



# OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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## PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

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You asked (1) what the differences are between the three types of regional planning organizations that the statutes authorize and (2) about municipal planning organizations (MPOs).

The Office of Legislative Research is not authorized to give legal opinions and this should not be considered one.

### SUMMARY

By law, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) must designate [local planning regions](#) within the state. It has assigned towns to 15 designated planning regions.

Within the 15 current regions, there are three types of regional planning organizations (RPOs) allowed under Connecticut law: (1) regional planning agencies (RPA), (2) councils of governments (COG), or (3) councils of elected officials (CEO). Through local ordinance, the municipalities within each of these planning regions have voluntarily created one of the three types of RPO's to carry out a variety of regional planning and other activities on their behalf.

RPAs prepare the plan of conservation and development that the law requires; assist public and private agencies in developing and complying

with any of its plans; and may provide administrative, management, technical, or planning assistance to municipalities or other public agencies within its region. COGs carry out the planning duties and responsibilities for the region, including preparing the plan of development the law requires and reviewing certain zoning and subdivision matters. They also have the powers of RPAs and CEOs (if either exist in the region at the time of the ratification of a COG, they are absorbed under the COG after a transitional period). CEOs are authorized to consider public matters common to two or more member municipalities (such as transportation or health) and have the powers of COGs or RPA's if none exist in the region.

Additionally, a 2010 law allows these three types of RPOs to propose "Regional Economic Development Districts" that the governor designates, prepare strategies to develop them, and apply for state and federal economic development funds. It specifies criteria for drawing district boundaries and procedures for preparing, reviewing, and approving strategies (at this time, it appears no such districts have been fully approved) (CGS § [32-742](#)).

The law requires, within available appropriations, OPM's secretary, on or before January 1, 2012, to analyze regional boundaries and redesignate them if necessary. We have contacted OPM about the status of this report and will provide additional information when it is available.

Concerning MPOs, federal law requires a regional planning process as an integral part of the use of any highway-related federal grants administered by the Federal Highway Administration and mass-transit related grants administered by the Federal Transit Administration. A "metropolitan planning organization" (sometimes referred to as a "municipal planning organization" or MPO) works on the regional transportation planning process whenever transportation projects are under consideration for which the sponsoring agency is seeking federal highway funding administered by the Federal Highway Administration or transit funding administered by the Federal Transit Administration (23 U. S. C. § 134 et seq.; 49 U. S. C. § 5303 et seq.) Connecticut statutes do not define MPOs and refer only briefly to "metropolitan planning organizations" in reference to Transportation Strategy Board projects (CGS § [13b-57l](#)) and New Haven Line revitalization (CGS § [13b-78l](#)).

In Connecticut, the state's RPOs administer and support MPO duties and responsibilities for planning, programming, and coordinating federal highway and transit investments in urbanized areas, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics](#). For example, the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA) staff supports the South

Western Metropolitan Planning Organization. According to [SWRPA](#), it “coordinates preparation of a Transportation Improvement Program, develops a Long Range Transportation Plan and prepares an annual Unified Planning Work Program, [which] are part of the planning process required of metropolitan areas under federal law.”

## **REGIONAL PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS (RPOS)**

By law, OPM designates local planning regions within the state (CGS § [16a-4a\(4\)](#)). Within the 15 current regions, the three types of RPOs allowed under Connecticut law are RPAs, COGs, and CEOs. Through local ordinance, the municipalities within each of these planning regions have voluntarily created one of the three types of RPO’s to carry out a variety of regional planning and other activities on their behalf.

At this time, there are five RPAs, eight COGs, and two CEOs. One potential change to the number of RPOs is the OPM-approved merger of two RPAs, the Connecticut Estuary and Midstate Planning RPAs, to form the Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region, which would be a COG. But, 60% of the affected towns must first agree to the change, which has not yet occurred.

### ***Regional Planning Agencies (RPA)***

**Authorization.** CGS §§ [8-31a](#) to [8-37a](#); and ordinances adopted by the municipal members’ legislative bodies.

**Purpose.** Each RPA must prepare a plan of conservation and development for its area (regarding land use, housing, highways, parks, schools, etc.) at least once every 10 years and revise it at least every three years. The adoption and review process for such plans includes developing recommendations for an original plan or amendments to an existing plan; holding public hearings; addressing voting requirements; and distributing the plan, part, or amendment to the member municipalities and OPM. An RPA also assists public and private agencies in developing and complying with any of its plans. It is authorized to provide administrative, management, technical, or planning assistance to municipalities or other public agencies within its region.

RPAs may also study and recommend to member towns the most efficient and economical way to develop and operate facilities and services.

