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Together Again
CCM in-person convention is back!

The 2021 CCM Convention will be here before you know it. On Tuesday November 30 and December 1 we will be convening at Mohegan Sun for the first time for our fall classic, bringing together municipal employees from around the state with state government officials and companies that offer the best products and services that keep our towns and cities going. There’s still a few days left to registration – and here’s what awaits you when we get back together again!

First and foremost, we’d like to remind all of our attendees how seriously we are taking the ongoing pandemic. Though we are pleased that cases continued to decline in October and early November, we will still be requiring all attendees, staff, exhibitors, and guests to wear masks. Most importantly, we will be requiring all attendees, staff, exhibitors and guests to provide proof of vaccination or a negative test, and we will also be providing on-site testing services. This simple measure will go a long ways towards keeping all of us healthy and safe during our two-day event.

At the heart of the event will be the same great Convention that you’ve come to expect from CCM. There are going to be over a dozen workshops including a panel of state commissioners, nearly 150 exhibitors, the awards dinner and more.

Key workshops include CCM’s American Rescue Plan (ARP) Advisory Committee; Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendent’s Blueprint to Transform Connecticut’s Public Schools; Making Our Communities Great Places To Live For All: Examples & Stories From CT Municipal Leaders; State Commissioners’ Panel; Successfully Managing Short-Term Grants and Funds; Risk Management for Municipal Officials PFAS - The Hidden Expense; CT Trail Finder: Engaging Trails & Greenspaces for Economic Development & Public Health; Risks of Not Promoting Fair & Equitable Workplace; Social Services: Everything you wanted to know; Update on Affordable Housing & Land Use Legislation; Cybersecurity: Preventing Costly Attacks to Your Municipality; Municipal Collective Bargaining After COVID-19; and Connecticut’s Financial Outlook – Beyond the Headlines.

For the second day, we have invited Connecticut’s federal congressional delegation to participate in a panel discussion.


Make sure to register for the safe, new and improved convention before it’s too late.

Thanks to this year’s sponsors — CIRMA, Post University, Halloran Sage, Connecticare, Bank of America, and Sacred Heart University!

Here’s what else we have planned on the agenda:

**Municipal Excellence Awards**

The 2021 Municipal Excellence Awards will be once again awarded in four categories, two for municipalities and two for individuals.

- Three General Entry Awards by Population Size
- A Topical Award (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)
- The Joel Cogen Lifetime Achievement Award
- The Richard C. Lee Innovators Award

The award recipients will be honored at the Convention, as well as featured in a future issue of CT&C.

**#LoCoolGov Contest**

A $500 scholarship will be handed out in two age groups to a Connecticut student in a public middle school or high school.

Participants must create their own original work themselves, but may get help from teachers, parents, or friends in the form of ideas. They may also collaborate on projects of no more than three people.

For more information on these two awards, visit https://www.ccm-ct.org/Resources/Municipal-Excellence-Awards and https://www.ccm-ct.org/Resources/LoCoolGov-Youth-Scholarship

**Sustainable CT**

Municipalities who have achieved certification in the Sustainable CT program will receive recognition and their plaques during the Convention.

**Connecticut Certified Municipal Officials**

We will once again be lauding our municipal officials who have completed enough credits to become certified municipal officials.

**Game On!**

At the end of the evening on November 30, we will have a lively reception at GameOn, where you can continue networking, drink, relax, and bowl or play arcade games.

To be a part of this fun and informative experience, you can go to www.ccm-ct.org and follow the links to the 2021 CCM Convention Registration Page, or take a snap of this QR code with your phone and you’ll be brought right to the page.

We can’t wait to welcome you to this year’s Convention and to be back with you in person!
Learning And Growing Together

CCM CARES: In Action provides a guided process to achieving racial equity

One of the key features of racial equity work is that it is a continual process. There’s always room to learn and grow, but fortunately many of us are taking that journey together. After CCM launched CCM CARES at the end of 2020, we pledged to keep that work going and we’re proud to continue with CCM CARES: In Action, a guided series of action items for towns and cities to follow on that path.

Taken from our InfoKit, the Seven Action Items for Racial Equity allow municipalities to follow a guided process alongside CCM. We have been providing training sessions, peer roundtables, and technical assistance as municipalities progress at their own pace.

Many towns have already taken their first steps in the Seven Action Items, which are as follows:

1. Adopt a Resolution or Proclamation outlining Statement Racial Equity Goals and Strategies
2. Build Organizational Capacity for Racial Equity
3. Use a Racial Equity Lens Tool to make decisions
4. Develop Community Partnerships with under-represented residents
5. Prepare Annual Report on Racial Equity, including Composition of Municipal Workforce and Other Key Indicators
6. Adopt a Racial Equity Procurement and Contracting policy
7. Identify and Take On a Racial Equity Challenge/Goal with Racial Equity Action Plan

To date, there have been three guided workshops that have covered the first four action items, all of which can be accessed by contacting ccmtraining@ccm-ct.org for the information.

Speakers at these sessions have been peers from towns and cities in Connecticut and North Carolina, as well as organizations important to this work like Sustainable CT, the CT Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity, and the United States Department of Justice.

Resources provided to attendees include the CCM Racial Equity Toolkit as well a Racial Equity Goals and Strategies Statement and Glossary of Terms. When discussing inequities in America, it’s important to start with a shared language and definitions to encourage uniform understanding.

In addition to the webinars, there have also been Racial Equity Roundtables. These are not recorded to make attendees feel comfortable speaking openly, fostering an environment of mutual support.

After the 2021 Convention, the workshops will begin again to cover the final three action items on Preparing Annual Reports, Procurement and Contracting Policy, and Taking on a Racial Equity Challenge.

Currently, we have the next webinars covering Action Items five and six scheduled for December 22 and January 26. The date for the final webinar will be announced for some date in February. Individuals do not need to have been present at past presentations to have an engaging experiences in any future session, though looking at the materials beforehand is helpful.

We have been encouraging attendees to share the progress that is being made in the municipalities via the Action Item Progress Submission Form. The benefit is twofold. One, it shows that towns and cities are not in this alone. In the sessions so far, over 30 municipalities have been present with many more following the recordings afterward.

By tracking and sharing attendee progress, we hope to provide examples that can be adapted by others and showcase the impact of advancing racial equity in our Connecticut communities!

Each town and city in this program provides a critical resource to all the others as we learn together and work towards a common goal. This is not change that will happen overnight, and no two municipalities will follow the exact same path. How you get there is less important than getting there. We’d like you to join us on journey to racial equity in our state, making the Connecticut of tomorrow a better place for everyone.

HOW TO REGISTER

Visit ccm-ct.org/Resources/CCM-CARES, where CCM members can now register.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT CCM’S NEW WEBSITE:

CCM is excited to have recently launched a new website! All members now have new login information, which is required to register for events and trainings.

If you have not yet received a notification about your new login information, please contact MemberServices@ccm-ct.org.
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An Opportune Time For Regionalism
The County Level ARP Funds could be shared step towards recovery

Just a hair over 61 years since the state of Connecticut did away with formal county-level government, our state is set to receive funds that were otherwise allocated to counties. Much of those funds, part of the American Rescue Plan, could be best used towards greater regional and state cooperation according to CCM’s ARP Advisory Service Committee of experts as towns and cities plan recovery projects in the coming years.

After being left out of county-level funds in the CARES act back in 2020, CCM, NLC and others advocated for Connecticut to receive an apportionment of the county level funds to be distributed to Connecticut’s 169 municipalities on a population basis. They were ultimately successful, and that language was included as part of the ARP funds.

Connecticut has received $1.56 billion directly for municipal governments, $995 million for Connecticut school districts. The county-level funding totaled out at $691 million. In total, that’s just over $3.2 billion.

The ARP Advisory Service Committee, which has been developing best practices and providing resources to towns and cities through the rollout of the ARP, believes that this specific county-level funds could best be used towards regional efforts.

Going forward, as towns and cities continue to discuss and implement projects, there are some that even with these additional funds that would be much more effectively accomplished on a larger scale and that involves bringing in COGs and other regional partners.

“There is a wide range of potential regional projects that will be considered by the COGs or other regional partners that can assist towns with staffing regional recovery efforts,” said Carl Fortuna, First Selectman of Old Saybrook and ARP Advisory Service Committee member.

The committee is continually working towards recommendations and brainstorming on projects that fit within the scope laid out by the Department of Treasury.

“The COGs can provide a valuable mechanism to provide municipalities with support for administering this ARP funding; coordinating grants and loans to small businesses; enabling greater regional delivery of social services; and enhancing broadband implementation,” said Sam Gold, Executive Director of the Lower Connecticut Rover Valley Regional Council of Governments.

