



Civic Engagement Session - October 17, 2016

Goal & Objectives

To increase awareness of the opportunities to advocate for issues facing large and small municipalities in Western Connecticut and how to get engaged in selected communities as a citizen.

- ❖ To expose attendees to how their local municipalities are impacted by federal and state legislation and current issues.
- ❖ To discuss the important issue of regionalization and municipal resource sharing.
- ❖ To learn how to make changes in the local community.
- ❖ To learn about local volunteer opportunities for civic engagement.

Important Session Information

Session Leaders

Paula Rolleston, John Monteleone

Advisor

Ellen Carter, Director of Community Leadership, *Connecticut Community Foundation*

Session Attire

Dressing for comfort is appropriate.

Venues

Southbury Town Hall, Room 205
501 Main Street South, Southbury, CT 06488
203-262-0600

Parking

Parking is available on either side of Town Hall. Room 205 is located on the upper level.

Directions

[Click here](#) for a map and directions to Southbury Town Hall



Agenda

- 8:15 Arrival, Light Breakfast
Southbury Town Hall, Room 205
Meet & Greet with Southbury First Selectman Jeff Manville
- 8:30 **Welcome & Overview**
Paula Rolleston & John Monteleone, *2016 WCL Planning Team & 2015 WCL Class Participants*
- 8:45 **Civic Engagement & Congressional Highlights**
Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty, Representative of Connecticut's 5th District
- 9:30 U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut
- 10:00 **Civic Health and the Power of Civic Participation**
Valeriano Ramos, Jr., Director of Strategic Alliances and Equity Officer,
Everyday Democracy
- 11:00 Break
- 11:15 **Making Progress in the Land of Steady Habits**
Ruth Skovron, Founder, *Northwestern Connecticut Regional Planning Collaborative*
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 **Case Study: Making Changes in Your Town**
Paula Rolleston, Moderator
Eileen Schmidt, Founding Member, *East Litchfield Village Improvement Society (ELVIS)*
Barbara Putnam, President, *East Litchfield Village Improvement Society (ELVIS)*
- 2:15 Break
- 2:30 **Regionalization: Getting Involved to Make Change**
Humphry Rolleston, Moderator
Jessica Fowler, Board of Selectmen, *Town of Sharon*, Founder, *NWCONNECT*
Catherine Awwad, Executive Director, *NW Regional Workforce Investment Board*
Rick Dunne, Executive Director, *Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments*
Dave Elder, Supervising Transportation Planner, *CT Bureau of Policy and Planning*
- 4:00 **Session Day Wrap Up**
Brief Review of the Day & Opportunities for Engagement, Preview of Education Day



Speaker Biographies

Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty

Representative of Connecticut's 5th District

Elizabeth was elected to Congress on November 6, 2012. In Congress, Elizabeth serves on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Science, Space and Technology Committee. Elizabeth also serves as Vice Chair for the House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force. As the Representative for Newtown, CT, Elizabeth believes it is critical for our country to address gun violence and make a strong commitment to keeping families safe.

Before her election to Congress, Elizabeth served in the Connecticut General Assembly (2009-2011) and the Cheshire Town Council (2005-2008).

Elizabeth graduated from Harvard University in 1981 and earned her law degree from Yale Law School in 1985. After clerking for U.S. District Judge Robert Keeton of Massachusetts, she joined the firm of Sidley Austin and served as a member of the Supreme Court bar. She later taught as an adjunct professor at American University and worked in healthcare and Medicare policy as a Senior Research scholar at Yale.

Elizabeth lives in Cheshire with her husband and three children.

Contact info: <http://esty.house.gov/>

Valeriano Ramos, Jr.

