



*Making Great Communities Happen*

## **Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association**

### **Testimony Regarding the Proposed 2018-2023 Conservation and Development Policies Plan**

There is no single document more critical to Connecticut's future than the Conservation and Development Policies Plan. CCAPA acknowledges the challenge that Office of Policy and Management staff have in creating a document that both synthesizes state policies and provides adequate direction to state agencies. We appreciate the recent submission of the 2018 Report on the Implementation of the 2013-2018 Plan but note that 16a-32(c) requires that an *annual* implementation report be prepared and presented to the Continuing Legislative Committee on State Planning and Development. We ask that OPM and the Continuing Committee ensure that annual implementation reports prepared and reviewed as a way to improve the Plan's implementation, and that these reports be made publicly available. The annual review of implementation should be a process that develops greater capacity among state agencies and identifies necessary activities. What is each state agency's role in implementing the plan and what actions are called for? For example, although the plan recommends that the State support compact growth in areas without public water and sewer by "identify[ing] innovative mechanisms, utilizing decentralized or small-scale water and sewage systems, to support increased housing density in village centers and conservation subdivisions that lack supporting infrastructure," the Department of Public Health has yet to define review criteria for alternative septic treatment systems, despite being directed by the Legislature in 2007 to do so. Better data collection and sharing is another area (called for in Section 6) that has seen little progress in recent years. An annual and public review process would highlight opportunities like these for improvement.

CCAPA offers that the 2018-2023 plan could more strongly address the following:

- Identify how state-funded projects are components of place-based economic development.
  - CCAPA believes that the quality of place is critically important. Agencies should invest in "place-based" infrastructure that enhances design, improves daily function, protects our heritage, and increases amenities within Connecticut's village centers and urban downtowns. We advise state agencies to refer to the Plan's principles as well as the regional and local Plans of Conservation and Development to determine the development goals for each place in which state activities are being carried out--to ask not just what the funding is for, but why, and to ensure that state activities complement these goals. Currently, only projects within Village Priority Funding Areas receive this type of contextual review. A "value of place" strategy leverages public and private investments, ensuring that the whole is greater than the sum of

its parts.

- Incorporate fair housing goals into the Plan’s recommendations regarding housing development and reconcile location conflicts between the goal of expanding housing opportunity for low-income and minority households and the goal of revitalizing neighborhood centers and transit-oriented development.
  - The Department of Housing has embraced location-specific policies that focus new housing production in “high opportunity” areas that give low-income residents access to high-quality schools and stable neighborhoods, policies which often conflict with Growth Principle #1 (Redevelop and Revitalize Regional Center) and Growth Principle #3 (Concentrate Development Around Transportation). These policies need not be at odds with one another. CGS 16a-27(b) requires that plan revisions “take into account... linkages of affordable housing objectives and land use objectives with transportation systems.” The State must develop a cohesive location-specific strategy to support housing growth in areas that both promote positive resident outcomes and attract investment to the walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods that will drive economic growth in the state going forward.
- Acknowledge that modifications to the current property tax system must be made in order to achieve the Plan’s goal and support the principles (and include tracking tax reform initiatives in annual implementation reviews).
  - Connecticut’s system of linking the ability of a municipality to provide services to its residents with the value of local real estate has a pernicious effect on the state’s housing market and on local housing production policies. The reliance on local property tax must be addressed in order to achieve the goals outlined in the Plan. Our reliance on property tax blocks progress in two ways:
    - 1) Impeding much-needed development of affordable and multifamily housing. Historically, communities have closed themselves to multifamily development for fear that households with children would burden the local school system. While many Connecticut communities are now realizing that multifamily properties can be economic drivers for their communities, there is still widespread reluctance on the part of communities to accept additional residents. Diversifying municipal revenue sources and stabilizing educational costs would enable communities to look beyond fiscal concerns in formulating local housing policies; and
    - 2) Discouraging investment in urban areas. High mill rates in Connecticut’s urban communities discourage potential residents from buying homes in these areas and businesses from locating there, further eroding the local property tax base. By leveling the property-tax playing field, Connecticut’s cities can be more competitive in attracting businesses and encouraging young residents to establish roots in the community and in the state.
- Anticipate how Connecticut’s coastal natural and man-made systems must change in response to sea level rise and increased flooding. In particular, the Plan should address:

- Marsh advancement. Tidal marshlands are the region's fishery nurseries and can only be located along our coastlines. As cited in recent collaborative work by The Nature Conservancy, marshlands also act as important buffers to break down wave energy during storm surge events. As seas rise, housing and other non-water-dependent land uses need to be relocated to accommodate marshland advancement and protect our regional fisheries and natural storm surge protection; and
- Replacement of development areas lost to sea level rise. Some of the State's most valuable neighborhoods are at risk of deterioration or abandonment due to more frequent flooding. Municipalities facing a loss of amenities and tax base will look to concentrate new investment in transit-oriented development areas and higher elevation town centers that are located out of the flood zone or inundation areas.

CCAPA's *Start With Planning* white papers on housing, transportation, resiliency, conservation, and economic development go into further detail on many of the above topics. We encourage members of the Continuing Committee to review them at <http://www.ccapa.org/legislative/start-with-planning/>.

## **WHO WE ARE**

The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA) has over 420 members who are governmental and consulting planners, land use attorneys, citizen planners, and other professionals engaged in planning and managing land use, economic development, housing, transportation, and conservation for local, regional, and State governments, private businesses and other entities. CCAPA has long been committed to assisting the legislature and State agencies with developing and furthering responsible growth management principles. The American Planning Association is an independent, not-for-profit, national educational organization that provides leadership in the development of vital communities.

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