“Recovery efforts should not take place in a vacuum. Enhanced collaboration by the State with municipal leaders and COGs will promote stronger money-saving recovery efforts,” said Joe DeLong, CCM Executive Director and CEO.

Sixty-one years in the larger scheme of things is not such a long time, but the lack of county-level government should not keep municipalities from working together. As the ARP Advisory Service Committee recommends, the ARP funds are a great opportunity to work towards a unified Connecticut recovery.
It has been recognized that COVID has revealed as many issues as it has caused, notably the digital divide was revealed to be more of a chasm than gap. Many might be brushed off as “just the way things are,” but some need our attention and response now and moving forward, and the need of repairing and replacing crucial HVAC systems is more urgent now than ever.

CCM, the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), the Council of Small Towns (COST), AFT Connecticut, and the Connecticut State Employees Association (CSEA), have come together and asked the state to help fund these HVAC repairs and replacements in schools as we have seen growing costs related to indoor air quality.

With COVID a lingering concern for nearly two years, parents, teachers, and community leaders needed to assess the risks of in-person schooling against remote learning. It was clear that students needed to get back into classrooms, but with so many buildings aging out of their HVAC systems and with modern air filtration, towns and cities across the state had to grapple with the associated costs.

And while indoor air quality has been brought to light largely due to the pandemic, the conversation is has started has shown that there are concerns beyond transmission of COVID. In fact, outdated HVAC systems can lead to a series of problems like chronic absenteeism and long-term health issues due to things like mold or dust in the systems.

One concern has been global warming, which has made our summers hotter, earlier. Overheated classrooms are not conducive to teaching or learning. And one fact cited by multiple organizations is that pet stores have temperature regulations and standards when it comes to pet stores, but none for our public schools.

This coalition’s ongoing fight will be to have Governor Lamont and the legislature not only set reasonable standards for our children’s classrooms, but to authorize repairs under the State Department of Education’s annual bond funding to towns for school construction and repairs. Furthermore, as the Governor should include HVAC repairs in his ARP funds spending and the Connecticut General Assembly’s approval should be contingent upon the inclusion of this provision.

Many of the issues that were uncovered and revealed by the pandemic are not ones that will be solved overnight or even in one budget cycle. HVAC needs to be an ongoing concern, and one that the state needs to assist on. Having good air quality in our public schools seems like a no-brainer.

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**Meet Derek**

CCM adds a new staff member

Please join CCM in welcoming Derek Watson, who joined the Municipal Resource & Service Center team earlier this month. Derek will be working with George Rafael in the position of Municipal Resource Service Associate. In his role, he will work on a variety of programs as well as assist the research team and database management. Derek, a resident of Trumbull, is a graduate from the University of New Haven with a Master of Public Administration, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice. Prior to joining CCM, Derek held the position of Operations Lead for Yale Conferences and Events where he managed the vaccination housing program and worked in the Isolation Housing Office. Derek plays trumpet and taught marching band for 2 years during graduate school. In his spare time, he enjoys traveling, movies and staying up to date on current events.
One of the unfortunate consequences of the underfunding of programs like PILOT, or payments in lieu of taxes, is that municipalities must rigorously adjudicate what is and what is not exempt from local property tax. In some cases it is clear, and in others it walks a fine line. A recent ruling from the State Supreme Court moved the goalpost further away from municipalities.

The case looked at non-profits in Cromwell that the town had looked to tax under very specific circumstances: they were being funded by the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and because they didn’t limit their stays, they were not actually “temporary housing.” Under state law, if a non-profit location meets both of these requirements, then it could be considered taxable property.

Tried by Murtha Cullina representing the town, they argued that the non-profit in this case met both requirements. It was ruled against on the definition of temporary – which the non-profit suggested was entirely dependent on the length of their treatment.

From the CTNewsJunkie, the ruling represented a new precedent on which as many as 12 pending court cases can be decided on. Attorney Proloy Das of Murtha Cullina disagreed, stating in the Hartford Business Journal that “the broader issue of tax exemptions for housing-related nonprofits is hardly settled.”

The other cases represented a growing need in towns and cities for a fair and accurate system of assessing property taxes or in its place, receiving the amount owed from PILOT. Before the tiered system was implemented by the State Legislature this year, towns and cities were being reimbursed at a rate closer to 25%, meaning they only received a quarter of lost tax revenue.

Assessors have also asked in the past for a clearer delineation between what is and what is not taxable property. Because that area is currently gray, towns and cities who believe they are just in taxing certain properties and non-profits who believe they are just in requesting exemptions and there will continue to be disagreements over who is right.

“Municipalities will not be the first ones to argue against the work that non-profits do,” said Joe DeLong, CCM Executive Director and CEO. “In many instances they are doing work that the town simply cannot take on due to funding, but would like to see in their town. Taxing these buildings certainly doesn’t come out of animosity, but out of simple adherence to law. While the goalpost was moved, it’s a further sign that the state needs to continue to step up its funding so these issues may be avoided in the future.”
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The opioid crisis has been one of our nation’s most urgent and pressing matters. Nearly 50,000 people die from opioid overdoses every year in the United States. This problem did not occur overnight, and a recent settlement with opioid distributors has paved the way to fight back against this epidemic. In order to guide towns and cities through the process, CCM has created a task force to help guide you through the process.

Attorney General William Tong announced the settlement back in July, which was made with Cardinal, McKesson, AmerisourceBergen, and Johnson & Johnson for $26 billion to be paid out over 18 years. Connecticut is getting $300 million, but a final figure is dependent on a few factors. The agreement, which was negotiated by 14 state, will be used for “opioid abatement, including expanding access to opioid use disorder prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery.” In addition to this, they said that there will be significant changes to the industry to prevent this from happening again. It is worth noting that this settlement is separate from the suit against Purdue Pharma.

Municipalities must opt-in for this settlement, and the more that do, the greater the amount that the state receives. Unfortunately, there was some confusion regarding the original correspondence as it did not come directly from the Connecticut Office of the Attorney General, but rather from a third party administrator who was tasked with notifying municipalities on behalf of the States’ Attorney Generals throughout the country with pertinent information and requirements for towns and cities to participate in the settlement process and receive benefits afforded in the agreement.

CCM’s Board of Directors approved the formation of a Special Committee on Opioids Settlement to offer guidance to towns and cities on the receipt and dissemination of funds through the National Opioids Settlement, which Connecticut and many municipalities were a party to. The Committee will also be charged with working directly with Attorney General William Tong to facilitate an efficient process and maximize participation among municipalities. Mayor Neil O’Leary of Waterbury has been appointed chair of the Committee. CCM has put together this information based on frequently asked questions about this settlement:

**What You Need to Know**

- The email and written correspondence sent by the National Settlements Agreement was legitimate and has valuable information regarding the process and details of the agreement.
- Local governments in the participating states will have up to 150 days to join and sign onto the deal.
- Generally, the more towns and cities that participate, the greater the amount of funds that flow to that state and its participating subdivisions.
- Municipalities are required to take affirmative steps to “opt in” to the settlements.
- Any municipality that does not participate cannot directly share in any of the settlement funds, even though Connecticut is settling and other participating towns and cities are sharing in settlement funds.
- This nationwide agreement resolves and provides payment for all the current statewide opioid claims that states and municipalities have brought against the companies.
- Generally, municipalities who agree to the settlement will be receiving 15% of the total settlement proceeds (CT will receive approximately $300 million over 18 years).
- There is no need for a town or city to be represented by an attorney or to have filed a lawsuit to participate in the settlements.

**How Do You Participate in the Settlement?**

You must go to the national settlement website to register to receive in the coming weeks and months the documentation your subdivision will need to participate in the settlements (if your municipality is eligible). All required documentation must be executed and submitted electronically through the website and must be executed using the “DocuSign” service. As part of the registration process, your subdivision will need to identify, and provide the email address for, the individual who will be authorized to sign formal and binding documents on behalf of your subdivision.

- For more detailed information on the national settlements visit nationalopioidsettlement.com
- Connecticut-specific information from the Office of the Attorney General can be found here. If you have any questions regarding the National Opioid Settlement Agreement, please do not hesitate to contact Brian O’Connor, Director of Public Policy, at 860-804-4658 or Mike Muszynski, State and Federal Relations Manager, at 203-500-7556.

Bringing A Crisis To A Close

Opioid Settlement needs your participation
Make Your Muni Complete With Pality
CCM’s newest service puts tools at your fingertips

Towns and cities are quite unlike any other level of government. Even the largest cities don't have the bureaucratic divisions afforded state or federal governments. This is why local government leaders have to be experts in so many fields. CCM is proud to offer our newest partner, Pality, who put together resources to help you make informed decisions.

