



Making Great Communities Happen

Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association

Testimony regarding HB 5183

AN ACT REQUIRING A STUDY OF THE PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCING OF MUNICIPAL ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS.

CCAPA supports the intent of the proposed bill to support municipal actions that will revitalize communities. During the 2017 legislative session, CCAPA submitted comments to Speaker Aresimowicz regarding predecessor bill HB 5592 which was proposed to develop an incentive program to support the growth of vibrant and livable communities. HB 5592 initially proposed incentives to municipalities for undertaking local revitalization projects that contribute to the cultural and economic growth of the community.

CCAPA believes that there are opportunities for additional funding programs and statutory authorities that can help stimulate local programs and infuse a high level of program activity. We recommend that the following concepts be studied as part of OPM's proposed work:

- 1) **District Challenge Program:** Local communities can be challenged to stimulate job growth through high-value incentives such as a comprehensive facade improvement program for a town center, a business attraction fund to better position a district for sustainable growth, or a land banking effort to preserve key assets.
- 2) **Program for Pre-Development Funding:** Competitive grants that would support pre-development activities are essential because municipalities often need to prime the marketplace through financial due diligence activities, acquisition of properties (land banking), and pre-development design in order to attract the right developer to deliver the right project for the district.
- 3) **Leverage Project Implementation through Matching Grants:** A significant portion of capital funds for transportation-related projects comes from the federal government and requires a 10-20% match. Municipalities would more aggressively pursue federal grant funding if there were a source for local matching dollars. These funds could provide the up-front expense of engineering design and permitting, which fit within that 10-20% of project expense and are frequently not covered by federal grants.
- 4) **Provide New Statutory Authorities:** Municipalities need municipal tools and authorities to enable new revenue sources such as a dedicated local sales tax increase for redevelopment projects or to allow the creation of municipally-chartered Land Banks or more robust Community Development Corporations with the ability to efficiently acquire, clear title, redevelop, and re-sell troubled properties.

- 5) Regulatory Relief: At the local level there is an increasing frustration that certain statewide processes do not address the unique aspects of a particular (and often historic) local condition. We therefore would like to once again push for actions by the Connecticut Department of Transportation to modernize its Project Scoping Manual and Highway Design Manual to standardize the construction of neighborhood-scale, pedestrian-oriented street and sidewalk design, and for the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to reform their review process for large community septic systems to be faster and more predictable (i.e. developer-friendly).

Adoption of a district plan outlining principles for development and reuse and listing necessary capital investments should be a prerequisite for the above benefits. Neighborhood/district plans are already required for TIF Districts and NRZs.

We offer the assistance of CCAPA's members in any exploration of programs that would further contribute to the mission of increasing the livability, accessibility, vibrancy, and success of Connecticut's towns and cities.

WHO WE ARE

The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA) has over 420 members who are governmental and consulting planners, land use attorneys, citizen planners, and other professionals engaged in planning and managing land use, economic development, housing, transportation, and conservation for local, regional, and State governments, private businesses and other entities. CCAPA has long been committed to assisting the legislature and State agencies with developing and furthering responsible growth management principles. The American Planning Association is an independent, not-for-profit, national educational organization that provides leadership in the development of vital communities.

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