

Capitol Region Council of Governments

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DATE: MARCH 5, 2008
TO: CHAIRMEN AND MEMBERS OF JOINT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
FROM: LYLE D. WRAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CRCOG
SUBJECT: WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR HOUSE BILL NOS. 5673 & 5674, AN ACT CONCERNING REVIEW OF PROJECTS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE AND AN ACT CONCERNING THE POWERS OF REGIONAL COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT

CRCOG is the regional planning organization serving the City of Hartford and the 28 surrounding suburban and rural communities. The CRCOG legislative priorities for 2008 include support for issues necessary to improve our regional economic competitiveness, improve our region's quality of life for all residents and support our municipalities in their efforts to seek stable revenue streams to accomplish these goals. Many of these priorities are addressed in Raised Bills 5673 and 5674.

CRCOG understands that as municipalities seek to grow economically, responsible, larger-scale projects, such as projects of regional significance are critical to the growth of municipal grand lists. With regard to Raised Bill 5673 CRCOG has long supported regional review and comment on projects of regional significance, when such reviews are advisory to the decision-making bodies charged with approving the projects. State statutes already require advisory reviews of zoning and subdivision proposals abutting or spanning town lines. Advisory reviews of projects of regional significance are a logical extension of existing COG powers, but should not hinder the rights of individual municipalities to approve or deny significant projects.

In the 2007 legislative session, CRCOG supported this type of regional review process and stressed that if implemented, the new process should be evaluated after one to two years to assess its impact. The following key questions beasked in such an evaluation: Are projects that are truly significant from a regional standpoint being captured by the referral criteria? Are the regional comments being incorporated into final decisions regarding projects? Are they resulting in development that is more responsive to inter-municipal issues and concerns? Is the review process resulting in approvals that support regional and state growth and conservation objectives? CRCOG supports a regional review process that preserves the rights of individual municipalities and employs an evaluation process to determine its effectiveness at guiding and coordinating regional growth.

With regard to Raised Bill 5674, CRCOG strongly supports any opportunity for municipalities to ease the property tax burden. Municipalities within the CRCOG region rely heavily on the property tax to fund their education systems as well as many daily town operations. Many towns within our CRCOG borders rely on the property taxes for as much as 80% -90% percent of their revenues. CRCOG encourages the members of this committee and of the legislature to look to successful programs in neighboring states such as Massachusetts where there is a 4% excise tax related to hotels and motels. CRCOG has also long supported producing enabling legislation for Councils of Governments and Councils of elected officials to operate as regional assets districts which would allow for the raising of revenues that could be used to benefit important regional assets, such as museums, regional parks and trail systems and regional transportation facilities. This bill provides a unique opportunity for the legislature to provide more than one option for municipalities to produce revenues and CRCOG is in full support of that effort.

We would be happy to respond to questions or request for further information.

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