Through its core product, TownFaqs Analytics, Pality aims to help municipal leaders become experts in the fields that are crucial to running local government. These include tax policy, budgeting, capex planning and financing, economic development, contract negotiations, and pension funding & restructuring.

Combining proprietary data sets on audited financials, operational statistics, pensions, OPEB, demographics, housing markets, the local economy, news, events, governance, TownFaqs puts all the information in one easy to use dashboard that is easy and clear to read.

TownFaqs Analytics (tm) includes full peer benchmarking, local economic forecasts, historical financials, budgeting parameters, and an array of sensitivity and what-if analytics to support strategic decision making.

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CEOs, budget and HR officers, controller, finance committee and attorneys can have all this information sent directly to their inbox simply by becoming a member of Pality!

We are excited to announce a special offer on TownFaqs Analytics subscriptions. CCM will cover 20% of the initial subscription costs for the first 30 member subscribers.

For more information on Pality, contact Bob Clark, Co-Founder, Pality, bobc@pality.com, or George Rafael, Director Municipal Resource and Service Center, CCM, grafael@ccm-ct.org. You can also visit their website at www.pality.com to learn more.

Renewed Commitment To Academic Policy
State invests in municipal and regional policy at UConn Hartford

As part of the 2021 legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly relocating the Connecticut Institute for Municipal Studies to UCONN’s Hartford campus, and renewed the organization as the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP). CCM looks forward to working with and aiding the Institute as we make Connecticut a more equitable place for every resident.

Many might remember the old organization as CIMS, which went back to 2002, at Central Connecticut State University. The new Institute aims to build on that legacy by working toward “a just, equitable, and inclusive Connecticut through independent research and evaluation, public policy analysis and development and community engagement.”

In their mission, they work on issues that might not receive the attention they deserve. Projects they are currently working on include Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative, Connecticut Sexual Assault Kit Initiative, Police transparency and accountability task force, CT Reentry Roundtable Collaborative, Connecticut Electronic Defense Weapon Report, and Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project (CTRP3).

Though these topics may be difficult, they represent critical conversations in ensuring that everyone in Connecticut has the chance at a positive and healthy life.

The Institute aims to bridge the divide between academia, policymakers, practitioners, and the community all working towards a common goal, while leaning on the resources of the University of Connecticut to help get the work done.

As the premier state-local think tank, CCM will work with IMRP on initiatives that will push policies in the areas of municipal and regional concern in the right direction for our members and their constituents.
A lot can happen in three years, as we have all learned. Just three years ago the CCM Communications staff looked at the media landscape and realized that there was great untapped potential in the podcast realm. And with a partnership with WNHH in place, we set out to tell municipal stories and speak to municipal issues that no one else was discussing – what better name for CCM’s podcast than the Municipal Voice? With nearly 80 episodes under our belt we have reached over 150,000 listeners across all of our platforms, which includes Facebook, Soundcloud, YouTube, and on the FM radio waves courtesy of our partners at WNHH. Viewers can watch the episode as it airs on Facebook Live or they can catch up with the broadcast later.

That’s the beauty of podcasts. They open up a world of possibilities – one that many more people have tried out in the past year. According to Statista, less than 30% of people had regularly listened to a podcast in the past month. By 2021, that number was over 40%, and more than that, nearly 60% of people have listened to at least one podcast.

This past year we have continued with our remote tapings of our episodes in accordance with

Danbury Police Chief Patrick Ridenhour joined us to talk cannabis legalization, accountability, and partnerships with social workers and mental health professionals
social distancing policies and best practices. And while we would love to get back into the studio, the flexibility of video conferencing apps like Zoom have let us bring in guests wherever they are.

We’ve had First Selectman and Mayors from around the state letting us know where they stand. We’ve had representatives from important organizations like CT Main Street Center, CBIA, and CAPSS talk about programs and issues that you just won’t hear about anywhere else. And we had reps at every level of government come on, including Speaker Matt Ritter and U.S. Senator Chris Murphy.

As we celebrate three years on the air, we take pride in being the voice for the municipalities and reaching audiences well beyond town and city halls. The issues and topics we discuss may be the first time an individual hears about it outside of the municipal realm. In the coming year – and years – we look forward to being your voice.

The Municipal Voice airs a new episode every other week on Wednesday’s at Noon, with a rebroadcast the following Wednesday at the same time. You can find the episodes by visiting us on our Facebook page, or by visiting the Municipal Voice landing page on our website at www.ccm-ct.org/Resources/The-Municipal-Voice. And be sure to keep a lookout for our bi-weekly emails about future guests!

Guests include state legislators like Matthew Ritter, CT Speaker of the House (above) and community leaders such as Margaret Middleton, CEO of Columbus House

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Back in 2018, the federal government changed the State and Local Tax structure so that individuals could only deduct $10,000. Several states, mainly high tax states like Connecticut have sought several different kinds of workarounds to maintain this deduction, with many being overturned or overruled. This happened once again in a recent ruling that affirmed the right of the federal government to cap income tax deductions.

The lawsuit, brought by Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Maryland, was tried in the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan on the grounds that the current limit goes against the 10th amendment. This amendment if “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

The three-judge panel unanimously agreed that because there was no legitimate reason from the federal viewpoint why a person should not pay state and local taxes.

While not altogether dependent on state and local tax (SALT) deductions, the state maintains that the cap hurts small businesses and the middle class, estimating that it would impact more than 170,000 residents claiming over $10 billion in deductions. Since the implementation of the cap, Connecticut has tried several ways to alleviate that burden - some successful, some not.

Around the time that the deduction was capped, Connecticut implemented a pass-through entity tax that allowed certain types of small businesses to circumvent the federal cap by paying taxes at the business level rather than the personal level. The IRS affirmed the right to this workaround for small businesses in 2020.

Another workaround that was not as successful was an attempt to mitigate the cap for individuals through their property tax. The Connecticut Business & Industry Association explains that “under the proposal, municipalities could allow taxpayers to make voluntary payments to approved charitable organizations, or ‘community supporting organizations,’ in lieu of paying local property taxes, in exchange for a corresponding tax credit.”

Since charitable contributions are not capped, those payment could be deducted, they noted, but the IRS “quickly” invalidated this workaround.

In light of this loss, it’s worthwhile to note that by fighting this deduction cap, the State of Connecticut has taken the position that taxes, especially those on property and small businesses, are burdensome and need to be mitigated.

CCM came out in support of these workarounds at the time but noted that these workarounds were not solutions to the state’s regressive tax problem. The cap reveals the uncompetitive nature of Connecticut’s property tax, and only real property tax reform could fix it.

Currently, the federal government itself is trying to work out a compromise on the deduction by either eliminating it for two years or raising the cap. While that is handled on the federal level, it is important that we work on fixing the underlying issue and not the symptoms.
CIRMA  Annual Meeting of Members


save the date

● FRIDAY, JANUARY 28TH, 2022
● HARTFORD MARRIOTT DOWNTOWN
● 9:30 AM (registration starts) – 2:00 PM
The Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency (CIRMA) announced plans to expand its innovative smart-sensor program. The decision to invest in the program’s growth was primarily due to the considerable success CIRMA members experienced after implementing the sensor technology within their schools and municipal buildings.

Since the program’s inception two years ago, CIRMA reports saving participating members approximately $70,000 in insurance deductible dollars.

And with Connecticut’s frigid winter temperatures lurking around the corner, CIRMA’s timing is impeccable. Each winter, schools across New England become increasingly more susceptible to costly property damages. When teachers, students, and staff go home, the likelihood of incidents involving frozen or broken pipes, refrigeration failures, or power outages goes up. Schools that endure these types of losses are often left dealing with costly damages to school property, food spoilage, prolonged closings, and disruptions in daily operations—not to mention the countless hours spent recovering and restoring school property. And while insurance can help cover the costs of cleanup, business interruption, and remediation, chances are, payment for an insurance policy deductible would be required.

The size and cost of water-related property damages can be significant and could potentially impact insurance premium costs in the future.
CIRMA Welcomes New Staff

Behind our financial strength and leading products and services is the true CIRMA difference: Our People.

We’re excited to welcome these impressive professionals to CIRMA. Our employees are at the heart of everything we do. It’s our staff who help create our innovative solutions and deliver on the promises we make our members, every day.” said David Demchak, President and Chief Executive Officer of CIRMA.

Karu Murugesan joined CIRMA’s Business Intelligence team as their Enterprise Architect. With a master’s degree in computer science and engineering, Karu joins CIRMA with over 25 years of hands-on experience in different stages of software development life cycles. He also offers over 16 years of claims software development experience.

Kelsey Jacques joined CIRMA’s Claims team as their newest Workers’ Compensation Claims Representative. Kelsey joins CIRMA with over five years of experience in Workers’ Compensation claims and insurance fraud. Prior to joining CCM/CIRMA, Kelsey held the position held the position of Senior Workers’ Compensation Claims Representative at ESIS, Inc. (CHUBB LTD.) located in Simsbury, CT.

