



Connecticut

Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association

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PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

RB – 1215: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A PROCESS OF STATE-WIDE RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

SUMMARY: RB-1215 would implement growth management strategies including requirements for state and regional economic development plans, regional approval of “regionally significant” developments, consistency between state, regional, and municipal plans of development, grants for regional and municipal plans, regional tax sharing, regional asset districts, increases in the state income tax, and full funding of ECS and PILOT programs.

ANALYSIS: CCAPA believes there are many factors that influence local land use decisions. Dependence on local property taxes, education costs, growth versus no-growth attitudes, and real estate and development market preferences among them.

The bill provides an opportunity to improve our state, regional, and local planning capacity through the development of state and regional economic development plans, grant fund for municipalities for local plans of conservation and development, and better coordination of planning efforts at all levels of government.

FISCAL IMPACT: This bill would have significant fiscal impacts for state, regional planning organizations, municipalities, and the residents of Connecticut. We recommend a detailed fiscal impact analysis be conducted by the Legislatures Office of Fiscal Analysis.

CCAPA POSITION: CCAPA has supported smart growth policies and improved planning capacity at the state, regional, and local levels of government for many years and we are supportive of the Legislatures willingness to continue to consider these very important issues. CCAPA supports some elements of RB-1215, specifically the sections dealing with planning and incentive grants, while choosing to be silent on others. To assist the Planning and Development Committee with these planning issues, we have provided an analysis of the sections of the we believe need further consideration and modification. CCAPA is willing to work with the legislature, state agencies, and other interested organizations and individuals to develop planning policies that are best for Connecticut.

Section 1. State Economic Development Plan CCAPA supports the adoption of a process to develop a State Economic Development Plan. The process to develop such a plan needs to be expanded to included a greater number of state agencies, regional organizations, municipal representatives, and far greater input in the planning process from all interested parties. We recommend at a minimum that in addition to the agencies identified in the bill the creation of an Advisory Committee made up of, but not limited to, the following entities: the Office of Policy and Management Responsible Growth Office, the Department of

Labor, the Connecticut Development Authority and Connecticut Innovations, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Transportation, Regional Planning Organizations, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, Connecticut Organization of Small Towns, Connecticut Business and Industry Association, Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association, the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, and other municipal representatives.

The Advisory Committee should be involved in developing the goals, objectives, implementation strategies, and measures for success for the economic development plan.

The State Economic Development Plan should contain the following elements:

- Baseline data concerning the state of the economy
- After the initial Plan, an evaluation of the status of actions recommended in the prior Plan
- Strategic Plan for the next five years. (goals, objectives, specific strategies and targets – i.e., jobs to be created in which sector, how they will be created; etc.)
- An evaluation of the overall effect of these actions on the economy

Sec. 2. State Economic Development Plan Adoption Process CCAPA recommends that plan be a long-range plan for 10 years and included a process for amending the plan to address changes needs or economic conditions.

Sec. 3. Section 16a-31 State Plan of Conservation and Development CCAPA supports the recommendations to have the State Plan of Conservation and Development apply to a greater number of state projects and activities. However, CCAPA believes that this process requires a comprehensive planning process that will coordinate the planning documents of individual state agencies with the State Plan of Conservation and Development. This will require greater planning capacity in the Office of Responsible Growth and said office should assist state agencies in the adoption of their plans to ensure consistency with the State Plan of Conservation and Development.

Sec. 4. Section 4-124d CCAPA supports the recommended changes to this section.

Sec. 5. Regional Approval of Projects of Regional Significance CCAPA supports developing a process that would allow regional planning organizations to review and comment on projects of regional significance and state whether they conform to the policies of the regional and/or state plan. CCAPA does not believe projects that require STC approval is a good measure of regional significance. Many projects that go to STC for review do not have regional impacts. Regional planning organization should be required to develop criteria as part of the regional plan to identify projects of regional significance within their region.

CCAPA does not support granting regional agencies the authority to approve or deny projects. Development approvals by local land use commissions and state agencies, like the State Traffic Commission, are based on compliance with regulatory standards set forth by those agencies. No such standards exist for regional planning organization. Therefore, a regional review that comments on the project with the context of the policies set forth in the regional and/or state plans is more appropriate. If the legislature considers creating a process for review by the region, CCAPA recommends that such review is provided within the application timelines established in Section 8-7d of the CGS and that such review does not add additional time to the application. However, we also suggest that, in commenting, the

regions should state whether w a project complies with the regional Plan of Conservation and Development, and, further, the STC should, as a part of its action, determine that the project is consistent with the State Plan based upon a report on such compliance by the Office of Responsible Growth.

Sec. 6. Section 8-35a Regional Plans of Development and Economic Development Plans CCAPA supports the recommended changes to the scope of Regional Plans of Development and the inclusion of Economic Development Strategies within such plans. However, as with the State Economic Development Plan, we recommend a more inclusive process to develop the Plan that involves other regional organizations and entities and should include the Office of Responsible Growth to assist with the coordination of regional and state policies. An advisory committee should also be considered.

CCAPA strongly recommends that clear definitions of “consistency” and “conforms” be developed to explain what it means for a regional or local plan to be “consistent with” or to “conform with” the State Plan. Regional and local plans will include far more specific information, and policies than the State plans and we need to recognize this difference in the scale of planning. Strict conformance or consistency, if not well defined, could limit or restrict the abilities to plan for or react to changing conditions at the regional or local level.

Sec. 7. Responsible Growth Planning Grant CCAPA supports planning grants to municipalities to assist with updates and modernization of municipal plans of conservation and development, zoning regulations, and subdivision regulations. CCAPA recommends that this program be administered by the Office of Responsible Growth. The Office of Responsible Growth could also provide municipalities with technical assistance and/or best practices to encourage responsible growth strategies as part of these updates.

Sec. 8. Municipal Criteria for Receiving Responsible Growth Planning Grants CCAPA supports the concept of an incentive-based planning grant program. However, CCAPA believes that the criteria for receiving responsible growth grants as proposed in this bill are too few and narrowly defined and therefore may not be applicable to many communities, and therefore inequitable. If the intent of this section is to reward communities for accomplishing smart growth initiatives, then we suggests that the menu be significantly expanded to include, but not be limited to, preservation of open space (including farmland preservation), adoption and implementation of land use regulations that provide for cluster development, village districts, mixed-use developments, and higher housing densities; brownfields inventory and remediation; among other initiatives. Further, we feel that the legislation should empower the Office of Responsible Growth to administer the Program, create a point system for measuring compliance, and define terms. We further believe that this program should be incentivized by providing up-front, no-strings grants to municipalities to perform planning studies and to develop land use regulations which help towns accomplish these smart growth initiatives. We also feel that the legislation should require the Office of Responsible Growth to provide municipalities with a smart growth toolbox and model regulations, among other assistance and guidance.

Sec. 9. Regional Efficiency Grant Program CCAPA recommends the comments as stated above for the Municipal Planning Grant Program.

The remaining portions of the proposed bill relate to sales taxes, property tax sharing within regions, increases in the income tax, user taxes, regional asset districts, PILOT, and educational cost sharing. CCAPA expertise and concerns are related to planning and development policy. Therefore, we focused our attention and comments on the planning and development aspects of this proposed bill. CCAPA will

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not comment on the remaining portions of the proposed legislation. Our silence on these issues should in no way be interpreted as support for or opposition to these provisions.

CCAPA is willing to meet with members of the Planning and Development Committee and staff to further explain our comments and to assist with further changes to this proposed bill if the Planning and Development Committee chose to improve and support this bill.

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