

11/18/2022 DRAFT

CRCOG Legislative Agenda for 2022

The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) is the largest council of governments (COG) in Connecticut and serves 38 municipalities with a population of almost one million residents. Geographically, the region encompasses an area of 1,000 square miles covering most of the historic Hartford and Tolland counties.

CRCOG appreciates the support that we have received from state government in recent years. Our General Assembly has stabilized funding for COGs and has supported critical initiatives such as the CT Foundation Solutions Indemnity Corporation (CFSIC) that is responsible for assisting homeowners with crumbling foundations. The state has also tasked COGs with a key role in coordinating the submission of competitive applications for funding under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law/IIJA. Stronger COGs can continue to encourage regional collaboration to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of municipal services and to strengthen our economic recovery from the global pandemic.

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 program for building inspectors that could prove a model for the state. CRCOG supports this initiative which will likely require changes to the state building code and legislative action.
- 2) *Reciprocity for municipal officials* –In order to assist municipalities with filling various staff vacancies, CRCOG recommends that Connecticut increase reciprocity to accept certifications from other states for various professional and technical positions. CRCOG proposes that the state 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 the CT Conference of Municipalities (CCM), CRCOG, and other municipal organizations. CRCOG recommends that the General Assembly work in consultation with municipal organizations and organized labor to eliminate any remaining statutory barriers to shared services. This effort may involve revisions to the Municipal Employees Relations Act (MERA) and state legislation 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. CRCOG endorses the proposal

that municipalities have the option to merge and opt into intermunicipal land use commissions with authority to address planning and zoning and inland wetlands matters. In addition, CRCOG is seeking state legislation to 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. Like CCM and others, CRCOG encourages the state to continue 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.
- 2) *Regional approaches to stormwater management* – Stormwater management is a challenge for many of our communities. The frequency of heavy rain events has increased. We have more impervious cover and the region has several areas with poorly draining soils. Many properties in our older neighborhoods still have stormwater lines directly connected to sanitary sewer system (even in SSO communities). Our existing stormwater infrastructure is aging, undersized or both. All of these issues contribute to local flooding in streets, homes, and commercial properties. This flooding can overwhelm sanitary sewer systems leading to contamination in local waterways including the CT River and Long Island Sound. The General Assembly has adopted legislation allowing municipalities to create local stormwater authorities to help finance stormwater infrastructure. CRCOG recommends that the state assess the viability of regional stormwater authorities to allow towns to combine resources to address this complex and costly issue more effectively.
- 3) *Funding for PFAS contaminated wells* - Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of over 9,000 manmade chemicals that are used in many consumer and industrial products such as non-stick cookware, fabric coatings, food packaging, and firefighting foams. PFAS are very persistent and can migrate through soil and remain in groundwater for long periods of time. PFAS are being studied as a cause for various health issues, including thyroid disorders and several cancers. Given the prevalence of private wells throughout our region and Connecticut overall, the state has allocated \$1.15 million in funding to test private wells. CRCOG recommends that the state build on this initiative and provide funding to remediate contaminated private wells. COGs and regional health districts could be a partner in this effort.

Finance & Local Government Revenues

- 1) *PILOT funding* – CRCOG endorses CCM's recommendation 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 to fund important municipal services and programs in some of CRCOG's most economically distressed municipalities.
- 2) *Medicaid ambulance reimbursement* – The state Medicare ambulance reimbursement rate is approximately 50% of the Federal Medicare rate and is not covering the cost of care. Medicare patients comprise a large percentage of ambulance transports across the state and ambulance service is critical to

maintaining the health of this population. CRCOG has two related recommendations to correct this funding deficiency: 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. CRCOG recommends 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) *Funding for CFSIC* – The CT Foundation Indemnity Solutions Company (CFSIC) was established to assist homeowners with crumbling foundations. To date, CFSIC has successfully replaced foundations for 642 homes within the CRCOG and Northeast CT Council of Governments regions. Under Public Act No. 17-2, CFSIC was scheduled to “sunset” on June 30, 2022. On July 6, 2021 Governor Lamont signed Public Act 21-120, which eliminated CFSIC’s termination date and allocated \$100 million in additional General Obligation Bond funding for CFSIC payable in four annual installments of \$25 million each beginning on July 1, 2022. Following the initial \$25 million installment it will be necessary for the State Bond Commission to authorize the issuance of the remaining balance of \$75 million in bond funds to enable CFSIC to continue its mission.
- 3) *Revolving loan program for code compliance* –Municipal planning staff have noted 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. CRCOG proposes that the state, through the Department of Housing (DOH) or other appropriate agency, 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, CRCOG strongly encourages 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

- 1) *Complete streets plan* – Complete streets planning is important for several reasons, especially to promote pedestrian and traffic safety, economic development, and livability. CRCOG encourages the state to continue to provide resources to enable municipalities to develop and implement a Complete Streets Plan as a component of local Plans of Conservation and Development (POCD).
- 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. CRCOG supports the CTDOT's request for legislative approval to obtain this authority. This issue is vitally important to the future of the region's multi-use projects.

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