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CIVIC ACHIEVEMENT

Sing Us A Song Ansonia Man

New town song touts all that makes Ansonia Ansonia

In every town and city in Connecticut, there are talented individuals of all stripes. Some open restaurants after a lifelong passion for cooking, some paint lovely, expressive murals that enliven main streets, but rarer than that are the troubadours that write a song for their town. Ansonia’s Richard Demko did just that to give just a little buzz to his hometown.

Inspired by and commissioned by the City of Ansonia, Demko’s song Ansonia Recharged was written specifically to promote its economic development and projects that the town is completing.

On a map touting the progress of many of these projects available on the AnsoniaRecharged.com website show that over the past couple of years Ansonia has made significant updates to downtown – with many more to come.

On Restaurant Row and beyond, they’ve welcomed new local restaurants and companies into town, saw small start-ups find space for manufacturing, and designated an area as an opportunity zone that will hopefully entice more businesses with incentives and tax benefits.

What was missing was the soundtrack.

The story goes that Ansonia’s Corporation Counsel approached Demko about the possibility of writing a Yacht-rock single – think Michael McDonald and Dan Fogelberg – which is what Mayor David Cassetti generally has pumping through city hall’s speakers.

In a fortnight, Demko produced a song that fit that criteria, playing almost all of the instruments on the track. He lent Heather Joseph take over the vocals and the guitar that you hear soloing in the background is none other than Former State Senator George Logan, who is also an Ansonia resident.

Though the lyrics tout all the great things to see and do in Ansonia, they decided that that wasn’t enough. What good is a theme song without a music video to go along with it?

Mayor Cassetti traipsed through town, just as the lyrics implore the listener to do, stopping at many of the local restaurants, businesses, and assets that make Ansonia what it is.

While Yacht Rock might not be the high voltage rock and roll of AC/DC, the song provides enough of a charge to get the train rolling on Ansonia Recharged.

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One Man’s Trash Is Another’s Library
Ashford Transfer Station Library getting renewed interest

S
ome good ideas are new and innovative – using a new technology to find efficiencies, for example. But some ideas are old and recycled and worth rediscovering. That’s the case in Ashford as people find out that the town’s Transfer Station has a library.

That’s right. The town’s transfer station has a library. And while libraries are one of civilizations greatest and oldest innovations – the Ashford Transfer Station Library isn’t so much a library, but a place where residents can discard lightly used goods and books to be picked up by others.

The online blog Connecticut Museum Quest, or CTMQ for short, explored the book exchange picking up classics like James Joyce’s Dubliners and books by Anthony Bourdain, and pledging to return the favor by dropping off a box of books that they no longer wanted.

One might think that this is a unique and novel concept for the town to explore. It’s a way to continue the cycle of usefulness for goods that might otherwise be thrown out – Recycling has been around for decades, but now it’s gotten to the point where we use metal straws and wear shoes made out of recycled materials. Surely this place just opened.

In a New York Times article dated November 19, 1995, they note that “the book exchange, started this year, is housed in an 8 foot by 12 foot plywood shed.”

“There are no lights and no windows but the shed is lined with shelves sagging under the weight of hundreds of books. People are invited to take as many as they want, and drop off what they’ve read.”

Many ideas take time to suss out. Any new technology or concept needs to prove that it can stick around, and it seems that the people of Ashford themselves weren’t sure of this new library concept at the time.

But they were sure seeing the joy that it brought to people. One attendant said that four out of five people coming to the transfer station also visited the library, comparing it to Grand Central Station.

Twenty-six years later and the library is still being discovered by book lovers. And for something that works on the honor system, they’ve never run out of books. Pictures from CTMQ show perhaps hundreds of books ripe for the taking.

CTMQ says that the concept is so obvious that one of these should exist at every Transfer Station in Connecticut, and maybe they’re right. With over 25 years of success, this innovative idea doesn’t need to prove itself any longer, it’s one that towns across the state can recycle for themselves.
2031 Seems So Far Away
State pot of community investment money says its time to plan for it now

While towns and cities across the state grapple with how to properly use the ARPA funds that were allocated in response to COVID, there’s another batch of funds that will become available in the next year for distressed communities. The Community Investment Fund 2030, part of this year’s budget is offering qualifying towns a chance to make a huge change.

At a time when investment in our towns and cities is more crucial than ever – these funds will be allocated to projects proposed by municipalities and vetted by the Board and the Governor.

Quoted in a CTMirror article, House Speaker Matt Ritter said that they want the eligible towns and cities to think big with their proposals; “These pots of money are going to be for projects you can look back at in five or 10 years and see a difference.”

Though the projects aren’t as constricted as ARPA funds, there are some sample ideas that were given to guide the thought-process for municipalities.

“Projects that can be funded will serve the purpose of including but not limited to: To provide financing and loans for small businesses located in eligible municipalities; Improvements to water and sewer infrastructure to boost economic development; Affordable housing; Improvements to energy resiliency projects; Build facilities such as senior centers and libraries.”

Used in concert with ARPA funds and in the event that some form of infrastructure bill gets passed, these next few years can be transformative for the towns and cities of Connecticut to reinvigorate their infrastructure, economic development and more, leaving them much better suited to tackle the landscapes of tomorrow.

In a press release on the subject, State Senator Doug McCrory said “This fund is a significant opportunity to provide direct support to communities that for decades have been underserved and marginalized.”

“With this source of funding we can invest in projects that will create jobs, help residents gain the skills needed for a 21st century economy, and more to meet the needs of the entire family.”

These funds are guaranteed to last for five years, with an option to extend it for five more years for a total of 10 years.

Although these funds are not being allocated to every town and city in Connecticut, many of these distressed municipalities are hubs of their local economies, so any investment in them is an investment in their respective regions. This led Speaker Ritter to ask towns to work with local civic groups on where this investment would best be served.

Ten years is a long time – and no doubt you would see change. But with smart planning and big thinking, the Community Investment Fund 2030 could be a key part of a better future for Connecticut.
Goodbye Paycheck-To-Paycheck Lifestyle

Hartford is looking into a Universal Basic Income, a concept older than you

There is a growing segment of the population that believes the best way to solve inequity is simply to give people money, no strings attached. Supporters of a so-called Universal Basic Income include charitable billionaires, presidential candidates, and a surprisingly diverse group across the political spectrum. Hartford is now designing a test program that will send $500 a month to 25 single parents or guardians.

It might come as a shock that just handing people money has become a popular concept, but the idea goes back centuries, getting nods from individuals like Utopia writer Sir Thomas More and Patriot and Common Sense author Thomas Paine. In the modern era, it has been touted by Republicans and Democrats with elderly and disabled individuals guaranteed a minimum income through programs like Social Security.

The concept is simple: Give People Money. This was even the title of a book on the subject by Annie Lowrey. The kind of no-strings-attached wealth distribution has been tried in many places, notably in third world countries where people are subsisting on less than a few dollars a day. Receiving an allotment of money was able to change entire economies, and Lowrey gives examples of areas where individuals were able to start businesses and become self-reliant.

This is the reflex where a Universal Basic Income receives support across the spectrum. Since individuals are receiving money, their reliance on welfare programs diminishes. In Hartford, the task force in designing the program believes that participants in the test might be asked to give fingernail or hair samples in order to test for stress levels.

In this testing phase, the participants are going to be asked to work with the panel designing the program to look at household necessities, how the UBI money is being spent, and what the outcomes are. One reason that the UBI program chose single parents is so they can look at the children’s test scores with the idea that they will increase.

One obvious question is: Who pays for it? In Hartford, like in many other UBI programs around the world, there is a private backer – either a charity or individual. But programs that approximate UBI in America like Social Security are paid with taxes. And the checks that were parts of Presidents Trump and Biden’s recovery plans were a kind of UBI on a limited basis.

Income Inequality in 2021 is at one of the highest levels in history, and in 2017, Ray Dalio of Bridgewater Associates shared a linkedin post showing that the top .1% of earners owned almost as much wealth as the bottom 90%. The last time this happened was in the late 20s.

Though they are still planning how the UBI will look in Hartford, it’s a sign of things to come around the country. With the popularity of the stimulus checks and support from billionaires like Elon Musk, it wouldn’t be shocking to see these programs grow. With growing income inequality, you might even call it common sense.
One thing that jumped out when looking at the 2020 Census was how diverse Connecticut was getting, which was reflected in many of the headlines from news outlets around the state. One of the fastest growing segments was that of the Hispanic / Latino community, many of whom are bilingual. In Bridgeport, they recognized the need for additional tools to help teach children in these bilingual homes.

