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From: Andrew Lavigne[alavigne@ctportauthority.com]  
Sent on behalf of: Andrew Lavigne <alavigne@ctportauthority.com>  
Sent: Tue 11/30/2021 6:40:51 AM Eastern Standard Time  
Subject: [CT Mirror] Stuart Mahler: How does this board monitor state procurement with only one employee?

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>From a SCSB board member. CPA mention at the end, but only covers SCSB learning they had no jurisdiction and the legislative revision. It's frustrating seeing the project referred to as "controversial."

## How does this board monitor state procurement with only one employee?

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CT VIEWPOINTS  
STUART MAHLER  
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As a part-time lecturer at Central Connecticut State University I taught a course on the Introduction to Public Administration for ten semesters. I made sure the students understood there were two branches of government, a part time legislature branch and a full time executive branch run by the governor. In Connecticut we have a part-time legislative branch and a full time executive, the governor. We learned that both branches of government needed to work together. When they work together, it's a beautiful sight and it's absolutely important they work together.

The [State Contracting Standards Board](#)(SCSB) was created in 2007 following the scandals of the Rowland Administration and the debacle regarding the non-existent drains that were installed, or in this case, not properly installed on the I-84 project in the Cheshire area in 2006. SCSB is a watchdog agency like the Freedom of the Information Commission and the Election Enforcement Commission.

The mission of the SCSB is to require that state contracting and procurement requirements are understood and carried out in a manner that is open, cost effective, efficient and consistent with state and federal statutes, rules and regulations. Unfortunately, the SCSB has never been fully staffed to carry out its functions. For most of its existence, the board had and still has one full-time employee. The one other employee of the board, the State's Chief Procurement Officer, left years ago and the board has not been given permission to fill it.

So how does the work get done with one employee?

The board is blessed with many dedicated members –appointed by the governor and the leadership in the legislature –. who have undertaken the work that staff would normally perform. Thanks to one board member, Albert Ilg, a former city manager, the board has attracted graduate student interns from the University of Connecticut who are bright and talented. One former intern graduated and recently was appointed to the board.

With limited resources, the board conducts agency audits on procurement, The board's Audit Committee conducts triennial audits of state contracting agencies. It resolves disputes in contested cases of procurement, issues analyses on procurement policies and conducts investigations of alleged improper procurement.

Good things happen when facts are presented in a systematic manner. Connecticut Department of Transportation began the process of refilling bridge inspector positions. Instead of outsourcing all the work, DOT can train a sizable work force to do a lot of the work, even complicated analysis. Technology should not be a distraction for not doing the job in house.

The conclusion of the board's audit committee can be summarized as we can do better and in some cases much better. In general, state agencies don't conduct cost-benefit analysis or evaluations to determine whether it is cheaper to have state employees perform the work or an outside contractor. State agencies procurement officials don't receive the proper training they need and the training they want to be effective and efficient for Connecticut taxpayers. Finally, many state agencies don't have a formal process to evaluate the work of outside contractors to see if it is achieving its mission.

When a dispute arises regarding the process or awarding of a contract, the board has a statutory subcommittee that adjudicates the claim within 30 days. This expedited process saves the state's taxpayers significant dollars that would be otherwise spent on litigation in court and it gives finality to those bidders or proposers involved in the procurement process. For example, the subcommittee recently heard and issued a

decision in a multi-billion dollar health care contract administered by the State Comptroller.

Our data analysis work group examined competitive bidding practices and the duration of some of the contracts were in effect for decades. The data analysis workgroup also recommended that the state would be better off if it centralized its procurement operation bringing greater expertise to the procurement and contracting process.

The board has conducted investigations of procurement irregularities. Following the disclosures by the Hartford Courant of a media contract for the Connecticut Technical High School System, the board working with the State Department of Education created a model procurement manual with checks and balances to ensure taxpayers' money is being wisely spent.

The SCSB issued a report regarding the Dillon stadium project in Hartford. It found that the procurement policies were too lax at the quasi-public agency known as the Capitol Region Development Authority (CRDA). The SCSB recommended changes both to the quasi-public and to the General Assembly to improve their processes.

Recently, the SCSB undertook a review of the controversial State Pier project in New London. Much to our surprise and confirmed by the Attorney General, the Connecticut Port Authority has specific language in the law that exempts the Connecticut Port Authority from the SCSB's oversight. Due to legislative action this past legislative session, the SCSB was given jurisdiction to monitor the work of the Connecticut Port Authority.

Where does that lead us, if the citizens believe in our mission of open, cost effective and efficient procurement of goods and services by the state and its quasi-publics? First, the General Assembly has to appropriate the necessary funds for State Contracting Standards Board to properly staff its operation. In doing so, like other watchdog agency, the board needs the autonomy to hire its staff.

I think you'll agree.

*Stuart Mahler of West Hartford is a SCSB Board member.*

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