

Evaluation of:  
Public Service Answering Points  
&  
Municipal Assessments  
  
Priority Regional Opportunities  
for CRCOG

## Background

CRCOG has been a regional leader in providing regional opportunities and services to CRCOG member towns and other municipalities within the state of Connecticut. CRCOG's Cooperative Purchasing organization, the CRCOG Regional Purchasing Council, boasts 111 members. CRCOG's IT Services Cooperative which encompasses many services, has 61 participating towns, and CRCOG's Job Order Contracting program recently surpassed \$50MM in projects. In addition, CRCOG has undertaken a number of initiatives (either with state grants or of CRCOG's own initiative), including the nutmeghr.org portal which provides municipalities with a variety of Human Resources related resources; the Electronic Document Management System, which is currently in pilot and CRCOG expects to move into program mode this fiscal year, and the Cybersecurity initiative, which provides municipalities with assessment and remediation opportunities as well as model municipal cybersecurity policies. Moreover, CRCOG has the longstanding CAPTAIN Mobile Data Communication System. Each of CRCOG's Programs add value and create efficiencies for our municipalities.

This document serves as CRCOG's overview of the two areas requested by the Office of Policy and Management: Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs) and Municipal Assessment and potential regional consolidation and implementation and an outline of CRCOG's regional priorities

In FY 2017-2018 as part of its strategic planning, CRCOG conducted a survey of its members to gauge interest in various regional programs. Both Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs) and Regional Assessment were topics discussed in that survey. In addition to other resources, the evaluation of those potential projects will reference the 2017-2018 survey of CRCOG members.

## Evaluation of Public Service Answering Points

CRCOG believes that the Kimball report from 2012 regarding Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs) is still applicable in the state today and the ideal solution for the state would be 3 Regional PSAP centers. Understanding that the ideal is most likely not achievable, CRCOG believes there could be efficiencies gained in consolidation. CRCOG itself has a combination of some consolidated PSAPs (either regional or multi-town) and some standalone PSAPs. 22 of CRCOG members are standalone, while the other 16 are either consolidated with another municipality or part of a regional PSAPs. It is important to note that of the CRCOG members that are part of regional PSAPs or multi-town PSAPs many cross COG borders.

### CRCOG Activities regarding Regional PSAPs and Member Sentiment

CRCOG conducted a survey of its members in 2017-2018 regarding the potential of PSAP consolidation among other items. In addition to the survey, CRCOG's key executive committee members, including police chiefs and staff visited the regional PSAP center in Waterbury to understand the consolidation process and view a regional center.

CRCOG's survey results showed the Regional Dispatch Centers (along with Regional prison Holding Cells where that may become necessary with some dark stations) ranked the lowest of all the projects proposed. In addition, within CRCOG's Public Safety committees and groups, opposition to Regional PSAPs run high.

In addition to the CRCOG survey, a survey of 48 small towns conducted one year after the Kimball Report (see Appendix) had an equal number of towns (11) were opposed to PSAP consolidation and in favor without preconditions. More than one third (17) would only consolidate with significant cost savings for the town. Others (9) would only participate if their own town was the host town. CRCOG staff believes if this survey were conducted today, the results would be very similar. This survey result shows the political challenges in creating a Regional PSAP solution that would have enough buy-in to realize savings.

### Challenges to Consolidation

CRCOG sees the following as the largest challenges to PSAP consolidation

- 1) **Member sentiment and resistance within Public Safety Departments.** As noted earlier, PSAP consolidation is not high on the list of priorities for CRCOG member towns (some of whom are consolidated and some who are not). In addition, public attitude towards PSAP consolidation will be critical to having expanded regional PSAPs become a success.
- 2) **Cost.** There are large capital costs involved in initial PSAP consolidation including straightforward costs, such as building space, equipment costs, as well as ancillary equipment and consolidation costs. This is a large barrier for municipalities voluntarily consolidating into larger efficient regional PSAPs (contrasted with two or three town PSAPs that may only gain minimal efficiencies).
- 3) **“Local Knowledge” Concerns.** One of the barriers and resistance to consolidation is that some may believe that there will be a loss of local knowledge or relationships. These concerns need to be addressed by:

- a. Creating a consistent statewide standard for address points and assistance to municipalities to meet those standards
  - b. Educating the public and officials regarding benefits of regional PSAPs (improved emergency response, especially larger scale incidences that would easily overwhelm one or two dispatchers; relationships will develop and continue within regional PSAPs with dispatchers and police or fire)
- 4) **Implementation Concerns.** Transitioning to a regional PSAP must be conducted in such a manner that there are no temporary lapses in services.
  - 5) **Challenges with Systems Integration.** Many PSAPs currently use different software and systems for their dispatch operations. Integrating and consolidating disparate systems will require careful planning and execution to avoid any interruptions in service. Current regional PSAPs that have integrated recently appear to have taken 3 to 5 years to completely changeover their software until they are seamlessly integrated.
  - 6) **Union and Labor Concerns.** Some PSAP dispatchers are under union contract and integration / regionalization would require transition period or negotiations so that the any union or labor concerns are addressed.
  - 7) **The need for economies of scale and critical mass.** Effective PSAP consolidation requires sufficient size and breadth in order to realize efficiencies and effectiveness. Marginal efficiencies gained will not move the needle on effective PSAP consolidation.

## The Way Forward

Although there are significant barriers to Regionalization of PSAPs that would give communities true efficiencies and effective public safety, CRCOG believes that it is achievable with large state investment, the right stakeholder involvement, and effective education and outreach.

The elements necessary for true effective regional PSAP consolidation would be as follows:

- 1) **Clearly outlined state strategic goals.** Without clearly outlined state strategic goals, regional PSAP initiatives will always flounder. The Kimball report clearly laid out the “optimal” scenario for PSAP consolidation in the state. Political reality, however, is that the “optimal” three PSAP solution for the state is probably not achievable. The state needs to clearly define the “tipping point” of the definition of a when a PSAP the state considers sufficiently equipped and in which the state believes will benefit from economic efficiency. In other words, the state needs to clearly define the size of a PSAP (either by FTE or call volume) that overcome the state’s public safety concerns and will enable municipalities to see significant economic savings.
  - a. If Public Safety is the concern and reason for consolidation what is the emergency incident call volume the regional PSAP should be able to handle? This could be for a single incident or associated incidents such as a weather event and a clearly set target by the state.
  - b. Given that target, what should that PSAP’s daily operation be (by call volume or FTE) to be able to handle the potential incident? These goals will presume larger incidents would rollover to sister regional PSAPs that would assist with the emergency.
- 2) **Significant state capital investment.** Regional PSAPs will require Regional PSAP centers that can handle call volumes of an entire region. Moreover, equipment

standardization will require some number of towns to purchase new equipment. These costs should not be borne by municipalities but by the state in order to encourage the transition to a regional PSAP. The maintenance of the Regional PSAP could and should be borne by member municipalities, with the assumption that the on-going costs will be less than current costs. The state, however, should make the necessary capital and transition investments in order to keep the municipalities whole.

