

The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association Regionalism Policy Statement

Organizational Objective

CCAPA supports public policies, planning objectives, and legislative actions that encourage regional cooperation and coordination on land use issues and smart growth efforts, including the revitalization of urban centers, the protection of natural resources, the optimization of infrastructure investments, and the promotion of long-term economic development.

Background

Today's global economy requires agencies and governments at all levels in Connecticut to think and act regionally in order to remain economically competitive. No single municipality can provide the infrastructure, workforce and housing necessary to attract and retain businesses that compete globally. Rather, Connecticut must develop and promote livable regions that can attract and sustain a competitive economic cluster.

In addition to its economic development benefits, regionalism helps to protect community character and shared environmental systems. It can enhance common infrastructure and transportation systems, to maximize their efficacy and efficiency. Regionalism can also achieve financial efficiencies through shared services. Addressing conservation and development at a multi-town level and across disciplines is at the foundation of many smart growth goals, including the promotion of traditional urban centers, reduction in traffic congestion and protection of natural resources.

Recognizing that certain policy issues are better addressed at a regional level, the Connecticut General Assembly enabled the creation of regional planning organizations in the 1940s. The State developed the boundaries of the current 15 regional planning organizations in the 1950s. These boundaries have changed little since their creation, despite significant changes in the State's economy and development patterns. The 2007 Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee study of regional planning organizations found support for, and recommended that the State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) review the regional planning areas at least every 20 years. The lack of logical regional planning areas hinders cooperation and coordination around viable regions and the implementation of smart growth practices.

A general lack of support for regional planning further weakens Connecticut's ability to reap the benefits of regionalism. The State has steadily reduced its funding for regional planning organizations - the FY 2010-2011 budget provides only \$200,000 per year for all fifteen. While the State has created valuable incentives for municipal cooperation, the programs have been better at promoting ad hoc partnerships than lasting regional identities.

Policy Principles

In order to implement smart growth policies, Connecticut needs to define rational socio-economic regions, and foster cooperative policy, economic development, and land use efforts within those regions.

- Connecticut's regions must be defined by overlapping economic, transportation, environmental and social systems
- Regional planning must be integrated across planning areas, including land use, housing, transportation, and economic development

- Regional planning provides an important link between state-level goals and policies and local-level conservation and development concerns, and therefore must be supported by the state and municipalities and coordinated with their planning efforts
- Residents and decision-makers must be educated on the need for mutual support among rural, suburban and urban communities, to reinvest in central cities and their infrastructure, to target dense development in appropriate sites with appropriate infrastructure and transportation access, and to invest in natural resources and open space conservation
- Incentives for municipalities, ideally located in logical planning regions, to take regional approaches to economic development, land use, housing, transportation systems and service delivery must be created and supported

Legislative Recommendations

1. Review and reorganize the State's Regional Planning Organizations

Much has changed since the 1950s, when the current fifteen regional planning organizations' areas were originally defined. In order to effectively promote regionalism, the regional planning organizations' territories must be defined by current environmental, economic, transportation, and social systems. Public Act 08-182 requires OPM to conduct a review by January 2012. At the least, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee's recommended criteria for logical regional planning areas should be used. The review also provides an opportunity to educate state and local officials on the important role of regional planning.

2. Renew state support for regional planning and foster a climate of regionalism

State funding is necessary to support regional planning in Connecticut. Especially as the State considers new regional planning areas based on physical, social and economic characteristics, it should also reconsider how it financially supports regional planning organizations. In addition, any state policy and/or grant incentives for inter-municipal cooperation should involve regional planning organizations in order to foster regional identities and ease opportunities for municipalities to participate.

3. Coordinate state, local and regional levels of planning

According to Public Act 08-182, OPM has to develop regulatory criteria for reviewing regional plans of conservation and development. The development of such criteria should help to establish the role of regional planning in Connecticut as a means of implementing the policy goals of the State Plan in balance with local development plans.

4. Ensure that regional planning is integrated across planning areas

The State's growth management principles and requirements for municipal plans of conservation and development require consideration of the environment, economic development, transportation and other infrastructure, housing, agricultural resources and other planning areas. Regional plans should also integrate these functions, especially as most current regional planning organizations serve as Metropolitan Planning Organizations and thereby heavily influence transportation planning. OPM's forthcoming regulatory criteria could also address this need.

5. *Create financial and other incentives for municipalities to participate in regional planning and service sharing efforts*

Build on the success of the Regional Performance Incentive Grants established by Public Act 07-239 to create incentives for, and models of, regional service sharing. Reliance on property taxes is a powerful disincentive to regionalism. Explore other means of sharing property taxes or other local revenues in an attempt to balance reinvestments in traditional urban cores and infrastructure with more rural areas.