



Western Connecticut  
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## Civic Engagement Session October 16, 2017

### Goals and Objectives

- ❖ Illustrate how individuals can effect change in their local communities
- ❖ Explain the operation of Connecticut town government, boards and commissions
- ❖ Provide an overview of the major issues facing western and central Connecticut, with emphasis on citizen participation

### Important Session Information

#### Session Leaders

Harold Kramer, *WCL '16*  
Gail Seymour, *WCL '16*

#### Advisor

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

#### Session Attire

Dressing for comfort is appropriate.

#### Venues

**Old Woodbury Town Hall**  
5 Mountain Road  
Woodbury, CT 06798

#### Parking

Parking is available on Mountain Road or along Main Street South. You may also park at LaBonne's Market (238 Main Street South). Spaces are available to the right of the store - then take the short walk across the street.

#### Directions

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



## Agenda

- 8:30 Arrival and light breakfast
- 8:40-8:45 **Welcome and Overview**  
Harold Kramer, *WCL '16* and Gail Seymour, *WCL '16*
- 8:45-9:15 **Getting Involved in Community Service**  
Ed Edelson, *former First Selectman, Town of Southbury*
- 9:15-10:00 **Civic Engagement and Congressional Highlights**  
Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty, *Representative of Connecticut's 5<sup>th</sup> District*
- 10:00-10:15 Break
- 10:15-11:30 **Opening a Microbrewery in "Foundationville"**  
Moderated by Joseph Montebello, *WCL '16*
- Martin Cobern, *Former Member, Cheshire Planning and Zoning Commission*  
Martin Connor, *Town Planner, City of Torrington*  
Ed Edelson, *Former First Selectman, Town of Southbury*  
Deborah Fuller, *Former Member, Woodbury Board of Finance*  
Karen Reddington-Hughes, *Chairman, Woodbury Business and Economic Development Committee*
- 11:30-12:15 **Social Media and Civic Engagement**  
Richard Hanley, *Associate Professor of Journalism, Quinnipiac University School of Communications*
- 12:15-1:00 Lunch
- 1:00-1:15 **Foundation Bite: Community Leadership**  
Ellen Carter, *Director of Community Leadership, Connecticut Community Foundation*
- 1:15-2:00 **Impactful Change through Advocacy**  
Roberta Willis, *Former member of the Connecticut House of Representatives*
- 2:00-2:15 Break



- 2:15-3:15            **The Case for Regionalizing**  
Moderated by Humphry Rolleston, *WCL '16* Rick Dunne, Executive Director,  
*Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments*  
Neil O'Leary, Mayor, *City of Waterbury*  
Rick Lynn, Executive Director, *Northwest Council of Governments*
- 3:15-4:00            **Voting: The First Level of Civic Engagement**  
Denise Merrill, *Connecticut Secretary of the State*
- 4:00-4:15            **Session Day Wrap Up**

## Speaker Biographies

### Ed Edelson

*Former First Selectman, Town of Southbury*

Ed Edelson moved to Southbury, Connecticut with his wife in 2004 where they opened Cornucopia at Oldfield Bed and Breakfast. They recently closed the business, sold the property, and are now living in Heritage Village. Prior to that, Ed had a long career with the ExxonMobil Corporation where he mainly worked in the Caribbean and Central America. After moving to Southbury, Ed became involved with local organizations including Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition and Southbury Historical Society. He also became engaged in town governance serving on the Inland Wetlands Commission and Board of Finance and chairing the Southbury Democratic Town Committee. In 2011, Ed surprised many by becoming the first Democrat to be elected with a majority of Democratic Selectmen and later the first Democrat to be re-elected as First Selectman. Ed continues to be involved in democratic politics as the elected representative of the 32nd Senate District to the Democratic State Central Committee.

Contact Info: [ededelson@charter.net](mailto:ededelson@charter.net)

### Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty

*Representative of Connecticut's 5<sup>th</sup> 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.



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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/>

### **Martin Cobern**

*Member, Cheshire Planning and Zoning Commission*

Martin Cobern earned his BS in Physics from The Cooper Union in 1967, and his PhD in nuclear physics from Yale University in 1974. After several research positions in nuclear physics and engineering, he was recruited in 1979 into the oilfield services industry and, in particular, the field of Measurements-While-Drilling. Marty soon became one of the leaders in that new field in which he holds thirteen patents. He retired as Vice President, Research and Development of APS Technologies, Inc. of Wallingford in 2014.