Director of Strategic Alliances and Equity Officer, *Everyday Democracy*

Valeriano (Val) Ramos Jr. is Director of Strategic Alliances at Everyday Democracy, a national organization devoted to building the capacity of communities for dialogue and problem-solving. In this role, he contributes to leveraging organizational resources; working with state, regional and national networks on building a civic infrastructure for dialogue and deliberation; and developing state and regional intermediary ("anchor") partnerships to build community capacity for dialogue and change. He serves as the Coordinator for the Connecticut Civic Health Project. Val is also Everyday Democracy's Equity Officer and works with an "Equity Team" to build an organizational culture that promotes anti-racism practices and helps to bring an "equity lens" to the work of the organization.

Before joining Everyday Democracy, Val was Director of Constituent Affairs under former Connecticut Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz. While there he was the Coordinator of the *Tu Voto Sí Cuenta*, a statewide voter education and outreach campaign, which registered over 20,000 new Latino voters in 2008. Prior to his role in state government, Val spent almost twelve years in higher education, as Director of Community Service and Civic Engagement at Trinity College and as Assistant Dean at Yale College.



Val has many years of experience working in Connecticut's Latino community as nonprofit administrator, consultant, organizer, and activist. He also worked for over seven years as Executive Director of three Latino community-based organizations—LULAC Educational Service Center, Connecticut Association for United Spanish Action (C.A.U.S.A.), and Guakia, Inc.

Val has presented at numerous conferences, including the Connecticut Latino Voting Summit, National Conference on Citizenship annual conference, Frontiers of Democracy, National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation national conference, Collective Impact Forum, and Connecticut Council on Philanthropy annual meeting, to name a few. He is co-author of the *2011 Connecticut Civic Health Index Report* (published by the NCoC).

Val has extensive experience in public policy research and advocacy, campus community service and civic engagement, community outreach and organizing, and voter outreach. He has served on numerous Boards and state government task forces and panels, been featured in numerous radio and television interviews in Connecticut, and taught at the college level. Val holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Yale College (Yale University) and a master's degree in politics from New York University.

Contact info: vramos@everyday-democracy.org. <http://www.Everyday-Democracy.org>

Everyday Democracy welcomes inquiries from prospective volunteers. While we are not seeking volunteers at this time, we are always interested in individuals who can contribute their skills, knowledge, and expertise in support of our work. For inquiries contact Valeriano Ramos at vramos@everyday-democracy.org.

Ruth Skovron

Founder, *Northwestern Connecticut Regional Planning Collaborative*

Ruth Skovron is the driving force behind several important initiatives to address the declining economy in northwest Connecticut. Her work is a prime example of what one person can do with a vision, effective collaborations, and most important, persistence.

Ruth says she knew nothing about economic development when she moved to Falls Village 20 years ago. She had retired from a successful career as co-owner of a suburban weekly newspaper in northern New Jersey, which she ran for 17 years. In her new town with a population of 1200, she joined the Planning and Zoning Commission. She soon recognized that the only way for small towns in the region to survive was to band together. In 2007, she founded the NW CT Regional Planning Collaborative, which, via state and foundation grants, provides cost-effective professional assistance to eight towns in the region on a range of issues from job development to affordable housing.



Ruth was also instrumental in winning a Regional Performance Incentive Program grant for the 8-town Collaborative. The two-year grant allowed the Collaborative to hire a consulting firm to work with the eight towns that comprise the northwest region. Most recently, she helped to form the Falls Village Housing Trust, Inc. to address the issue of affordable housing.

The Collaborative received an award of excellence from Connecticut Main Street Center, and Ruth was recognized by the Connecticut chapter of the American Planning Association in 2010 with the organization's Citizen Planning Award. Relating to her work on small town economic revitalization, Ruth was a finalist for the Purpose Prize from Encore.org, a national organization devoted to tapping the skills and experience of those in midlife and beyond to improve communities and the world.

Contact: ruth@nwctplanning.org

Eileen Schmidt

Founding Member, *ELVIS, East Litchfield Village Improvement Society*

Originally from Milford, Connecticut, Eileen was living on the west coast when her husband got a job in the area and they moved to East Litchfield in 1977. They bought the old country store, which had been turned into a home. Her background includes a career in research in the publishing industry. Eileen considers herself a dedicated history buff.