The program, Footsteps2Brilliance, aims to level the playing field in early childhood reading. It is a mobile platform that can be accessed either online or offline on a multitude of devices like phones, tablets, or computers. Children who are just learning to read are able to immerse themselves in the writing through reading the material, playing a game that will help them understand and, most crucially, allow them to develop language skills in both English and Spanish.

One example shows students who can read if they like a book called La Arana Pequeñita, and toggling it to English, they can engage with the Itsy-Bitsy Spider.

According to figures cited in a CT Post article, upwards of 20% of students in Bridgeport are English learners. While in Middletown that rate is closer to four percent, and despite having lower rates of English learning students, literacy skills increased by 175%.

That is due in part to the way parent engagement is built into the app. Footsteps says that by including engaging materials for caregivers and responsive information, that time spent learning with caregivers can be increased by up to 300%. One example is something they call “Family Friday” that emphasizes both to the child and caregivers that reading can be a fun and collaborative activity. That extra time translates to increased learning.

The CT Post article also highlights why getting children to learn before third grade is critical. An American Educational Research Association study had shown that “a student who can’t read on grade level by third grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who does read proficiently by that time.”

Other factors such as poverty increase the chances that a student will not graduate high school on time. While Connecticut’s graduation rate has improved over the last twenty years, with nearly 90% of students graduating high school, there’s always room for improvement and growth.

This is especially true now that the Census data has shown that Connecticut has a growing population of students who are likely to be bilingual. Instead of leaving them in the lurch to learn one language at home and another language in school, Bridgeport, through the Footsteps2Brilliance app is promoting literacy not just in one language but in two. Giving children the right start on the path to a fully-fledged education in our state.
Schooling has been difficult lately – which is to say more difficult than it usually is. Keeping kids engaged and learning is no easy task, but one that was all the more difficult through COVID. That’s what makes this year’s National Blue Ribbon schools much more special, especially for the Mary Morrisson Elementary School in Groton.

The school, which actually closed at the end of 2020, received the Blue Ribbon Designation for “Tapping into the power of collaboration and approaching teaching and learning with a growth mindset are the key essentials that they used to close achievement gaps and ensure our commitment to continuous improvement.”

Closing gaps in education has been a key facet of concentration for teachers and administrators. We talked a lot about the digital divide, but that is just one part of the achievement gap which measures consistent disparities between students based on race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic factors.

At our current rate, this gap will be closed by 2266 according to figures cited in a CTMirror article.

Those at Mary Morrisson aimed to meet children where they are rather than asking them to meet expectations that might be difficult for them. By taking small steps to start, students can continue to make leaps and bounds later in life.

In their submission they say “We work as a team to provide the necessary support and scaffolding to make sure all students learn. You could look in any classroom and truly not know which students have IEPs or which students receive reading or math support. We have blended the Tiers so that all students, regardless of ability, are supported and achieve.”

This year, the award was handed out by Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, a person familiar with Connecticut public schools. Three other schools in Connecticut received a Blue Ribbon this year: Andrew Avenue Elementary School in Naugatuck, Northwestern Regional High School in Winsted, and Frisbie Elementary School in Wolcott.

The Department of Education gives this description about the program: “An important part of the U.S. Department of Education, the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes outstanding public and non-public schools. In identifying several hundred outstanding schools annually, the program celebrates school excellence, turn around stories, and closing subgroup achievement gaps. The Award is both a high aspiration and a potent resource of practitioner knowledge.”

While the Mary Morrisson Elementary School has closed, most of the staff have moved to the Thames River Magnet School to continue this important work.
The Dan Cosgrove Animal Shelter in Branford wants to make history. Just as they are charged with keeping pets safe and happy until they find their forever homes, they want to keep the environment safe and happy by becoming the first net-zero animal shelter in the country, and they’re going to do so with a little help from Sustainable CT.

Throughout the pandemic, the team at the shelter has been working diligently to plan for their new building. As they continue to grow in their ability to serve Branford and North Branford, the new building will expand their capabilities to “meet the needs of our furry and feathered friends,” as they put it.

Though plans were already in place to build, some amenities that would help make the building net-zero were not originally included in the costs. They wanted to add amenities towards that goal and decided the Sustainable CT Community Match Fund was the way to go.

In fact, the shelter was able to raise $15,000 for a total of $30,000 after the matching funds were added. This money will go to LED Exterior and Interior Lighting, a Dual EV Charging Station, and the costs to install two Solar Thermal Hot Water 120-gallon systems. These systems were donated to the shelter by the Connecticut Green Bank.

It took all of 12 days – not even two weeks – for the shelter to reach their goal, and donors ranged from $10 to $5000. Every donation, big and small, all added up to one successful campaign.

The Dan Cosgrove Animal Shelter has an amazing track record for caring for our non-human friends – in a press release for this project they list out all the animals that they’ve cared for, saying:

“Hundreds of displaced animals come through the shelter’s doors each year. In addition to dogs and cats, Branford’s animal shelter serves as the temporary home for less common animals, too, including guinea pigs, chinchillas, rabbits, and even the occasional owl and deer.”

By going green in their building, the shelter is giving back to the environment and doing their part to protect the homes of our indigenous creatures, and ensuring that there will be outdoor places where we can hang out with our pet friends after giving them forever homes!
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Going Green, Doing Good
North Haven program donates food for green investment

Going green helps everyone. Could it get any better than saving money and doing your part to help in the fight against climate change? In North Haven, the Clean Energy Task Force said yes it can.

As part of their work towards minimizing greenhouse gases, two vendors donated $25 for each completed Home Energy Solutions (HES) campaign, raising a total of $6075 for the North Haven Congregational Church Food Pantry.

Each HES campaign sends out officials from energy companies to go out to homes in the designated area to check them for “energy inefficiencies like drafts and air leaks” while also providing things like LED light bulbs and water saving aerators in some cases.

They also discuss with homeowners whether or not there is some potential savings in replacing things like appliances, heating and cooling equipment, or even replacing insulation to lower the transference of heat from indoors to outdoors. In some cases, there are improvements that will cost some money upfront that will save homeowners money in the long run.

Generally, residents can request inspections and assessments like these for about $1000, but through the program, they were able to have them completed for $50. The original price might have put it just out of reach for most households, but now almost 250 North Haven residents are able to save on their heating and energy bills.

And buying those new appliances certainly won’t be cheap either, but the good news is that through Energize CT, there are rebates for all sorts of products like Air Source Heat Pumps, Central Air Conditioning Systems, and double pane windows.

The North Haven Clean Energy Task Force is no stranger to this kind of work. This is the third HES campaign that they’ve worked on, but the task force goes all the way back to 2007.

One hates to sound like a broken record, but in this case small actions can add up to larger accomplishments. And North Haven has done its part in the work by seeking our electricity from renewable sources in its public facilities.

And of course, the donations to the North Haven Congregational Church Food Pantry are just one more way that this program is doing good for the people of North Haven. As we enter holiday season in 2021, this can be a wonderful gift to a family in need.

On Oct. 6th, Members of the North Haven Clean Energy Task Force, The Town of North Haven, New England Conservation Services and CMC Energy Services presented a $6,075 donation to the North Haven Congregational Church’s Food Pantry.
Bees?

Beacon Falls sponsors local beekeepers programs

When towns plant pollinator pathways, they intend for bees and other assorted insects and birds to come dine on the nectar and cross-pollinate. But unfortunately, the bee population is in precipitous decline. These necessary creatures have lately found homes in colonies in backyards, not an errant nest, but placed there intentionally. If you were interested in becoming a beekeeper, Beacon Falls Parks & Recreation department has been holding programs to learn how.

Held at the local Naugatuck YMCA, they sponsored a total of four programs – two this past year in September and November, with two planned for spring next year. They are free for Beacon Falls residents.

The classes were being helmed by Rich and Robin Pivirotto, the owners of the Beacon Bee Company, which they founded in 2019 after several years of amateur beekeeping.

But like many hobbies, they found that beekeeping was addictive – starting out with only one hive, they grew to 20 hives in their apiary by 2020. Each hive can produce over 50 pounds of honey or more each year, with around half or a little less being excess. Some beekeepers sell the surplus, which likely funds added beekeeping gear.

Back in 1918, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station had this to say: “The outlook for honey production never was better, from the money standpoint, than at present, and the possibilities, through the suppression and control of infectious diseases are much greater in recent years [...] so that beekeeping and honey production generally will be much improved.”

This sweet golden syrup isn’t the only thing that bees are good for. Apples, blueberries, raspberries, pears, squash, cucumbers, as well as a variety of flowers are dependent on bees to pollinate them.

