

MINUTES
Transit Committee Meeting
January 12, 2021 7:15pm
Zoom Meeting (Recorded)

Committee members present:

Dick Lowenstein, CHAIR
Amy Kaplan
Kristan Hamlin
Candace Banks
Peter Gold, Current Transit Director
Sal Liccione

Also present:

Jennifer Johnson, former Westport Transit Director
Sam Arciola, Deputy Chief, Westport Police
Elaine Daignault, Director, Department of Human Services
Foti Koskinos, Chief, Westport Police

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:20pm and discussion ensued about the precise scope of the agenda call to review “the future of the Westport Transit District and to make recommendations as appropriate.”

The question was raised whether this meeting focus should be on compensating the Transit Director or discuss more generally the role of the Transit Director, including the scope, structure and potential integration into Town Departments, under the direct oversight of the Selectman or Board of Selectmen.

All agreed that it was premature to recommend compensation for a position yet to be clearly defined. Peter Gold told the committee that the Transit District is up to date and set for the next several months, due to previous Director Marty Fox’s much appreciated efforts. He suggested that before making recommendations, the committee should first discuss how the role

of Transit Director should be integrated with aspects of traffic/parking, planning, human services or even economic development. Kristan Hamlin likewise pointed out that transit issues have areas of overlap with other town functions

Kristan Hamlin and Peter Gold spoke about the Board of Finance's lack of support for the Transit District, having cut or reduced funding consistently over recent years. It was noted that the funding was usually restored after the Transit Committee and the full RTM overrode the BOF.

Jennifer Johnson suggested that the committee consider reducing its oversight charge and focus on developing transit goals and look at all forms of transit, including walking and biking as well as buses, shuttles, and door-to-door (see her email text, dated 1/12/21, which follows this report).

The committee then discussed various ways that different transit district services could be administered or delivered through other departments or related functions within Town Hall. We agreed that we lacked the knowledge to make any specific recommendations at this time but want to clarify what a Westport Transit District should provide, and how it should be administered.

To that end, Chairman Dick Lowenstein appointed member Kristan Hamlin to chair a Sub-Committee, composed of herself and any others she chooses, to study and define the issues, and make specific proposals for the RTM Transit Committee first to review and then to consider recommending to the First Selectman and/or the RTM. The Chair said that the Sub-Committee's first task is to clearly state its charge and provide an approximation timing of its report.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25.

Email from Jennifer Johnson

Tonights RTM Transit Committee meeting - Recommendations

Jan 12, 2021, 4:57 PM

Jennifer Johnson
to RTM, rtm_transit

Dear RTM Transit Committee Members:

For your reference, attached below is a link to the CT regulations governing Transit Districts. Given the complexity of these regulations, it is clear that Transit Districts were never intended to be overseen by volunteers. Furthermore, it makes no sense that this committee - the RTM Transit Committee - has been left to shoulder this responsibility in Westport.

Tonight as you discuss your one item on your meeting agenda I'd like to suggest two recommendations you can make to the full RTM:

1. That the RTM/RTM Transit Committee be removed from oversight of the Westport Transit District. Instead this function should be absorbed by the Board of Selectman who also oversees other traffic matters in town, including parking.
2. That the full RTM recommended to the Board of Selectman that the Westport Transit District merge with another Transit District - Norwalk Transit District, CT Transit District or Greater Bridgeport Transit District. Furthermore, the new merged Transit District should be renamed to more accurately reflect the region served, such as "Southwest CT Transit District".

In this historic times, it is time to rethink what is best for Westport's transportation needs. For over 30 years the RTM Transit Committee and the full RTM have worked in good faith to oversee the Transit District's volunteer directors. Simply put, this model of a one-off Transit District makes no sense. It has failed. It is time for a new beginning.

We are at a point in history where we have the time and reason to rethink what we've done before and restart in a new direction. **Please be part of that future. Please vote for change.**

I respectfully request that these comments in their entirety be included in the minutes of tonight's meeting.

Thank you,
Jennifer Johnson - Former Westport Transit District co-Director (2012-2016)
28 Tamarac Road
Westport

https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_103a.htm