Eileen has worked on the Archivist Bantam Post 44 American Legion and Greater Litchfield Preservation Trust. She is a member of the Auxiliary and supports the Fire Department. She participates with the Naugatuck History Consortium and Chapel Chat & Chores, including history tours. She was the founder and editor of the East Litchfield Newsletter.

Contact info: east.litchfield@gmail.com

Barbara Putnam

President, *ELVIS, East Litchfield Village Improvement Society*

Barbara has lived in Litchfield with her husband Bob Berson since 1984. She is a retired architectural designer. She teaches yoga, and grows vegetables on land that has been in her family since the 1940's. In addition to ten years on Planning and Zoning, Barbara has also served on the Historic District Commission, the Design Review Advisory Board, and the Conservation Commission. She has been an active Democrat, serving on the Town Committee and working on various election campaigns. She is treasurer of St. Michael's Episcopal Church, where she also sings in the choir.

Barbara currently serves as President of the East Litchfield Village Improvement Society, which formed in the fall of 2014. She helped write the bylaws, apply for 501c3 status and make the



transition from an unincorporated association to a nonprofit corporation, in anticipation of ELVIS becoming the owner of the historic East Litchfield Chapel, built in 1848.

Contact info: bdputnam@alum.mit.edu

Jessica Fowler

Board of Selectmen, *Town of Sharon*, Founder, *NWCONNect*

Jessica Fowler has lived in Northwestern Connecticut for most of her life. She received her Bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado, was awarded a National Urban Fellowship and graduated with a Masters in Public Administration from Baruch University in New York. Jessica has been active in women and children's issues all her life, joining the Board of Directors of the Susan B. Anthony Project (SBAP) in Torrington, CT in 1995. During her board tenure she organized and co-chaired the Agency's first regional fundraiser and supervised the selection of its first Development Director. Jessica served on the SBAP Building Committee and worked to relocate and renovate the Agency's new \$1.5M facility. She has also held Trustee and Board officer positions on the Indian Mountain School Board of Trustees and the Sharon Day Care Board of Directors.

Jessica's passion for community involvement and good local governance has continued to the present. She was elected to the Town of Sharon Board of Selectmen in 2013 after serving for the past six years on the Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning and Zoning and the Town of Sharon Long Range Planning Committee.

In March of 2015 Jessica and other northwest corner residents formed NWCONNect, a citizen advocacy group, in response to the lack of adequate internet and cellular service in the northwest corner. Since this time NWCONNect has received \$250K in state grants and legislative allocations, formed as a legal entity, developed a partnership with the Northwest Hills Council of Governments, and is currently working to release a Request for Proposals for the installation, operation and maintenance of a fiber optic network for 25 towns.

Jessica currently works as a Development Coordinator for Project Delivery Associates based out of North Carolina. Project Delivery Associates provides owner's representation, site location, all project scheduling and coordination as well as construction management for both commercial and residential clients and nonprofit organizations.

Contact info: selectmanjessicafowler@gmail.com

Catherine Awwad

Executive Director, *Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board (NRWIB)*

As the Executive Director of NRWIB, which serves 41 cities and towns, Cathy leads the board's administration of state and federal job training programs. She plans, develops, and implements



programming to meet the needs of employers and employees in the Northwest Region of the state. She also manages procurement and coordination of service-provider contracts designed to ensure seamless delivery of workforce programs. Cathy has been associated with the NRWIB for 15 years.

A registered pharmacist, she founded a retail pharmacy business and continues to work as a staff and clinical pharmacist. She served as a Commissioner on the Waterbury Board of Education from 2013-2015 and also served on the Board of Aldermen from 1993-2000. She became chief of staff of the Mayor's Office in 2000 before taking over as the interim Director at the NRWIB. She graduated from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy in Boston and studied at UConn, Waterbury.