But the owners would take umbrage at a word used earlier - As Rich says, “beekeeping is not a hobby, but a full-time commitment”. There are days when their “day jobs” may be done, but they still must put in the time for their beekeeping responsibilities.

Robin says, “beekeeping doesn’t come without it’s challenges, but at the end of the day, it also comes with so many rewards”.

Naturally, many will be afraid of the consequences of a bee sting. But there are sure to be methods learned in these programs that will teach individuals how not to get stung, as well as being able to tell the difference between honeybees and their more nefarious cousins, the yellow jackets.

Back in the day, Romans would pay their taxes in honey. Word is still out if Beacon Falls will adopt these measures. But as Robin said, there are so many rewards for keeping bees that one may very well develop a taste for honey, which some say is sweeter than wine.
ENVIRONMENT

There When You Need It

2021 CCM Convention exhibitor shares tips on storm preparedness

You know that feeling when you walk into the grocery store and you are instantly surround-ed by red and green ornaments, garland, and wrapping paper and you think to yourself, “How is it the holiday season already?” Well, hurricane season can sneak up on you in much the same way. While we are now coming out of the 2021 hurricane season and taking a collective sigh of relief that Connecticut didn’t suffer any major impacts, another hurricane season will be here again before you know it. So, as we celebrate this holiday season and ring in 2022, ensure to put planning for disaster response on your list of resolutions. No matter the season, summer or winter, destructive weather events can occur at any time. Storm preparedness and readiness is a year-round mission and paramount to the success of any recovery. AshBritt offers four tips for preparing your municipality for storm-related events in any season:

1. First, gain an understanding of disaster debris management, through the State Disaster Debris Management Plan and review the State Guidance for Municipalities to determine your contracting options by visiting the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Disaster Debris Management and Preparedness portal. Once you understand what is available, procure a contract that best suits your needs based on the information you have received from contractors.

2. Our second tip is to learn about post-disaster debris management. AshBritt’s online training academy provides participants with information about debris management following a federally declared disaster event.

3. Thirdly, as you prepare for whatever comes next, build local capacity with government staff, as well as with the local workforce through training and workshops.

4. Lastly, develop an education outreach marketing campaign aimed to educate residents on storm preparedness and the proper segregation of storm debris.

In 2021, AshBritt provided the NW Connecticut Region with an informative presentation on the types of services available to municipalities, showcased educational outreach campaigns, and shared information on our capability and capacity to handle multiple activations. AshBritt has more tips and services that can help you prepare for disasters in any season. We are available to provide similar presentations and customized training sessions to meet your needs, visit AshBritt.com to learn more about how we are always There When You Need Us.
Connecticut Towns A Beacon of Calm
Francis Pickering talks Western COG and COVID recovery

Western Connecticut has been home to much of the growth in the state over the past 10 years, clogging up infrastructure and tying up housing.

Spreading that wealth around, according to Francis Pickering, Executive Director of the Western Connecticut Council of Governments, is one way to relieve the pressure.

“What people were fleeing in New York City,” Pickering said, “they were not fleeing a shortage or deficiency of things to do.”

For him, this migration is part of a much longer pattern that exists between the big city and Western Connecticut. COVID hit at a time when many millennials were hitting an age where they wanted to settle down.

In New York City, they didn’t have backyards or access to parks in much the same way that Connecticut has – Pickering said that most people in Connecticut are within 15 minutes of being able to take a walk in the forest – so what’s going to keep them here is stability.

“A home is “often the largest investment in their life, it becomes a source of savings and intergenerational wealth, and they work really hard to choose a home location that they believe will deliver a return on investment.”

Pickering notes that “What’s wrong with Connecticut?” Op-eds have largely died out as a theme lately, suggesting that the state has been a “beacon of calm in a gusty turbulent sea.”

With a budget surplus and ARP funding putting the wind in the sails, there’s the additional considerations of the likely infrastructure funding and a new federal rule that will make it easier for Connecticut to receive fund that are predicting smooth sailing at least in the short term.

Councils of Government, or COGs, are the closest thing that Connecticut has to county level government. In a state so small, the extra layer might seem extraneous and costly, but it has also prevented Connecticut from receiving federal funds.

“This has happened to me personally,” Pickering said, “When we’ve applied for a grant, and they say I love your application, but you’re not eligible.”

A new designation called County Equivalency from the Census Bureau will prevent that from happening – making COGs eligible for geographically determined moneys that would go to county-level government in other states.

As far as transportation – Pickering says that we still exist in a traffic pattern that was first laid out in the 1950s – everyone goes one way to work and back the other way home, creating the traffic that is so common on 95. Worse is the infrastructure on Metro North which harkens back to the 19th century.

So to fix this, to bring it up to the 21st century, Pickering argues that we’re going to need much more investment than what the current bill offers.

Most importantly though, Broadband can offer opportunities that asphalt roads cannot. By containing all the jobs to one area, you constrain the resources. Work from home policies can open up the state so that it evens out pressure and perhaps takes some vehicles off the road.

“What’s good for our regions is good for the rest of the state,” he states, “We should all be enjoying economic growth.”
Not long into the 21st century, there have been faint hints of a quiet question – are cars really the best idea? They pollute, they’re dangerous for those inside and out, and they also make it very easy for individuals to get around. But what if there were other, safer, greener ways to get around? Governments from federal to local are asking this question – in New Haven, several projects are aimed at making the city more bicycle friendly.

One such project is taking place in the Edgewood neighborhood, connecting the west side of town to downtown via a cycle track. After delays that arose due to COVID restrictions, this project has finally begun with expected completion next year sometime. Not only will this track provide a safe location for cyclists to make their way downtown, but it has added benefits in safety across the board.

For pedestrians, they will be making improvements on crosswalks including ADA compliant signals and ramps at each intersection. And for cars, the additional infrastructure will have the effect of making the street look more crowded. This has been shown to decrease traffic speeds, thus making the road safer for those in cars as well.

Whitney Ave is seeing the same kind of rethinking, although that project is still in the planning phase.

For part of the project, the plan includes the separated bike lanes that have become popular around the world. A cross section of the new design shows a sidewalk, two bike lanes for north and south travel, a parking lane, a two lane street divided by a center turn lane, and then the other sidewalk. This kind of infrastructure makes it nearly impossible to hit a cyclist under normal driving situations.

But even this plan has setbacks as the plan has to change about halfway up causing issues with dismounting and crossing the street for cyclists. This is why the city is meeting and discussing these plans with individuals who plan to use the infrastructure – the residents. Any project that neglects the way individuals have to use it in practice runs the risk of not being used at all.

And finally, after several years, construction has finally begun on the final part of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail connecting Long Wharf to Hamden and, if you have the time and strength, Massachusetts.

This final piece of the puzzle is all part of the reimagining of infrastructure and best uses. More and more, people are using this infrastructure to get around – both for leisure and essential travel.

Towns and cities across the country are making bicycles a priority, and in some places around the world, cars have been shut out of downtown areas giving them a safer and more vibrant spaces for their residents.

It’s unlikely that we will see a world without cars – even if they doubled the Infrastructure Plan to $4 trillion, it would not be enough to convince everyone to give up their cars and take public transportation. But in cities like New Haven, the “Field of Dreams” logic is working, if you build it, they will come.
When you buy a car, you automatically assume that you’ll have a place to put it wherever you go. Your supermarket will have a place - preferably close to the door - for you to park. Your workplace, your favorite restaurant, all likely have parking places nearby. But what happens when density runs up against available parking spots? West Hartford is trying to determine just how to solve that problem.

The problem is multi-faceted and not all of the issues are problems. For one, towns that are seeing growth in population are going to have to tackle this problem sooner or later. Currently, every household in America - whether it is an estate one 100 acres or a studio apartment in New York – has an average of 1.88 cars, while over 90% of households have at least one car.

A key focus of transit oriented development is growing that 10% of people who don’t have or even need a car. And throughout the past two decades there have been increasing discussions over “minimum parking requirements,” or the amount of parking spaces per apartment in new buildings.

The Brookings Institute argues that these requirements are adding to the cost of multifamily housing with an average of $50,000 per-unit costs for each additional parking space in above-ground or below-ground parking. But that still leaves you with the problem of the 1.88 cars per household that need somewhere to go.

This problem can easily be seen in towns and cities across Connecticut because housing was built before the modern car-dominated era.

Cited in a Courant article about this issue, Town Manager Matt Hart said that “Since some of the apartment complexes in that area were built in the early 1900s — before the widespread use of cars and establishment of modern zoning laws — landlords have been renting extra parking spaces from churches and local eateries, like Butterfly Restaurant on Farmington Avenue.”

But even those spots are becoming scarce leading them to think about overnight parking permits for residents only, which would allow them parking in certain areas only. They could further restrict this permit to residents in only buildings of five units or more.

