



February 10, 2009

Testimony Regarding

## **Governor's Biennium Budget, FY 10 and FY 11**

Made Before the

### **Appropriations Committee**

The Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) is one of 15 Regional Planning Organizations and one of eight councils of governments in Connecticut. Our testimony today regarding the Governor's proposed budget is centered on regionalism. We strongly applaud the Governor's emphasis on regionalism. The proposed \$50 million to encourage regionalism in new monies is certainly testament to that emphasis and commitment. However, **the removal of the RPO line item works counter to regionalism and we ask that it be restored.**

In northeastern Connecticut we are also committed to regionalism. We have a proven record of this and plan to continue to apply regional solutions where they make fiscal and practical sense. For example:

- NECCOG, in 2001, began a regional **Paramedic Intercept** program. This program was in danger of lapsing in our region prior to NECCOG's intervention. Without a regional approach – this program that saves lives – would be hard pressed to continue.
- In 2004 we began a regional **Animal Control** program – saving participating towns anywhere from 20 to 60 percent. Moreover, by regionalizing this service we greatly improved services to both people and animals. In fact, since we began this program in 2004 – no animal has been put down due to a lack of space.
- In 2007 we began our **Engineering** program – hiring a seasoned professional to serve Ashford, Pomfret and Brooklyn full-time and on an on-request/fee basis for other towns. This has proven to be a great resource and we believe if asked the participating towns will tell you that it is cost effective.
- Since 1997 NECCOG has provided administration for the Northeastern Connecticut **Transit District**. This partnership allows both organizations to provide more services with less administrative overhead.
- In 2008 we began a region-wide **GIS/e-Government** Program – with assistance from the Regional Incentive Program. The goal of the NECCOG initiative is to establish a foundation of geographic information to support community (town and/or regional) decision-making. This program has the capability of completely changing the way we do business. GIS can have a positive effect on how all services are delivered and how all employees perform their jobs. A major barrier to implementation and successful use of GIS is cost. Cost in terms of hardware, software, data development, maintenance, and

qualified personnel. The NECCOG GIS program seeks, through the strength of collection action, the ability to benefit each town with a comprehensive responsive GIS program. Other benefits include reduced town hall foot traffic and resulting improved staff productivity.

- In 2001, we formed the **Northeast Economic Partnership** – collaboration with WINCOG and the town of Sprague from SECOG -- gaining recognition from the Economic Development Administration as one of only seven such regions in the State -- successfully completing a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). We have already gained \$1.5 million for Plainfield.
- We continued our administration of the **Eastern Connecticut Enterprise Corridor** and individual assistance to towns. And, we continued to underwrite the cost of the CERC Sitefinder service for our towns.
- **Other examples** of our work includes (just during 2007-8): Beginning the Update of the Union Plan of Conservation and Development, Providing Brooklyn Planning Assistance, Assisting Woodstock to update their Zoning and Subdivision Regulations, Conducting a Pomfret Buildout Analysis, Facilitating the update of the Killingly Plan of Conservation and Development, Conducting a Buildout Analysis for Eastford, Conducting an Administrative Study for Ashford, Creating a Parcel Map for Union, Assistance for the Pomfret Economic Planning and Development Committee, Pomfret Farmland Acquisition, Assistance, Assisting Putnam in updating their Zoning regulations, Developing a design manual for Route 6 in Brooklyn, Providing engineering services for Plainfield road project, FOIA education and assistance, and Working with the Ashford Economic Development Committee

We know that 2009 brings challenges for which there is no parallel – particularly in terms of budgets. NECCOG is ready, as we have been to try and address issues to benefit our towns and by extension our State. We are currently examining issues such as:

- **Revaluation Reform** – this can be done regionally
- **Revenue Sharing** – while this is a tricking and complex issue – it has possibilities and we should explore them with an open mind. We are holding a seminar on this topic this winter.

In short, NECCOG is a forum for discussion and action – it works. The stipend provided by the State enhances our ability to think and act regionally. The elimination of the RPO line item is the elimination of an investment in an entity that has a demonstrated record of success.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

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