

To: CRCOG Legislative Committee

From: Matt Hart, Executive Director

Meeting Date: October 27, 2022

CC: P. Yoder, C. Assis, R. Aloise, C. Radzins

Subject: Discussion Topics for FY2023 CRCOG Legislative Agenda

Below please find various topics that staff and I have flagged for the committee's discussion as it works to prepare CRCOG's FY2023 CRCOG Legislative Agenda. Some of these items would require legislation to implement. Others would require a change in state agency practice and procedure, or the development of a new state policy or program.

Service Sharing & Workforce Development

- 1) *Building inspectors* – Many of CRCOG's members and other municipalities across the state are struggling to recruit and retain qualified building inspectors and other municipal officials. The Department of Administrative Services (DAS) has formed a working group to develop a bona fide apprenticeship for building inspectors that could prove a model for the state. The proposal may require changes to the state building code and legislative action.
- 2) *Reciprocity for municipal officials* –In order to assist municipalities with filling key positions, staff recommends that Connecticut increase reciprocity to accept certifications from other states for assessors, civil engineers, code enforcement officials, tax collectors, and other local government positions. It may be beneficial for the state to establish an interdisciplinary work group to develop related recommendations for the General Assembly's consideration.
- 3) *Service sharing* – Removing barriers to service sharing at the local level has long been a goal of CCM, CRCOG, and other municipal organization. CCM's specific proposal is that the General Assembly eliminate any remaining statutory barriers to shared services. The state could allow for towns and cities to more efficiently allocate resources by:
 - Exempting the establishment of service sharing agreements from the definition of a "change in working conditions" for purposes of collective bargaining under the Municipal Employees Relations Act (MERA);
 - Amending MERA to stipulate that when service sharing arrangements affect two or more collective bargaining units whether inter or intra town, the interests of all employees affected by the new arrangements will be represented by either a coalition of bargaining units or a new bargaining unit created to represent all affected employees;

- Prospectively prohibiting any municipal collective bargaining agreement provision that limits the ability of a municipality to permit individuals or groups to provide volunteer services; and
 - Exempting municipalities from local charter provisions that prohibit or limit their ability to share services with other cities and towns.
- 4) *Intermunicipal land use and other commissions* – It can be challenging for towns of all sizes to recruit and retain volunteers to serve on land use boards and entities such as an ethics or fair rent commission. Under this proposal municipalities would have the ability to merge and opt into intermunicipal land use commissions with authority to address planning and zoning and inland wetlands matters issues. In addition, the General Assembly would expressly provide municipalities with the ability to form intermunicipal or regional commissions for a variety of purposes, including the adjudication of ethics and fair rent complaints.

Environmental Issues and Sustainability

- 1) *Waste management* – CRCOG has an important waste management study underway to develop short and long-term solutions for our region. It will be important for the state to continue to work with COGs and municipalities to develop cost effective regional solutions to reduce, reuse, and recycle materials (endorsed by CCM). Staff recommends that we continue to encourage the state to explore innovative ideas and programs to promote food waste diversion, extended producer responsibility (EPR) for consumer packaging, and streamlined permitting of anaerobic digesters and related infrastructure.

Finance & Local Government Revenues

- 1) *PILOT funding* – For several years CCM has requested that the state fund its payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) programs at statutorily required levels. Property tax exemptions lower the property tax base in many of CRCOG’s communities, particularly for those municipalities that host significant state property and private colleges and hospitals. PILOT payments help to level the playing field and fund important municipal services and programs.
- 2) *Medicaid ambulance reimbursement* – This suggestion comes from one of our members (Coventry). The state Medicare ambulance reimbursement rate is less than the Federal Medicare rate and is not covering the cost of care. There are two related recommendations to address this issue: 1) the state to index its Medicaid ambulance reimbursement rate at the Federal level; and 2) the state to pay the full rate for group home transport.

Housing

- 1) *Affordable housing* – The availability of affordable housing remains an issue for many if not most CRCOG communities. CCM has recommended that the state promote the construction of affordable housing through tax credits, brownfield restoration tax credits, and the local property tax exemption with state reimbursement. Affordable housing is important to our region for several reasons, including workforce recruitment and retention, equity, economic development, and neighborhood vitality.
- 2) *Revolving loan program for code compliance* – This suggestion comes from one of our members (Newington). The concern is that lower income property owners and businesses struggle to finance the cost associated with remediating code

compliance violations and making ADA upgrades and related improvements. Under this proposal the state would establish a low interest, revolving loan fund to assist income-qualified property owners and businesses with financing these expenses. As a revolving loan program, the fund would arguably be more stable and become self-supporting over time.

Infrastructure Funding

- 1) *Local Match for BIL/IIJA funding* – Most funding opportunities under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law/IIJA (e.g. Safe Streets for All, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities) require a 20% local match. It can be a challenge for many of our communities to receive local bond approval for a project that may not be approved at the state or Federal level. To help ameliorate this situation, COGs are encouraging the state to allow applicants to use current state funded grants as a partial match for BIL/IIJA grant opportunities. This change in practice would also help the state to ensure that Connecticut does not lose out on these singular grant opportunities.
- 2) *Hartford Line*- CRCOG welcomes the investments that the state is making to enhance the Hartford Line and passenger rail service, and has recently commented on both the state's passenger rail and freight rail plans. With respect to passenger rail, CRCOG strongly urges the CTDOT to complete the design and construction of the stations in West Hartford, Newington, and Windsor – as well as full buildouts in Windsor Locks and Enfield – as expeditiously as possible. These investments are necessary to maximize the ridership potential along the line.

Pedestrian and Traffic Safety (key recommendations from Vision Zero Council)

- 1) *Complete streets plan* – Complete streets planning is important for several reasons, especially to promote pedestrian and traffic safety, economic development, and livability. The Council recommends that the state provide funding for and require each municipality develop and implement a Complete Streets Plan to be eligible for certain State funding programs.
- 2) *Clarify CTDOT's authority to acquire land for multi-use trails* - Currently, there is an open question about CTDOT's legal authority to condemn right-of-way (ROW) for off-road trails for bike/ped facilities. The CTDOT will be seeking legislative approval to obtain this authority. This issue is vitally important to the future of the region's multi-use projects.