**Members.** By law, the minimum number of representatives per municipality is two and one of them must be the municipality's chief elected official or his or her designee. Municipalities with over 25,000 people are entitled to one additional representative for each additional 50,000 people or fraction thereof.

**Funding.** RPAs may receive funds from any source, including the state and federal governments, and bequests, gifts, or contributions made by any individual, corporation, or association. Any town, city or borough participating in a regional planning agency must appropriate funds each year for the RPA to perform its purposes. The funds must be appropriated and paid in accordance with a dues formula established by the RPA.

### ***Councils of Governments***

**Authorization.** CGS §§ [4-124i](#) to [4-124r](#) and ordinances adopted by the municipal members' legislative bodies.

**Purpose.** Authorized in 1971, COGs carry out the planning duties and responsibilities for the region. This includes preparing the required plan of development and reviewing certain zoning and subdivision matters. They have the powers of RPAs and CEOs and if an RPA or CEO exists in the region at the time of the ratification of a COG, they are absorbed under the COG after a transitional period.

**Members.** Each COG member is entitled to one representative on the council who must be the chief elected official of the municipal member, or in the absence of a chief elected official, an elected official appointed in the manner provided by ordinance of the municipality's legislative body. Each representative of a member is entitled to one vote in COG affairs

**Funding.** COGs may receive funds from any source, including the state and federal governments, and bequests, gifts, or contributions from any individual, corporation, or association. Any town, city, or borough participating in a COG must appropriate funds each year for the council to perform its purposes. The funds must be appropriated and paid in accordance with a dues formula established by the council.

### ***Councils of Elected Officials***

**Authorization.** CGS §§ [4-124c](#) to [4-124h](#) and ordinances adopted by the municipal members' legislative bodies.

**Purpose.** CEOs were authorized in 1965 and have all the powers of a RPA or COG if no such entity exists in the region. They are also authorized to consider public matters common to two or more member municipalities (such as transportation, health, safety, welfare, education, and economic conditions of the area); promote cooperative arrangements and coordinate activity among member towns; and make recommendations to member towns and other public agencies.

**Members.** The representative to the council from each member town, city, or borough is (1) the elected chief executive of the member town, city, or borough or (2) a member of its legislative body chooses, if it member town, city, or borough does not have an elected chief executive.

**Funding.** CEOs may receive funds from any source, including the state and federal governments, and bequests, gifts, or contributions from any individual, corporation, or association. Any town, city, or borough participating in a CEO must appropriate funds each year to carry out the council's purposes. The funds must be appropriated and paid in accordance with a dues formula established by the council.

## **MPOS**

In Connecticut, the state's RPOs administer and support MPO duties and responsibilities for planning, programming, and coordinating federal highway and transit investments in urbanized areas, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics](#).

According to the Connecticut Association of Regional Planning Organizations (CARPO), RPOs have overseen MPO functions of transportation planning going back at least to the Federal-Aid Highway Acts of 1973 (CARPO's "The Geographic Scope of Connecticut's Regional Planning," 2010, pp. 14-17 ).

According to CARPO, at that time, in order to ensure funding, the governor had to "... designate 'Metropolitan Planning Organizations' or MPOs to be responsible along with [Connecticut's Department of Transportation (DOT)] for carrying out a federally defined metropolitan transportation planning process."

Today, RPOs maintain MPO responsibility; more information is available here:

[http://www.crerpa.org/Regionalism%20Issues/GEOGRAPHIC\\_SCOPE\\_OF\\_CT\\_REGIONAL\\_PLANNING%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.crerpa.org/Regionalism%20Issues/GEOGRAPHIC_SCOPE_OF_CT_REGIONAL_PLANNING%20(3).pdf)

## **OPM REGIONAL BOUNDARY ANALYSIS**

The law requires the OPM secretary, within available appropriations, on or before January 1, 2012, to analyze regional boundaries and redesignate them if necessary. He must do so at least once every 20 years thereafter. Before doing so, he must develop criteria to evaluate how urban centers affect neighboring towns. At a minimum, the criteria must evaluate environmental and economic development trends, including housing, employment levels, commuting patterns for the most common types of jobs, traffic patterns on major roads, and changes in how people see social and historic ties. The criteria must also specify a minimum size for logical planning areas based on the number of municipalities, total population, and total square mileage.

The law requires the secretary to notify municipalities about the revisions he proposes before January 1, 2012 and specifies the process he must follow for notifying them. The notice must go to the chief executive officer (CEO) of each municipality in a region affected by the revisions. If a municipality's legislative body objects to the revision, the CEO must petition the secretary to attend a meeting with the legislative body to hear its objections. The CEO must do so within 30 days after receiving the notice. The petition must specify the meeting's place, date, and time (CGS § [16a-4c](#)).

JH:ro