- 3) **Overcome political opposition.** CRCOG views this challenge as the greatest for any consolidation efforts. Resistance can be present at many different levels: chief elected official, public safety leaders, public safety members and the public. A working group that allows all stakeholders to work towards an implementation would help with alleviating this. One note, the working group, however, would need a clear direction and goal to work towards, which would be the state strategic goals for PSAP consolidation. The working group can develop effective implementation plan that overcomes challenges and concerns regarding lapses in service as well as transferring and sharing local knowledge.
- 4) **Effective subsidizing.** Current PSAP subsidies do not encourage wholesale large regional consolidation. Although two-municipality consolidation may be slightly better than a single municipality PSAP, it does not offer the regional efficiency and address public safety concerns for larger incidents or issues. The formula for PSAP subsidies should be revisited and gradually changed over several years to encourage larger consolidation based on call volume and work towards the state's strategic goals.
- 5) **Encouragement/Incentives and Disincentive.** In addition to effective subsidizing that encourages larger scale regionalization, the state should gradually implement disincentives for towns who do not meet the state's strategic PSAP goals.
- 6) **Incorporate all dispatch services.** CRCOG's view is that effective regional consolidation includes coordination and dispatch for all services: police, fire and ambulance. Effective regional coordination and dispatch of all services together would result in better and more efficient services for the community.

Given the situation of PSAPs today in the state, CRCOG believes the best PSAP consolidation plan must incorporate all the above.

### **The Role of Councils of Governments in PSAP Consolidation**

Councils of Governments, by their nature, are in a challenging position regarding PSAP consolidation. The COG's primary constituents are the member municipalities and COG's are primarily planning organizations, not operational organizations. Moreover, many of the current regional PSAPs cross current COG boundaries. Finally, CRCOG's regional initiatives are all based on a voluntary participation model. Effective consolidation of PSAPs would make a complete voluntary participation model very hard to implement.

CRCOG believes the COGs can act as educators and supporters of Regional PSAPs but by their very nature and the primary constituents and expertise, CRCOG believes the ultimate consolidators and actors in implementing regional PSAPs must be the state working with the municipalities and appropriate stakeholders to create Regional PSAP authorities.

# Evaluation of Municipal Assessment

## CRCOG Activities Regarding Municipal Assessment

CRCOG's survey of its membership as part of its Strategic Plan in 2017-2018 showed Regional Assessment of some interest to our towns. Consequently, as part of its Municipal Services Workplan, CRCOG is currently undergoing a benchmark study of the region's assessment. Specifically, the intention of the benchmark study is to compare the CRCOG region with similarly sized counties. Although true apples to apples comparisons will be challenging (personal property and motor vehicles are not always included in the appraisal process and revaluations are conducted on a wide range of schedules), CRCOG believes that this benchmark study will show how the CRCOG region compares to counties or regionalized assessment services.

## Regional Municipal Assessment

Having implemented multiple regional programs, CRCOG believes in a step-by-step programmatic approach to any establishment or targets for regional municipal assessment. First, the state or the COG should establish benchmarks and an understanding of the current landscape; then develop goals and targets and an implementation plan involving all stakeholders and constituents; and finally implement the plan and realize the savings established in the first step.

1. **Benchmark.** The state's goal is for municipalities to realize cost-sharing benefits and reduction in price per parcel. In order to realize these goals, the state or the COGs must first establish an understanding of the current landscape. CRCOG intends for its initial benchmark study to at least address some of the benchmark questions below.
  - a. What do municipalities currently pay per parcel for revaluation (if contracted outside).
  - b. How many FTE's? How many Assessors vs. clerks or administrative personnel? (this should be compared against the number of parcels within a municipality)
  - c. If possible, determine current number of appeals compared to number of parcels. The state believes this is an area of potential reduction through regionalization. Having an initial benchmark would help to determine whether it is an area that would be beneficial for reductions.
  - d. How do the above compare with similar sized locations across the nation? (Counties, etc.)
  - e. Understand and outline best practices
2. **Develop goals based on actual benchmarks and best practices.** Current goals and expectations of savings are based on national comparisons instead of actual Connecticut municipalities and their current situations. Stakeholders, municipalities, the region and the state should set realistic goals and targets based on the situation on the ground, including a three to five year plan that leverages efficiencies.
  - a. Goals should leverage existing economies of scales and opportunities.
  - b. Assessment schedules for municipalities should be set by those municipalities who are bidding their schedules together, in order to maximize efficiencies, economies of scale and savings. Assessment schedules should also consider supply and demand cycles for the vendors and current programs in place.