This problem has been exacerbated by COVID, since so many individuals were working from home or home from school, that it became apparent just how many cars there were that needed parking spaces.

Unlike grocery stores or your doctor’s office, or even town hall, spots for your household to park the family car are dwindling as density increases. In order to successfully grow, increase economic development and still have enough parking spaces for residents and visitors, municipalities are going to have to decide just where to put all those cars.
When the Liberation Programs “Mobile Wellness Van” rolls up, it’s hard to miss the vehicle or the team. Bedecked in tie-dye that wouldn’t be out of place at a Grateful Dead concert, they’ve come to Greenwich with a mission to save lives.

The program has been in operation since 1971, with outposts already in Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford, and Westport. Specializing in substance use disorders, they report that they have served more than 2,400 individuals in their last fiscal year.

A lot of that is due to the ongoing opioid crisis, which has affected people in every corner of America. In the Greenwich Free Press, John Hamilton, CEO of Liberation Programs, said “Addiction is an equal opportunity disease. It affects all ages, all socio-economic classes, both genders, sadly, the same way. We’re here to meet people where they are in Greenwich.”

That is where the van comes in. It’s so bright and colorful so that people can see it and recognize it. Every Tuesday, the van will be parked near an I-95 exit, but that location can change depending on where the folks at Liberation Programs and town leaders in Greenwich feel it is needed.

This is important because many individuals need to understand their addictions before recovering from them. And sometimes unfortunately, individuals will need Narcan or other interventions before they ultimately accept that there is a problem.

Also in the Free Press article, Hamilton said that they can’t force people into a recovery program and expect them to change overnight. “That means that for some, this may be the year of recovery. We can start their recovery process, but we also know that this may not be the year of recovery, but our goal is to keep people alive to continue to engage them,” he is quoted as saying.

From the mobile van, “Liberation provides services for adults, youth, and families that include two inpatient treatment programs, outpatient and intensive outpatient services, health education for older adults and people living with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses, treatment and resources for adolescents and their families, education and prevention efforts in the community, mobile harm reduction services, and permanent supportive housing for families.”

While the tie-dye might be fun, the work that Liberated Programs does is serious. Many towns that have a partnership with an organization like Liberated know the benefits of the human interactions that they provide. Each person they interact with is another person that can be saved from the throes of addiction.
One obvious thing about us here at Connecticut Town & City is that we like to keep our readers informed with important updates and innovative ideas. So when a town implements a new program to do that for their residents as New Milford did with their Notify New Milford, then we have to highlight it.

The concept is simple – residents or individuals who find themselves in New Milford often can sign up for text messages and phone calls that will update them on crucial up-to-date information. This includes things like severe weather reports and missing persons reports, or even simple things like road closures and town events. Through Notify New Milford, individuals can decide how many notifications that they’d like to receive.

And because people are everywhere these days, they give you multiple options to receive the messages – home phone numbers for those that still have it, text messages and calls to your mobile phones, emails and other alerts.

The whole thing is powered by the Everbridge App, which allows people to receive messages even on a geo-targeted basis – like for instance if you enter an area where there’s a road closure up ahead, it can tell you.

To sign up, residents can go to the Town of New Milford home page at www.newmilford.org and scroll down to the bottom of the home page and click the Notify New Milford icon.

Benefits to an emergency alert system like this are obvious. Routing people away from serious weather events like tornadoes or unexpected road closures due to downed trees. But having residents more engaged in town events can be a huge plus that cannot be downplayed.

More and more towns are adopting measures to ensure that their residents stay connected, and we’ve written about this topic before. Some towns are experimenting with apps like this, while others are using social media to stay connected. What stands out is that the times have changed and we no longer know where people are. Reaching them at their location of choosing is the next step in keeping Connecticut residents connected and informed.
The work to end racism in America is an ongoing cause. Representatives from NLC REAL have told us that race is still the number one determining factor in success in this country. Connecticut towns and cities want to change that, and some, like Coventry, have begun adopting resolutions denouncing racism and pledging to do the work to move forward.

For Coventry, the beginning of the work was forming the resolution, which the Town Council wrote addressing many of these issues. And while making a declaration is important, many municipalities are moving towards the actions phase of this work – what was called operationalizing in the NLC REAL programs.

This is the key interchange between acknowledging that systemic racism is an ongoing concern, and that anti-racism should become the default imperative.

In the resolution, which passed unanimously, they discuss making lasting change through actions: “Reorganization of our Human Rights Commission and expansion of their charge to include vetting town policies and investigating potentially discriminatory regulations; revision and update of our affirmative action plan; participation of key staff in specialized training; establishment of a committee to begin formal community conversations on the upcoming open choice program and other topics, and work toward implement its findings and recommendations, and whatever other activities may arise; working to address improvements in housing based on income needs through our housing rehab program; and creation of a Senior Housing Alternatives Study Committee and supporting the Planning and Zoning Commission’s creation of an Affordable Housing Plan.”

Town Manager John Elsesser said that of the training, much of it will be provided by CCM (you can read more about those workshops in the front of this issue). CCM has also put together a landing page on our website called CCM CARES: In Action that provides ideas and strategies on how to implement action items.

Of course this is not an easy road to travel. All over the nation there has been push back on anti-racist measures. But sometimes we don’t do things because they are easy, but because they are hard, as President Kennedy once famously said. And as Dr. Martin Luther King said, the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.

This is a multi-operational process - one that starts with acknowledging the problem, learning and then doing. Coventry joins many other towns and cities on the path towards a future that is more equitable.
Bookselling Idea Is An Easy Sell

Trumbull looks to region for ideas and comes up with a no-brainer

Town and cities working together and sharing ideas is a big part of CCM. Whether through regional projects or simply helping each other, we know we have what it takes to make Connecticut a better place for every resident. In Trumbull, they looked to other towns for inspiration on an exciting new project students with disabilities.

The program which is called Educating Learners In Transition Environments, or ELITE, aims to help students with disabilities transition from a school environment to what they call “the adult world.” That transition is difficult enough for individuals, taking on responsibilities and managing tasks – but for students with disabilities who often had aides in school, this transition can be difficult to navigate.

The ELITE program is helping them by giving them a place to start – the ELITE bookstore. Students will have opportunities to work and grow in spaces that are “not contingent on the needs of an outside organization or business,” which will give them the time they need while making a meaningful impact on their community.

They believe the business can support upwards of 24 jobs between a bookstore and café. This could be supported by used book stores which are surprisingly successful business ventures – figures they cite in their proposal suggest that 61% of used bookstores make more than $20,000 a year in profits, with 13% of them making over $100,000. Many of the books

This business venture is a great idea – but the fact that it was inspired by bookstores and cafes in other towns and cities nearby makes it that much better.

In their business proposal to the town, they city Reread Books in Cheshire, Westport Book Sales in Westport, and Parsons Perks, which is a student run café in Milford’s Town Hall. With these retail spaces being successful in their own right, it was easy for Trumbull to make the decision.

This past September, the town council unanimously approved the lease for this new business, which is about as no-brainer as they come. They expect that they can get into the space fairly quickly and have the store up and running by early November [this article was written prior to any confirmed opening date].

ELITE has everything CCM could want in an innovative idea. The idea was sparked by looking at what other towns were doing, it is bringing in money to the town, and it’s helping students transition to life outside of school. Trumbull and their inspirations have shown us what is truly what is possible when we say we want to make the everyday lives of every citizen better.
May I See Your iPhone And Registration?

Apple and CT partner for future of digital IDs

So many technologies have been adopted across the past two years in response to COVID that it would be difficult to name them all. One big change has been the move towards contactless transactions and digital passes – enabled largely through smartphones. The final frontier will be when our identification cards will be stored digitally. Connecticut is part of a pilot program that’s going to look at state IDs and Driver’s Licenses with computer magnate Apple.

Announced in September of this year, the California-based company said that they have been working on technology to securely add digital forms of identification such as state IDs or driver’s licenses to their Wallet. This is Apple’s name for an application on their iPhone which allows customers to store things like credit cards, travel or event tickets, or even store loyalty cards. While Arizona and Georgia will be the first two states to implement this program, Connecticut will follow close behind in providing digital IDs. Importantly, they have already announced partners at the federal level such as the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), who will allow the use of the IDs at airport security checkpoints. At first it will not be all airports, and those participating locations will be announced at a later time.

“The addition of driver’s licenses and state IDs to Apple Wallet is an important step in our vision of replacing the physical wallet with a secure and easy-to-use mobile wallet,” said Jennifer Bailey, Apple’s vice president of Apple Pay and Apple Wallet said in a press release. “We are excited that the TSA and so many states are already on board to help bring this to life for travelers across the country using only their iPhone and Apple Watch, and we are already in discussions with many more states as we’re working to offer this nationwide in the future.”