He has been active in community activities, serving for over a decade on both the Cheshire Planning and Zoning Commission and Central Naugatuck Valley Regional Planning Commission, and chairing both. He served twice as President of Temple Beth David of Cheshire. He was Chairman of the Yale Graduate Student Alumni Association and a Governor of the Association of Yale Alumni, and is currently an Associate Fellow of Trumbull College.

Since his retirement, Marty has expanded his volunteer activities to include the Cheshire Community Food Pantry, New Haven Reads and the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, and was recently appointed to the Board of the New Haven Jewish Foundation. He has also had more time to indulge in his favorite activities – travel and photography.

Contact info: [mecobern@cox.net](mailto:mecobern@cox.net)

### **Martin Connor**

*Town Planner, City of Torrington*

Martin (“Marty”) Connor is Torrington’s City Planner. He is also the Consulting Town Planner for the Towns of Goshen and Burlington. A certified member of the American Institute of Certified Planners, he has been doing planning, zoning and inland wetlands work in Northwest Connecticut for over 29 years. Marty has a real passion for skiing, seeking snow in the summer in faraway places such as Las Lenas, Argentina, Valle Nevado and Portillo, Chile. Marty has taught skiing at



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Mohawk Mountain, in Cornwall for 27 years. He enjoys photography and learned a little something about photography while training as a crime scene photographer/evidence technician at his former job as a Police Officer in the Detroit, Michigan area.

Born and raised in Detroit he is a graduate of Wayne State University with a degree in Business Management. Marty enjoys spinning classes and is an avid runner, exercising with his running partners frequently and competing in local road races primarily so that he can eat ice cream for dessert without suffering from a lot of guilt. He also proudly serves on the Northwestern Connecticut YMCA Board of Directors and the Connecticut Chapter of American Planning Association's Awards Committee.

Contact Info: [Martin\\_Connor@torringtonct.org](mailto:Martin_Connor@torringtonct.org), <https://www.torringtonct.org/land-use-department>

### **Deborah Fuller**

*Former Member, Woodbury Board of Finance*

Deborah Fuller has been an active member of the Woodbury community for many years. She has volunteered her time and talents with numerous civic and nonprofit entities including President of Spruce Bank Farm (2009-present), President of the Woodbury Hill Condominium Association (2014-present), Vice Chair of Woodbury Board of Finance (2000-2013), and Vice Chair of Woodbury Charter Revision Commission (2001-2015). Deb has also been a member of the Arts and Culture Grants Committee at Connecticut Community Foundation and is a 2016 graduate of the Foundation's the Western Connecticut Leadership program.

Prior to moving to Woodbury, Deb served as Senior Vice President for Human Resources at The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center and held a similar position at The Hospital for Special Surgery.

Contact info: [pdactthree@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pdactthree@sbcglobal.net)

### **Karen Reddington-Hughes**

*Chairman, Woodbury Business and Economic Development Committee*

Karen Reddington-Hughes is the owner of Abrash Galleries Rugs and Antiquities of Woodbury. Karen has given rug lectures on the art of the Oriental rug throughout the Litchfield County area and has over 20 years of experience in the rug trade. Karen works with both corporate and private interior design firms with the acquisition, maintenance and appraisals of one of a kind pieces. Providing a peerless collection of antique Persian, Turkish, Chinese and Indian rugs is both her passion and her pleasure. In 2015, Karen was asked to participate in the US Aid ABADE (Assistance in Building Afghanistan by Developing Enterprises) program, which included 25 rug dealers from throughout the world. She met with Afghan rug weavers as well as the Finance Minister of Afghanistan, with a goal of encouraging trade between the two countries.



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Karen lives with her husband John and 19 year old son John Christian in Woodbury and has been an active resident of the community since 1990. She serves on the Board of the Connecticut Summer Opera Foundation, chairs the Woodbury Economic Development Committee, is president of the Woodbury Antiques Dealers Association, a member of the Advisory Board of the Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition, a member of the Woodbury Junior Women's Club and on the Art Committee of Flanders Nature Center.