Catherine's professional and community activities include the Waterbury Development Corporation, Waterbury Regional Chamber, Connecticut Pharmacist's Association, and Crosby High School Boys Basketball.

Contact info: catherine.awwad@nrwib.org; www.nrwib.org

Dave Elder

Supervising Transportation Planner, *CT Bureau of Policy and Planning*

David Elder, AICP, GISP-is a Transportation Planner in the Office of Strategic Planning and Projects, Bureau of Policy and Planning, Connecticut Department of Transportation. He is the project manager for the State's Strategic Transportation Plan and leads the office of Policy and Performance Measures.

Mr. Elder previously worked as the Senior Planner for a Council of Governments and Metropolitan Planning Organization in southwest Connecticut and has a Masters of Science in Planning and Resource Management from Central Connecticut State University.

Prior to working in the field of planning and policy, Mr. Elder worked as a land use official, law clerk, and GIS analyst for a not-for-profit agency. Mr. Elder's work for the Department includes legislation and policy review, freight planning, transit oriented development planning, statewide project coordination, and long range planning.

Contact info: David.Elder@ct.gov; www.transformct.info



Rick Dunne

Executive Director, *Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments*

At the merger of the *Valley Council of Governments (VCOG)* and the *Council of Governments of the Central Naugatuck Valley (COGCNV)* in late 2014, Rick was hired to be the Executive Director of the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) where he oversees administration of Regional Policy & Planning (*Transportation, Conservation & Development, Environmental, Homeland Security*), Brownfields Redevelopment and Shared Municipal Service provision. He currently serves as the Chairman of the *CT Association of Councils of Governments (CTCOG)*, the lead advocate for regional solutions to municipal issues.

Preceding the merger Rick was the Executive Director of the *VCOG* and remains Co-Director of the *Greater Bridgeport / Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (GBVMPO)*.

Before his tenure with the VCOG, Rick spent a decade as the Director of Development & Administration for the *City of Derby, CT* where he administered the local HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, directed Fair Housing Activities, supervised municipal land use planning & coordinated transportation activities with the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Rick previously worked as Policy Director for the Connecticut General Assembly's *Connecticut Institute of Municipal Studies (CIMS)* where he supervised policy development and drafted legislation on issues ranging from Neighborhood Revitalization to Property Tax Relief.

Rick resides in Derby with his wife Diane and daughter Ali.

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Richard Blumenthal

United States Senator for Connecticut

Sworn in on January 5, 2011, Richard Blumenthal is serving his first term as a United States Senator. Senator Blumenthal served five terms as Connecticut's Attorney General, fighting for people against large and powerful special interests. His aggressive law enforcement for consumer protection, environmental stewardship, labor rights, and personal privacy has helped reshape the role of state attorneys general nationwide, and resulted in the recovery of hundreds of millions of dollars for Connecticut taxpayers and consumers each year. As Attorney General, he advocated for reforms in the health insurance industry to assure critical health care coverage and lower pharmaceutical drug prices. He has worked relentlessly to eradicate corruption in state government and make state contracting accountable, fair, honest, and transparent.

From 1977 to 1981, Senator Blumenthal served as a U.S. Attorney for Connecticut, prosecuting drug trafficking, organized and white collar crime, civil rights violations, consumer fraud, and environmental pollution. He served in the Connecticut House of Representatives from 1984 to 1987, and the Connecticut State Senate from 1987 to 1990. As a volunteer attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Senator Blumenthal saved the life of an innocent, wrongly convicted death row inmate who came within hours of execution.

Prior to his position as U.S. Attorney, Senator Blumenthal also served as Administrative Assistant to U.S. Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff, aide to former U.S. Senator Daniel P. Moynihan when Moynihan was Assistant to the President of the United States, and law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun. Senator Blumenthal graduated from Harvard College and Yale Law School. From 1970 to 1976 he served in the United States Marine Corps Reserves, and was honorably discharged with the rank of Sergeant. Senator Blumenthal lives in Connecticut with his wife, Cynthia, and their four children.