3. **Clearly define roles and responsibilities.** Any proposal or plan for regional assessment needs to clearly define not only the goals, but the roles of the various stakeholders: the state, the municipality and the COG. Given the goals above, who / which entity will be responsible for which aspects of the goals?
4. **Implement and measure.** Based on the goals, stakeholders should implement a regional plan that has verifiable and measurable goals.

### **Preliminary Proposals for Regional Assessment**

Without a benchmark study, CRCOG is hesitant to put forward any final proposals regarding regional assessment. On the other hand, given CRCOG's history of success in regional cooperation, in addition to the above, CRCOG is proposing some strategies and guiding principles for regional assessment:

1. **Evaluate current statutes for ways to streamline existing practices.** Current statutory requirements may be updated to enable municipalities to gain efficiencies based on best practices and cost benefits analyses. For example, allowing municipalities the use of GIS and orthoimagery in lieu of physical visits would enable municipalities to focus on high value changes more effectively.
2. **Revaluation schedules rotating at the COG level.** In order to best leverage purchasing and consolidation efforts, CRCOG strongly believes revaluation schedules should be distributed within a Council of Governments. In order to effectively use market forces for better leverage and costs, having the schedule be at the COG level enables, COGs to jointly bid and enable revaluation companies to have on the ground resources every year in some capacity in some function within the COG. If the COGs are forced into a schedule that has the entire COG performing revaluation at the same time, competition becomes limited as the number of firms who can handle over 340,000 parcels within one year are extremely limited and local knowledge isn't leveraged.
3. **Leverage existing programs and resources.** The Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments has a successful regional valuation program that has served its membership. In addition, a larger municipality may be able to absorb the assessment function for a smaller municipality. Such potential resources and programs should be taken into consideration when developing regional assessment programs.
4. **Leverage technology.** CRCOG has a very successful regional online building permitting program in place to which 50 municipalities participate. Recognizing and leveraging existing technology is critical to the success of any regional program. This would include the use of orthoimagery and support of high resolution flights on a regular basis. The state, in addition, should consider implementing or purchasing technology that would further regional assessment programs.
5. **Focus on results.** Change is challenging under any circumstances, especially in the land of steady habits. Any regional assessment program needs clear direction, objectives and measurable goals. What are the goals of the program? Governmental efficiency should be balanced with customer service and both areas should be taken into consideration when formulating the goals. Each goal should be measurable and measured as the program is implemented.

## **CRCOG's Opportunity Areas for Future Regionalization**

Based on CRCOG's strategic planning and current Municipal Services Work Plan, there are numerous areas that CRCOG believes are opportunity areas for future regionalization. Some of the areas outlined below require significant staff time and capital resources, while others require regional coordination.

### **On-Call Human Resources**

Many small towns have a need for human resources assistance. They are not large enough to have a human resources person on staff, however, they have human resources issues or need assistance in various human resources areas. CRCOG is creating a program for its small towns for Human Resources on-call consultants.

### **School/Town Back Office Consolidation Assistance to Towns**

Based on CRCOG's Strategic Planning Survey conducted in 2018-2019, School/Town Back Office Consolidation is an area of high interest for many of CRCOG's members. Some have already implemented such consolidation, and many are interested. CRCOG believes a program to assist towns in implementing school/town back office consolidation could enable towns to realize efficiencies within the municipalities.

### **Regional Building and Fire Inspection Services**

Franklin Council of Governments in Massachusetts has regional building official and inspection services for some of its towns. Some of CRCOG's smaller towns may benefit from a similar program that leverages town resources more effectively.

### **Electronic Document Management System Program Expansion**

CRCOG's current EDMS program is in pilot stage and will be in program phase this fiscal year. The current program includes agenda management, HR File management, and Land Use documents. CRCOG believes expanding the program to include additional file types and categories will enable more municipalities to take advantage of this resource.

