

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 2, 2017
To: CRCOG Executive Committee Members
From: Chip Becket, CRCOG Policy Board Chair and
Lyle Wray, Executive Director, CRCOG
Subject: **Regional Futures Initiative**

At the CRCOG Foundation's Annual Meeting on June 23, 2017 the CRCOG Foundation Board of Directors and several invited guests participated in a discussion regarding whether CRCOG and the CRCOG Foundation should proceed with a **Regional Futures Initiative** for the metropolitan region and whether CRCOG or the CRCOG Foundation might serve as a "backbone organization" to assure that the effort moves forward over time.

What follows is a summary of activities that led up to that discussion and an initial proposal for related work over the coming year for the CRCOG Executive Committee to consider at its August 9, 2017 meeting next week.

How We Got Here:

The CRCOG Foundation Board's recent conversation was an outgrowth of CRCOG's expanding involvement in regional economic development activities. Recent efforts include:

- Progress Points meetings. Numerous meetings with the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and its Progress Points Partners to determine if there is an appetite for moving from an informing role to a more impactful one and to identify 'what we can do differently' in order to bring true prosperity to the region.
- Convening by the CRCOG Chair of an ad hoc economic development working group.
- CRCOG's independent work to engage key stakeholders and to articulate strategies for a better 'way forward' for Connecticut and our region.
- Three **Next Generation Economic Development** workshops focusing on talent development and advanced manufacturing, innovation and entrepreneurship and anchor institutions, as well as a standalone German American Business Forum on Industry 4.0. A fall session focusing on millennials is planned.
- Very recent receipt of a US EDA grant to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for our 38 town region.

Moving forward, the CEDS provides an opportunity for strategic decision-making that will provide a roadmap to accelerate inclusive economic growth within the metropolitan region.

Recommended Next Steps

Given the recommendations that came out of the Metro Hartford Progress Points working group sessions, discussions at the CRCOG Foundation meeting, and a variety of events

that should inspire collective action in Connecticut (e.g. Hartford's potential bankruptcy, the State's unresolved budget crisis, the exodus of major corporations, etc.), we recommend CRCOG consider taking a leadership role over the next year to coordinate the following activities:

- **Goal-Setting:** Build consensus around the need for accelerating inclusive/equitable economic growth (i.e., raising incomes across the income distribution with particular attention to opportunities for engaging those who have often been left behind). Such efforts may focus in part on helping individuals secure an initial job as well as promotions.
- **Situational Analysis:** Do a clear-eyed assessment of our situation: who, what, where to identify opportunities that particularly suit us as a metropolitan region (i.e., SWOT analysis with an emphasis on context and opportunities).
- **Strategic Initiatives:** Formulate a limited number of "game changer" strategies that will move the trajectory of inclusive economic growth in the right direction.
- **Capacity-Building:** Identify organizational collaborations that we will need to get action on the strategic initiatives and sustain this implementation over a sustained period of time.

Listening Tour. As a first step, we recommend launching a 'listening tour' this fall reaching out to key community leaders. We would use these conversations to: promote the regional futures initiative concept, gauge interest as well as perceived obstacles, identify specific opportunities for engagement and how they can advance the effort, and secure introductions to other influential players.

A preliminary list of individuals and organizations to connect with is attached. We welcome your suggestions for additions and hope that Policy Board members would participate in these conversations particularly when they have strong ties to the identified parties.

Planning Retreat. We also recommend scheduling a planning retreat for Policy Board members after the November elections. This would include an orientation on the regional futures concept to encourage participation and to create excitement around being part of such a process.

Steering Committee. Should CRCOG decide to move forward with the recommended course of action, we will ask Board members to serve on a steering committee to provide direction to the project and to help staff connect with and potentially recruit corporate, business, non-profit and philanthropic leaders from their communities. We would plan to ask each town to identify and provide contact information for three key leaders. Since several regional entities have already expressed preliminary interest in moving forward with a shared regional agenda and providing some staff support to this effort, they will be invited to participate as well.

Collectively, these initial activities will be critical for assessing if the necessary political and financial will exist here to support a successful, long-term initiative with a 20 plus year time horizon, championed by a core, diverse group of committed partners. They will also provide an opportunity for data collection in advance of the next legislative session in February.

In preparation for next week's CRCOG Executive Committee meeting, we have assembled background materials that can be accessed on the CRCOG website to provide some additional context to the regional futures conversation. While some describe recent work in this arena, we have also included materials like the Executive Summary for the Metro Hartford Millennium Project, to remind us that this is not a new conversation—just a renewed opportunity to make much-needed progress.

We look forward to your views on this important potential initiative. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to call to discuss in advance.