

**Commission on CT's Development and Future
State C&D Plan Working Group
Recommendations
Approved November 29, 2022**

I. Introduction

The Connecticut Conservation and Development Policies Plan (C&D Plan) should reflect a shared vision for the future of the State and chart a clear direction for action and investment over the Plan's five-year time horizon. It should direct the path forward with both a confidence of leadership and a recognition of the numerous and diverse stakeholders across all levels of government. It should be a document that is consulted repeatedly when decision-makers face questions about matters of policy and expenditure.

In practice, over the last several years, the C&D Plan has been lightly regarded, watered down in authority, and often superseded by plans or policies established by executive branch departments and agencies or individual municipalities.

The reasons for this diminishment are several and may have their roots in the process of development and adoption of the C&D Plan. Statutorily, the C&D Plan is a creature and creation of the legislative branch, via the Legislative Committee on State Planning and Development (CGS §4-60d). This Committee is charged with the establishment of broad goals and objectives and transmitting them to the Executive Branch (via the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, which is the closest thing to a "State Planning Department" that Connecticut has).

Practically speaking, it is OPM staff that generally develops the C&D Plan document and submits it to the Legislative Committee for review and approval. What this means is that OPM prepares a Plan for the Legislature to approve and transmit back to OPM. This has led to a lack of strong "ownership" of the C&D Plan and a confusion about the practical application of it. Because they are not deeply involved in the establishment of goals or development of the Plan itself, the Legislature tends to view itself primarily as a ministerial sign-off rather than forming the vision. Because of the structure of the statutes, while the OPM drafts the Plan, they (and their sister agencies) tend to see this as the "Legislature's document," and it does not carry the same weight as an Executive-branch directive from the Governor's office. Further, the Legislature itself, as a collection of local representatives, tends to be very sensitive to local concerns and priorities, which has led to the current deferential approach when policies within the C&D Plan conflict with local priorities. Municipalities and Executive Branch agencies have therefore begun to assert more practical primacy over policies and expenditures, with a result of the C&D Plan being a well-written but lightly regarded document. The fact that the current C&D Plan was nearly four years into its five-year cycle before it was finally adopted had little practical effect on decision-making at any level of government in Connecticut.

It is time for the C&D Plan to be both a strong vision and an effective mechanism for expressing and directing State priorities. This can be accomplished by strengthening ownership of the C&D Plan by the Executive Branch; making the C&D Plan more specific in its goals to facilitate meaningful implementation and monitoring of progress; and being flexible and responsive to changing conditions within the state.

II. Background

Following adoption of the first statewide *Plan of Conservation and Development: Policies for Land and Water Resources* through Governor Meskill's Executive Order in 1974, the Connecticut General Assembly enacted a formal process for statewide conservation and development planning and implementation in 1976. The General Assembly has since specified several issues of particular concern to be addressed in the broad scope of the C&D Plan through a series of statutory amendments to Section 16a-27. In 2005, the General Assembly made changes to state, regional and local planning processes to focus around the six growth management principles established by the 2005-10 C&D Plan. These Growth Management Principles continue to frame the C&D Plan and guide regional and local planning. The General Assembly also revamped the Locational Guide Map of the C&D Plan in 2005 away from the four development and four conservation categories that had been previously used, to create the Priority Funding Area mechanism in Section 16a-35c which is intended to help direct state investment and policies in growth-related projects.

The State C&D Plan Working Group spent the last several months listening to municipal, regional and state agency planners; reviewing planning processes in other states; considering the need for statewide planning, whom and what activities the C&D Plan should guide, how to best coordinate planning across levels of government; and, debating the best means to ensuring the C&D Plan gets implemented. As a result of this process, the Working Group approved the following recommendations to create a more meaningful process and plan for Connecticut.

III. Transform the C&D Plan into a visionary and objective-setting plan based on current data and analysis

- A. Establish a vision for desired land uses over the long-term (10-20 years), beyond the life of the C&D Plan
 - The C&D Plan should be an opportunity for the Executive and Legislative branches to express a clear vision for policy and investment at a statewide level. As the elected officer responsible for a state-wide scope and the resources of the Executive branch departments, the Governor's office should be included in establishing the vision.
 - The current Growth Management Principles should be reviewed and amended, and used to frame the vision and outcomes in areas such as

economic development, fiscal impact, housing, transportation, infrastructure, environmental conservation, and resilience