### **Consistent High Resolution State-wide Orthographic Aerial Acquisition (every 4 to 5 years)**

CRCOG successfully administered the statewide flight for orthographic imagery in 2016 at the 3-inch level. The state conducted a flight in 2019 at the 6-inch level, for budgetary and timing reasons. The 6-inch level data, however, is less useful for municipalities (and many state agencies). Given the value that high resolution imagery gives to municipalities, CRCOG strongly advocates for consistent high-resolution aerial acquisitions every 4 to 5 years. Although CRCOG has administered this in the past, this does not have to be a CRCOG project, but would be a regional benefit to all regions and should be a consistent part of the state's budget and process instead of projects that happen intermittently and unpredictably.



# APPENDIX – Small Town PSAP Consolidation Report 2013

## Small Town PSAP Consolidation Report for E9-1-1 Commission Meeting

**Forty-eight small towns with a stand- alone PSAP receiving 8,000 or fewer 9-1-1 calls per year were included in this Study.**

The Selectmen, Mayors, Town Managers and Public Safety Officials representing 42 small towns were directly interviewed. Six towns were not interviewed, but OSET has extensive knowledge on their position regarding consolidation (*Newtown, North Branford, Middlebury, East Lyme, Wolcott, and Plymouth*).

The towns were informed during the interviews of the benefits of consolidation and the funding available from the State.

1. Most of the towns view PSAP consolidation as potentially a good thing, but many feel that there too many issues that make consolidation risky.
  - Some see limited cost savings, or no cost savings for their town.
  - Some feel that there is no guarantee that the quality of service will improve for their residents and fear that it will actually decrease.
  - Most of the towns are satisfied with the way that their PSAPs operate, and many have expressed the opinion that if it made sense to consolidate they would be doing it already.
  - Dark Police Department not acceptable by many - directly related to the issue of telecommunicators performing multiple duties other than 9-1-1 & dispatch.
  - A State mandate is widely opposed.
2. There are towns that wish to consolidate but have preconditions that apply specifically to them.
  - Some have a building that they would like to use to host a center if they can attract willing participants.
  - Some need a guarantee of significant cost savings
  - Others would like the State to provide a facility and staff it for them.

### Overall Findings

1. There were eleven towns that are in favor of PSAP consolidation without any pre-conditions. These towns see a significant cost savings in consolidation and view the need for telecommunicators to perform other duties at the police department or a dark police department as non-issues

|                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| <i>East Lyme</i>      | <i>Plymouth</i>  |
| <i>Ledyard</i>        | <i>Thomaston</i> |
| <i>Middlebury</i>     | <i>Weston</i>    |
| <i>Newtown</i>        | <i>Wilton</i>    |
| <i>North Branford</i> | <i>Winsted</i>   |
| <i>North Haven</i>    |                  |

- There twenty-six towns that would consider PSAP consolidation only if certain conditions could be met.

Nine towns would consolidate only if their PSAP was the host facility:

|               |            |
|---------------|------------|
| Ansonia       | Southbury  |
| Montville     | Stonington |
| Old Saybrook  | Watertown  |
| Redding       | Wolcott    |
| South Windsor |            |

Seventeen towns would consolidate only if it results in a significant cost saving for the town:

|              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| Avon         | Madison       |
| Berlin       | Monroe        |
| Bethel       | Plainville    |
| Brookfield   | Rocky Hill    |
| Canton       | Seymour       |
| Clinton      | Simsbury      |
| East Windsor | Suffield      |
| Glastonbury  | Windsor Locks |
| Granby       |               |

- There were eleven towns that were not in favor of PSAP consolidation.

|            |                   |
|------------|-------------------|
| Cromwell   | New Fairfield ECC |
| Darien     | Orange            |
| Derby      | Putnam            |
| Easton     | Ridgefield        |
| Guilford   | Woodbridge        |
| New Canaan |                   |