Contact info: [abrash.galleries@sbcglobal.net](mailto:abrash.galleries@sbcglobal.net), <http://abrashgalleries.com/>

### **Richard Hanley**

*Associate Professor of Journalism, Quinnipiac University School of Communications*

Rich Hanley (B.A., 1978, University of New Haven; M.A., 1993, Wesleyan University) joined the Quinnipiac University School of Communications faculty in 2001 after a 23-year career as a journalist, including a stint at Time magazine. In addition to his faculty role, Hanley, has served as director of the graduate Interactive Communications (now Interactive Media) and graduate Journalism programs. He is the founding faculty director of the graduate program in Sports Journalism. Hanley is a frequent contributor of opinion pieces in national and global media and is widely sought for his comments on the news media, the internet and popular culture, appearing on national news programs on MSNBC and Fox News, including the O'Reilly Factor. He served for six years as a panelist on the weekly WNPR political discussion program titled Politics, Burgers & Beer. Hanley also is a frequent guest on national panel discussions, appearing in 2009 on C-Span as part of coverage of his National Press Club presentation on Journalism and Social Media. He also has served as an official contest entry screener for the Online News Association's annual awards. He has been a judge for the National Association of Opinion Page Editors annual contest, among others. He is a seven-time Emmy nominee for his television documentaries, including national PBS works such as The 1964 World's Fair and Dreams Go By, a film about the 1965 Little League World Series that earned Hanley an AP award.

Contact Info: [Richard.Hanley@quinnipiac.edu](mailto:Richard.Hanley@quinnipiac.edu)

### **Roberta Willis**

*Former member of the Connecticut House of Representatives*

Roberta Willis recently retired from the CT General Assembly, after having served for 16 years as State Representative from the 64th District representing the nine towns in northwest Connecticut. During her tenure, she was the House Chair of Higher Education and Employment Advancement championing higher education for our students.

The CT Board of Regents for Higher Education praised her as a "tireless advocate" for students who fought to protect and expand state scholarship funds, pushed for capital investments to improve college campuses, and championed stronger sexual assault policies on college campuses,



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which has been described as a national model. Before her retirement, in a surprise move, the legislature voted unanimously to rename the Governor's Scholarship Program, the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program, in her honor.

Raised in the northwest corner of Connecticut, Roberta has always been deeply connected and committed to her community. For more than 25 years, she has served on the Northwest Connecticut Community College Advisory Board and Foundation; she was instrumental in the creation of the Housatonic Youth Service Bureau; and is a long-time member of the Executive Committee for the Women's and Girls' Fund of the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation. She also is a member of the board of directors for 21st Century Fund at Housatonic Valley Regional High School and has served on the Northwest Arts Council and the Advisory Board at Sharon Hospital.

Roberta began her career as a congressional legislative aide, as a teacher in the Region #1 School District and as a community activist. She also co-founded with Meryl Streep the national organization, Mothers and Others for a Livable Planet, to protect children's health and the environment. Roberta graduated from Northwestern Connecticut Community College and received a BA in political science from Vassar College. She is the mother of four and a grandmother of four. She and her husband Bill reside in Lakeville.

Contact: [roberta.willisct@gmail.com](mailto:roberta.willisct@gmail.com)

### **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 in 2014, Rick was hired to be the Executive Director of the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) where he oversees administration of regional policy and planning (including transportation, conservation and development, environmental, homeland security), brownfields redevelopment and shared municipal service provision.

Prior to the merger, Rick was the Executive Director of the VCOG and remains Co-Director of the Greater Bridgeport / Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization. He has also served as the Chairman of the Connecticut Association of Councils of Governments, the lead advocate for regional solutions to municipal issues. Before his tenure at VCOG, Rick spent a decade as the director of development and administration for the City of Derby, CT where he administered the local HUD Community Development Block Grant program, directed Fair Housing Activities, supervised municipal land use planning and 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 where he supervised policy development and drafted legislation on



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issues ranging from Neighborhood Revitalization to Property Tax Relief. Rick resides in Derby with his wife Diane and daughter Ali.

Contact info: [rdunne@nvcogct.org](mailto:rdunne@nvcogct.org); [www.nvcogct.org](http://www.nvcogct.org)

### **Neil O'Leary**

*Mayor, City of Waterbury*

Mayor O'Leary joined the Waterbury Police Department in 1980 and rose through the ranks, becoming Chief of Police in 2004, serving in that role until his retirement in 2009. Subsequently, he was recruited by the town of Wolcott to serve as Police Chief. In 2011, O'Leary stepped down to successfully run for Mayor of the City of Waterbury.

