Over 175 key CT leaders convened Nov. 12 and Nov. 13 in Westbrook for a first-ever economic summit collectively organized by the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA) and the Connecticut AFL-CIO.

The three statewide organizations partnered for the first time to convene a unique Connecticut summit meeting for key business, government, labor, education and social service leaders to brainstorm on the best common pathways for Connecticut’s economic future. CCM will issue a final report on the summit’s findings in early December. Here is news coverage of the summit from the New London Day.

New London Day

Divergent groups tackle state’s economic problems

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By Brian Hallenbeck

Westbrook — More than 150 government, business and labor leaders hunkered down here Friday at the Water’s Edge Resort & Spa to brainstorm solutions to the state’s economic woes.

For a day, at least, everyone professed to be all ears.

Arranged by the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, the Connecticut Business and Industry Association and the Connecticut AFL-CIO, the Project B.E.S.T. (Bringing Every Stakeholder Together) Summit, which began Thursday night, marked a rare collaboration among groups whose interests often diverge.

Participants broke up into five groups that focused on taxes and regulations; education and workforce development; transportation infrastructure; regional solutions and quality-of-life matters.

Consultants helped lead the discussions.

In the afternoon, the groups shared their work.

“It was a great first step,” said Preston First Selectman Robert Congdon, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities’ treasurer. “Getting people together to work on the problems of the state is something that’s been sorely missed. What’s still missing here is the state government, the governor, the legislature. We can’t make it happen without their participation.”

Hanging over the event was the knowledge that lawmakers in Hartford were grappling with growing budget deficits projected for the current year and beyond.
“If we don’t fix what’s happening in this state structurally, that will be the norm,” Congdon said, referring to the repeated budget-adjusting. “We can’t run the state according to two-year election cycles.”

Norwich Mayor Deb Hinchey, a new CCM board member, joined the group on education and workforce development and said she found it helpful to meet with people from different disciplines.

“It’s not often that you get to hear from people on a one-to-one basis,” she said. “As municipal officials, we can get so insulated.”

Hinchey said she “heard some confirmation” that unfunded education mandates are unpopular with officials in many municipalities.

Kevin Maloney, chairman of the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission, reported that the transportation and infrastructure group agreed that the state must seek a “multimodel solution” to traffic congestion.

The group called for more public outreach, cost-benefit analyses of all projects and a constitutional amendment to ensure adherence to a “lock box process” that would prevent the legislature from “raiding” funds set aside for transportation.

In the future, it will become increasingly necessary to rely on user fees — meaning tolls among other things — rather than gasoline taxes to fund highway improvements, the group reported.

“If we do not leave here with a message for the governor and the legislature that business as usual is no longer acceptable, we will fail,” Maloney said.

Added Hinchey, “Municipalities can’t be healthy if the state’s not healthy.”