

# **northeastern connecticut council of governments**

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Testimony Regarding

Senate Bill 39

## **An Act Concerning Responsible Growth**

Before the

Planning and Development Committee

The Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) represents the chief-elected officials of the towns of Ashford, Brooklyn, Canterbury, Eastford, Killingly, Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Sterling, Thompson, Union, and Woodstock. Today, we offer testimony regarding Senate Bill 39, An Act Concerning Responsible Growth.

First, NECCOG is strongly committed to the tenants of responsible growth and much of the work that has emanated from this committee. With the slowing of development this is an opportune time to strengthen town regulations and state policies that we may protect what makes our state special and avoids foolish land use decisions going forward.

Section One of the Bill (lines 11 -30) establishes a "Responsible Growth Cabinet" made up of a variety of Commissioners and Agency heads. The cabinet would play an advisory role to:

1. Address issues raised by economic growth and real estate development;
2. support and encourage sound land use;
3. protect open space, farmlands and historic sites;
4. clean up and reuse valuable properties located in urban areas;
5. steer growth and real estate development to appropriate areas of our state; and
6. revitalize cities, preserve the unique charm of our state and build livable, economically strong communities while protecting our natural resources for the enjoyment of future generations.

Our basic question to this proposal is why a new cabinet creation when we have the Office of Responsible Growth? With the Office of Responsible Growth, we have the opportunity to create a solid, professionally staffed, non-partisan office to advise on all matters related

Ashford  
Brooklyn  
Canterbury  
Eastford  
Killingly  
Plainfield  
Pomfret  
Putnam  
Sterling  
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to land use. The working model to this is found right here at the General Assembly with the Office of Legislative Research, Office of Fiscal Analysis, and the staff at the Program Review and Investigations Committee. **Our suggestion is to strengthen the Office of Responsible Growth.**

Section Three (line 31) of the bill seeks to address “developments of regional significance.” Such projects should be scrutinized and be consistent with plans of conservation and development at the municipal, regional and state level. Lines 38-46 call for review by the Responsible Growth Cabinet and require that the developer appear before the cabinet. However, there is no provision for input from the municipality or the region. **We suggest any state review of developments of regional significance include both municipal and regional input.**

Consistent with our earlier comments, we believe that **a better system would have the Office of Responsible Growth evaluate developments of regional significance.** State funding and/or approvals would then be subject to such findings - or at least consider such findings prior to any decisions made.

Sections Four, Five, and Six of Senate Bill 39 contain language requiring whenever any zoning, wetlands, and subdivision regulations are changed that: “No regulation that is inconsistent with the plan [Plan of Conservation and Development adopted under 8-23] shall be effective unless the legislative body of the municipality approves such regulation.” We strongly support zoning and subdivision regulations being consistent with a town’s plan of conservation and development. In terms of Inland Wetlands and Watercourses - this is different. These regulations and associated local powers emanate from the State and are consistent for the most part statewide. If such regulations were subject to local vote, we may end up with an inconsistent regulatory system for the protection of these resources.

Section Seven should, we believe, contain language that requires or at least a review for consistency with the municipal, regional, and state plans of conservation and development.

Section Eight is a good addition.

Sections Nine and Ten provides additional funds for the Regional Responsible Growth Incentive Fund. NECCOG was a strong supporter of this initiative last year and has two new programs resulting from it that will create regional efficiencies and enhance services for the people of our region. **We urge your favorable consideration to renew this program.**

The condition that any such funding meet the responsible growth principles found in Section 1 may, in terms of Section Nine be too limiting. Last years bill provided funding to enable regions to act creatively to address the needs of towns. While the growth principles are broad, they may preclude a variety of initiatives that may enhance services at reduced costs and increase efficiencies. In terms of Section 10 where the focus is on TOD - adherence to the growth principles appears acceptable.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this proposal. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact John Filchak at 860-774-1253 or [john.filchak@necog.com](mailto:john.filchak@necog.com)