Adding IDs to phones will be sure to raise eyebrows, but for years now, and especially through COVID, people have been increasingly adopting the Wallet to make contactless payments. Like credit cards, people will add their ID to their iPhone. Per the release, the customer will then be asked to use their iPhone to scan their physical driver’s license or state ID card and take a selfie, which will be securely provided to the issuing state for verification. As an additional security step, users will also be prompted to complete a series of facial and head movements during the setup process.

Crucially, the ID will only be added to the Wallet once it was verified by the issuing state. A full suite of digital protections were announced that allow the whole process to work as with the credit cards.

While this kind of sea change will not take place over night, it is an important reminder that technologies like contactless payment and QR codes became key platforms during the pandemic after years of availability. And unlike credit cards, digital IDs have implications in many municipal processes and exchanges.

One could imagine in the future a time when a police officer asks for license and registration and a person pulls out their phone. Buying a bottle of wine, your id could be checked with the same scanner as your credit card. Getting married, applying for fishing licenses, and all sorts of other instances. It isn’t so much a brave new world but an eventuality.
Utilizing the CT Education Network

DBO installs hosted VOIP at Stratford public schools

The Stratford Public School district encompasses fourteen (14) buildings, over 7,000 students, 1,000 employees and approximately 900 telephone sets. The district replaced a CENTREX analog telephone system with cloud hosted DBO Voice Over IP telephone sets in 2015. Ed Molloy, the district Director of Technology, agreed to share his thoughts and experience with Town & City readers who may be faced with a decision to upgrade telephone services and systems in the near future.

The Connecticut Education fiber-optic network is a high-performance transport network available throughout the state and connects all Stratford public schools to the internet. CEN has made it possible to directly route services for ultra-high-performance, high availability, and resiliency supporting the most intensive data flows and real-time applications such as broadcast video and DBO VOIP.

“The district telephone sets are connected by the district fiber-optic wide area network and CEN without incurring additional circuit costs typically associated with cloud based VOIP, said Mr. Molloy. “By leveraging the school districts existing network infrastructure voice traffic is transported from phone to cloud with very low latency and high-quality connections.”

Has it met your expectations? we asked Mr. Molloy. “DBO VOIP has reduced our administrative overhead with a multi-level, web-based administration portal to program the phones, add/delete users and administer every aspect of our voice communications. The telephone system almost runs itself. Telephone sets are easily moved and reconnected during building renovations and all district employees have phones that support caller ID, voicemail, auto attendant, voice mail notification via email and many other features not previously available.

The school district is no longer required to maintain local PBX or call server hardware and all system software upgrades are done in the cloud. All services including long distance, voicemail, and support are included in one charge for each telephone set.

Hosted VoIP services are dependent on robust internet connections. When designed and implemented properly, hosted VOIP can provide a reliable alternative to premise-based systems without the administrative overhead.

Leveraging the custom DBO VOIP interface to the Ct. Education Network eliminates redundant circuit costs, onsite communications hardware, licensing fees and maintenance.”

Municipal Consulting Service

Recognizing that hiring the best people requires both a significant investment of time and effort as well as a trusted partner, CCM has added executive recruiting to our Municipal Consulting Service

MCS assists CCM members, their school districts and local public agencies with a full complement of essential services, including:

Grant writing and researching • RFP drafting • Project management
Operational reviews • Change implementation • Organizational studies
Strategic planning • Finance and budgeting • Purchasing
Facilities management • Temporary staffing

For more information contact: George Rafael, Director MRSC | grafael@ccm-ct.org | 203-498-3063
Cities and towns—even the smallest municipalities—not addressing fundamental problems with information technology and cybersecurity are not simply risking a virus that could wipe out data. They risk serious legal, financial, and operational penalties. As stewards of private, sensitive, and confidential information, municipalities must take information technology seriously.

The impacts of IT and cybersecurity underspending, obsolete systems, and poorly trained staff can hurt municipalities from a variety of angles.

1. **The high costs of a cybersecurity incident.**

When municipalities experience a cybersecurity incident without proactive IT support and cybersecurity best practices implemented, the costs in the aftermath of that incident will rise quickly from:

   - The time needed to notify authorities and regulatory agencies.
   - Hiring emergency IT consultants to address the incident.
   - Notifying citizens about the incident and providing them financial reparations (such as free identity theft monitoring services).
   - Paying lawyers lots of money to deal with legal issues related to the incident.
   - Many hours spent by municipal staff in crisis mode addressing the incident.

Even after addressing the incident, the repercussions may continue to be costly. Lawsuits, fines, and a damaged reputation in the eyes of citizens and businesses will haunt your municipality for months and years.

2. **Losing access to national and state databases (such as crime databases).**

When your municipality appears unable to handle sensitive and confidential data, you may lose access to it. Imagine if your police department was unable to access state or national crime databases.

Today, so much information access and sharing requires interdependence—and with interdependence comes responsibility. Do you think a friend would feel comfortable leaving valuables at your house if you never locked it? The same logic applies here. Towns and cities need to implement basic cybersecurity best practices or risk losing access to important information from government agencies.

3. **Paying higher cyber insurance premiums.**

Some municipalities think that cyber insurance will help take care of the high costs of a cybersecurity incident. However, municipalities may have renewals declined or will pay much higher premiums for what’s already costly insurance if they don’t address some of the following issues:

   - Creating a strong password policy—including multi-factor authentication for email, administrative access, and remote access.
   - Establishing a data backup and disaster recovery plan—with at least two copies of your data backup offsite.
   - Using enterprise-class antivirus software managed and maintained by IT professionals.
   - Using endpoint detection and response (EDR)—a tool to detect attackers already inside your systems.
   - Using modernized, professionally supported hardware.
   - Keeping software modernized, upgraded, and patched.
   - Protecting wi-fi access points.
   - Conducting ongoing employee training about cyber threats.
   - Establishing clear data access and authorization policies.
   - By taking more proactive steps, municipalities both lower cyber insurance premiums and reduce the risk of having a cybersecurity incident at all.
4. Cybersecurity continuing to affect municipal borrowing.

Credit-rating agencies such as Standard & Poor’s (S&P), Moody’s, and Fitch take municipal cybersecurity into account when considering borrowing rates for municipalities. If towns and cities want to borrow money at lower interest rates, they need to proactively address cybersecurity.

According to Fitch from a press release early in 2021, “Fitch includes cybersecurity in its credit analysis of the municipal sector and as part of its corporate-wide environmental, social and governance (ESG) framework. In addition, we believe cyber events pose financial risk which could impact municipal credit quality. This risk is not limited to the upfront cost of responding to a cyber-attack, but the costs of recovery and realignment of systems as well, which are many times more than the initial cost.”

See a pattern? Today, proactive IT maintenance and support goes far beyond just making sure your hardware, software, and systems are running smoothly. Lack of proper “cyber hygiene” can impact the way you protect information, comply with the law, and stay financially sound as a municipality.

About Joe Howland

Joe has been in the IT industry for over 20 years and has extensive IT management experience that spans multiple industries. A UCLA grad with a degree in Mathematics Computation with a Computer Specialization, he worked with Computer Sciences Corporation for 10 years supporting defense and financial sector contracts. Joe joined VC3 in 2009 and during his time with VC3, Joe has performed in the role of Virtual CIO for some of VC3’s largest government customers. Joe is currently VC3’s Chief Information Security Officer and is responsible for VC3’s IT security as well as advising on security for VC3’s customers.

About VC3

VC3 is a leading managed services provider focused on municipal government. Founded in 1994 with offices across the east coast, VC3 forms partnerships with municipalities to achieve their technology goals and harness their data. In addition to providing comprehensive managed IT solutions, VC3 offers cybersecurity, website design, custom application development, and business intelligence services. Visit www.vc3.com to learn more.

Energy Purchasing Program

Since 2004, CCM’s Energy Purchasing program has saved participating CCM-member municipalities, school districts and local public agencies tens of millions of tax dollars on the purchase of electricity, natural gas, and renewable energy.

ESPC: Owner’s Representation Service

Following a competitive bid process completed by its member towns and cities, CCM has launched a new Owner’s Representation Service for Energy Saving Performance Contracting (ESPC).

Energy Data Management

CCM is pleased to announce a new service for CCM members offered through Titan Energy New England — Titan Energy Intelligence — for Energy Data Management. With this service, municipalities, school districts and local public agencies can easily visualize and manage their energy use and confirm energy savings from efficiency, solar and other energy projects.

For more information contact: George Rafael, Director MRSC | grafael@ccm-ct.org | 203-498-3063
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The Drug & Alcohol Testing Consortium, a program of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, offers many benefits to your municipality.

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Mohegan Sun
a legendary meeting destination