

# CONNECTICUT APA

## REGIONALISM POLICY STATEMENT DRAFT



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**A REGIONAL APPROACH  
THE CONNECTICUT CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION  
REGIONALISM POLICY STATEMENT**

## **Introduction**

Regionalism is a concept and framework for action that could help Connecticut make progress towards responsible growth; however, it needs more support in this state where we continue to emphasize home-rule local authority for land use and development decisions despite its limitations.

## **What is Regionalism?**

Regionalism is a manner of thinking and acting that recognizes the economic, transportation and social interdependency of municipalities. Regionalism seeks to attain a variety of distinct and sustainable communities, a healthy regional environment that knows no political boundaries and a vibrant regional economy. It provides opportunities and options for achieving some of the basic tenets of smart growth, including: the preservation of open space and natural resources, the revitalization of established city centers, the optimization of infrastructure investment and the promotion of long-term economic growth. In a regional system, each municipality acknowledges, and is supported in, its primary role within the larger system, whether that is as a provider of abundant open space for farming, species habitat, and recreation, or as a provider of significant and varied employment opportunities, or as a provider of some other facet of a livable regional community. Regionalism respects diversity between communities, while simultaneously building cohesiveness among communities.

In many states, regionalism is ingrained in both state and local government operations through the existence of county governments which are authorized to levy taxes. County governments frequently implement policies and programs on land use, infrastructure, public safety and other services on a regional scale, maximizing the effectiveness of public expenditures through efficiency. Regionalism, should extend beyond shared services and attempts to create a regional community. By balancing land uses on a regional scale there is the potential to have the greatest and most sustainable impacts. Rather than each town and city striving to attain open space protection for a certain percentage of its land, a regional approach would identify areas with the highest quality open space and devote efforts to

preserving those lands, while simultaneously ensuring their accessibility to all of the regions' residents. Regionalism does not supplant local planning and authority; rather, it affords municipalities the opportunity to cultivate and build on their individual strengths.

## **Why Regionalism in CT?**

Connecticut has a long and proud history of strong local autonomy. Home-rule authority, however, has resulted in inefficient competition for property tax dollars, increasing social inequities through the concentration of poverty in older central cities and inner-ring suburbs, degradation of natural resources, and increased traffic congestion, among other problems. In an ironic twist, local autonomy has bred similar development patterns and styles, weakening the individuality of communities. Very similar retail and upscale residential developments have cropped up all over the State during the latest real estate boom, as towns chase property tax dollars.

A regional framework for decision making is integral to the State's recently adopted growth management principles. Balanced growth with redevelopment in traditional centers and conservation of natural and cultural resources depends on an agreed upon regional identity and vision for the future. Regionalism is needed if Connecticut is truly going to support smart and responsible growth. Suburbs and rural communities need to support reinvestment in central cities, and understand that strong urban cores help protect rural and suburban areas from sprawl.

## **Where do we go from here?**

Connecticut is unlikely to develop the types of regional governance institutions found elsewhere in the country. However, existing state and regional agencies could foster distinct regional identities and visions throughout the State, and promote local buy-in to regional land-use and planning efforts. The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association supports

regionalism and will promote initiatives that advance regional planning and thinking throughout the State.

Instituting a spirit and policy of regionalism in Connecticut will require a paradigm shift, and therefore will depend on strong leadership. It will require the development of a clear institutional framework that is politically and financially supported and within which local, regional and state actors can work together to realize the economic, environmental and social benefits of operating as regions. Moving Connecticut towards regionalism will also require building fiscal and technical capacity at the regional level, whether within existing regional agencies or modified agencies. Importantly, Connecticut residents need to be convinced of the benefits of regionalism in order to strengthen the political will necessary to make the shift toward regionalism. Individual communities cannot and should not be expected to provide every feature of a community. Only regions can truly provide the diversity of employment, housing, transportation, arts, culture, and recreation options that constitute a livable and sustainable community.

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The Connecticut chapter of the American Planning Association is a private non-profit organization consisting of approximately 550 professional planners, planning commissioners, developers, consultants, engineers, attorneys, teachers, state and local government officials, and others interested in promoting sound planning throughout Connecticut. For more information visit [CCAPA.ORG](http://CCAPA.ORG)