Mayor O'Leary's career has been marked by a deep commitment to Waterbury with a "can-do" attitude to effect positive change through collaboration and community building. As Police Chief, his innovative and aggressive approach to law enforcement has been credited with steadily decreasing the City's crime rate. In 2004, O'Leary founded the new Waterbury Police Activities League (PAL), which has become a national model for police prevention and service. In 2007, O'Leary's career in law enforcement received national attention. His tenacity in standing by a local rape victim, known to the public as "Jane Doe," and ultimately solving the crime 11 years later, became the focus of an NBC Dateline report originally aired that year. Mayor O'Leary now serves on the Board of Directors of "Jane Doe No More," a nonprofit founded to "improve the way society responds to victims of sexual assault."

Lately, Mayor O'Leary has focused his efforts on a comprehensive downtown revitalization project dubbed Waterbury NEXT. It is a \$20 million public-private partnership designed to reinvigorate Waterbury's Downtown by increasing the housing stock to draw young professionals to the area and improving the streetscape around the green.

Contact: <http://waterburyct.org>

### **Rick Lynn**

*Executive Director, Northwest Hills Council of Governments*

Rick is the Executive Director of the Northwest Hills Council of Governments, which is based in Goshen, Connecticut and serves 21 municipalities. Prior to this position, he served as the Planning Director of the Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials, Senior Planner with the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials, and as the Coordinator for the King's Mark Environmental Review Team.

Rick has a Master's degree in Environmental Planning from Syracuse University and a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Albion College. He has served on Cornwall's Planning and Zoning Commission, including six years as Chairman, and is on the Board of Directors of the Cornwall





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Conservation Trust. He is a member of the American Planning Association and the American Institute of Certified Planners. He and his wife reside in Cornwall, Connecticut and have two grown children.

Contact Info: [rlynn@northwesthillscog.org](mailto:rlynn@northwesthillscog.org), <http://northwesthillscog.org/>

## **Denise Merrill**

*Connecticut Secretary of the State*

Denise W. Merrill was elected to her second term as Connecticut's Secretary of the State in 2014. As Connecticut's chief elections official and business registrar, Merrill has focused on modernizing Connecticut's elections, business services and improving access to public records.

Secretary Merrill is focused on both civic engagement and fostering business enterprise. Since taking office, she has supported and expanded democratic participation, ensuring that every citizen's rights and privileges are protected and that every vote is counted accurately. Secretary Merrill has worked to expand voter participation through Election Day and online voter registration. She has also improved Connecticut's democratic accountability and integrity with a series of rapid response processes to Election Day problems. She was elected president of the National Association of Secretaries of State for the 2016-17 term and serves on the Board of Advisors to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

As Connecticut's business registrar, Secretary Merrill has made it easier for businesses to interact with the office by increasing online functionality, improving response times and connecting businesses with government resources. Merrill has partnered with the U.S. Department of Commerce Export Assistance Center, the General Services Administration, and Small Business Development Administration to distribute information about business assistance and educational events being offered by these agencies. Secretary Merrill also launched an award-winning online business startup tool to help entrepreneurs navigate through various state and federal agencies. She also led the development of Connecticut's e-Regulations System, an online platform that provides access to all agency regulation-making records with real-time updates.

Prior to her election as Secretary of the State, Merrill served as State Representative from the 54th General Assembly District for 17 years. First elected to the General Assembly in 1994, Merrill rose to the rank of House Majority Leader from 2009-2011. She also served as the House Chair of the budget writing Appropriations Committee, as vice-chair of the Education Committee and as a member of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. In a 2009 poll done by Connecticut magazine, Majority Leader Merrill was named by her colleagues in the legislature as "Most Respected by the Other Side of the Aisle" and "Most Effective Legislator."

Contact info: <http://www.ct.gov/sots>



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## Opportunities for further exploration and engagement

### Connecticut Council of Small Towns

A member-driven organization committed to giving Connecticut's smaller communities a strong voice in the legislative process. <http://www.ctcost.org>

### Connecticut Conference of Municipalities

The state's largest, nonpartisan organization of municipal leaders, representing towns and cities of our state with the goal of improving everyday life for all residents of Connecticut.

<http://www.ccm-ct.org>

### CT Data Collaborative

Striving for informed decision-making across Connecticut, the organization empowers an ecosystem of data users by democratizing access to public data and building data literacy.

<http://ctdata.org>

### Individual Town Websites

All town websites contain valuable information including governing documents, charters, plans of conservation and development, agendas/minutes of boards and commissions.

### Getting Started with Social Media

If you are interested in joining social media but are not sure where to start, this site offers a nice overview. Additional support may be available at your local library or senior center.

<https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-social-media>