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 a blog report by veteran Capitol reporter Ken Dixon of the Connecticut Post.**

**CT Post**

**Ken Dixon: Solving state woes in a basement by the shore**

By Ken Dixon

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WESTBROOK — At the Water’s Edge, of course I wanted to get out and to . . . well . . . the water’s edge.

It was such a nice day and, generally, civilians can get a tad boring when they start trying to reinvent government. So I figured I’d step out of the working group on “regionalism,” take a brief stroll, catch some rays, check for any November boat traffic on the Sound and wander back in when the herd had finished dining.

But the crowd inside — Connecticut’s Shadow **General Assembly** I’ll call it — was far too interesting for a private reverie at this crucial moment in the state’s history, what with GE pointing a gun at our heads over new state taxes that the corporate behemoth won’t even reveal; lower unemployment and even-lower pay for those with jobs; and roads that crowd up with conga lines of motorized lemmings twice a day.

As it turned out, union members, educators, local-government people and business leaders kind of re-invented the wheel on Friday in this conference center on the shoreline of a glittery Long Island Sound. But 150 people ended up agreeing on maybe 20 subjects for pursuit in a rare collaboration that state lawmakers, in their stumbling, self-centered reverb silo called the Capitol dome, would be foolish to ignore.

“If we do not leave here with the resolve to send to the administration the need for no more business-as-usual, we will have failed,” said **Kevin Maloney**, chairman of the **Connecticut Public Transportation Commission**, summing up two days worth of eating, networking, big-time jaw-boning and wonkish riffing that was actually refreshing.
This rare summit meeting on the state economy was co-sponsored by the trinity of often-competing Capitol outsiders: the Connecticut AFL-CIO, the Connecticut Business & Industry Association and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. They filled the parking lot here, along with all the available five break-out rooms. Maybe the best thing about the gathering was there was not one state lawmaker in attendance Friday.

The group on regionalism was relegated to a tiny basement room where 40 people hashed out major issues from decision-making to the type of carrots needed for inter-town cooperation.

Too bad Gov. Abe Ribicoff led the way toward abolishing the county system of government back in 1961, I got to thinking as Lyle Wray, executive director of the Capitol Region Council of Governments was talking about the high price tag of so many disparate 911 systems, when big cities with metropolitan populations equal to Connecticut’s 3.5-million, can provide the same emergency call service for a fraction of our costs.

The group’s facilitator, Maria Gonzalez-Soto, of the Vermont-based KJR Consulting, denied with a smile a little later that she had experience as a cat herder or circus ringmaster. But she kept the group moving and on point as the clock ticked up to 12:30 and the big buffet reveal. Brainstorming isn’t pretty, but with a mix of expertise and a pile of colorful sticky notes, articulation can get boiled down quite quickly. A little musical chairs every 20 minutes, a little focus on priorities and this crowded room realized that the long-term is five to 10 years, not the two-year, tops, election cycle that drives the General Assembly.

“It’s not solutions,” said Joe DeLong, executive director of the CCM, who stopped by on his morning rounds. “It’s the start of seeking solutions.”

Brian Flaherty, a former state House member from Watertown who is now with the business-centric CBIA, said the election calendar has a tendency to make lawmakers short-sighted.

“When you talk about the solution cycle, if you will, it’s much longer than an election cycle, much long than a session or a one or a two-year budget and they need to have a steadier hand and a eye on the horizon and not having to go and over-steer and swerve guardrail to guard rail,” Flaherty said. I flashed on the image of lawmakers, clad in animal skins, careening down a steep hill in their Fred Flintstone mobiles, trying to brake with their hairy bare feet.

So in one networking dinner party and a few hours of close contact exchanging ideas, the Shadow General Assembly accounted itself quite well. Of course, most of these people are actually employable professionals. Let’s not forget the part-time Legislature pays $28,000 for rank-and-file lawmakers.

As the luncheon discussion was ending and the crowd was heading back to I-95 for points where ever, I asked Fairfield First Selectman Mike Tetreau whether House and Senate members — 186 in all — missed the boat by skipping the big discussion day.

“One of the primary objectives here was to eliminate politics and sitting in on the discussion, you couldn’t tell Democrat from Republican in the groups,” Tetreau said. “And that really wasn’t a
focus of any discussion. It was always about what do we need to do and how do we improve Connecticut? I think it was OK as a first step not to have the state Legislature and the state administration here. Because we could show what we could get done without politics.”