- Focus on the interconnectivity of issues in a framework like sustainability that connects growth with conservation and equity
- B. Analyze existing conditions and trends to identify and help prioritize objectives that incrementally advance toward the longer-term vision
- Use best and most current data across all levels of government
 - Draw on resources of Executive Branch departments to provide current and projected data, with assistance from Councils of Governments (COGs)
 - Engage in early public outreach to identify trends and conditions that may be under-represented in data
- C. Develop specific, measurable objectives/ targets for particular elements and/or geographies for the five-year planning and implementation horizon of the C&D Plan
- Connect broad statewide goals to local action through the framework of regions (COGs)
 - Build off of increasingly connected data sharing across geographies (state-wide GIS and data management)
 - Establish realistic goals based on projected funding and time horizons for actions at different levels of government
 - Include benchmarking and implementation tracking
- D. Direct state spending and other actions to support objectives, while encouraging creativity and flexibility in the methods used and enabling responsiveness to unforeseen circumstances
- Enable state agencies to develop their own programs and initiatives to work towards the objectives
 - Encourage creative and flexible partnerships across levels of government, private and nonprofit sectors
 - Maintain active conversation between Legislative Committee and State Agencies on progress
 - Increase support/guidance for implementation funding at regional and local levels
- E. Make policy recommendations to guide decisions at the regional and local level and seek to obtain consistency through policy and funding decisions

- Provide resources to COGs to encourage their engagement as “connective tissue” between Executive Branch and municipalities, to help guide and benchmark implementation of state objectives
- Increase efforts at early “visioning” stages to engage COGs, municipalities and other stakeholders in building consensus
- Reinforce that while municipalities may choose to prioritize different goals or activities, State support and financial participation will be directed by the C&D Plan

IV. Maintain the C&D Plan as an Executive Branch plan with its development overseen by the Continuing Legislative Committee and OPM, and ultimate adoption by the CT General Assembly

- A. OPM should continue to draft the C&D Plan through transparent, iterative process with the Continuing Legislative Committee on State Planning and Development. OPM should actively engage State Agencies and stakeholders throughout the development of the draft C&D Plan (see Section V for additional recommendations).
- B. The General Assembly should maintain the responsibility of adopting the C&D Plan in part to help foster political commitment to the Plan’s objectives and spending priorities. The Continuing Committee needs to ensure that the C&D Plan is acted upon by the full General Assembly. Consider a statutory provision that the C&D Plan as recommended by the Continuing Committee is approved, if the General Assembly has not actively disapproved it after a specified time.
- C. State agencies should be held accountable to the specific, measurable objectives established by the C&D Plan by OPM and the Continuing Committee through regular monitoring of progress.
- D. The C&D Plan should guide COGs and municipalities in their own planning and land use decisions. (See Section VI on C&D Plan implementation).

V. OPM should meaningfully engage stakeholders in development of the Plan

The last two updates of the C&D Plan have included minimal changes to the broad policies within, thereby limiting meaningful engagement around the underlying issues and commitment to implementation of the Plan. The Working Group recommends a more inclusive engagement process to foster:

- Deeper understanding of the interconnections between various conservation and development priorities
 - Creation of reasonable targets and objectives
 - Ownership of the Plan and its implementation
- A. OPM should engage with the Continuing Committee, the Governor, and other legislative committee leaders early in the planning process to establish the long-term vision of the plan. The vision should serve to guide state agencies in developing policies and measurable objectives over the short-term that incrementally work towards the vision. OPM should continue to engage the Continuing Committee periodically as the draft Plan develops, to ensure early buy-in to the Plan.
- B. OPM should facilitate the collaboration of all state agencies in developing the Plan. State agencies should seek to understand the vision of the Continuing Committee vis a vis current conditions and trends to develop coordinated, prioritized strategies for state action. As the primary implementers of the policies and objectives of the Plan, it is critical for state agencies to have significant input into the Plan. To that end, state agencies should assist in:
- Sharing high level analyses of existing conditions and trends, with an eye towards the larger implications of those trends to the environment, land use, the economy, resilience, equity, and quality of life
 - Developing specific, measurable objectives or targets for the five-year planning horizon with an emphasis on linking interrelated objectives to identify potential cross-cutting actions
 - Prioritizing reasonable objectives for agencies to measure implementation performance against
- C. OPM should use technology to better engage COGs, municipal leaders, advocacy groups and other stakeholders throughout the planning process. The public hearing process within each COG region used in the last two iterations of the C&D Plan yielded minimal input. Rather than the traditional public hearing process, the Working Group recommends:
- Providing regular updates on the planning process through OPM's website
 - Clearly posting opportunities to provide feedback throughout the planning process through e-mail and phone

- Conducting video-conference feedback sessions with Councils of Government and/or interested stakeholders at important milestones, such as draft vision and conditions, draft strategies, and draft plan
- Consider a formal solicitation of feedback from local planning commissions and COGs through a referral process, rather than public hearings

VI. Ensure implementation of the C&D Plan

A meaningful plan is one that is specific enough to guide implementation, while flexible enough to accommodate changing conditions. A meaningful plan is also one that its authors and adopters commit to implementing. State agencies should commit to implementation of a revamped State C&D Plan that they helped to create.

Implementation should extend consistency broadly to:

- Agency operations, programs, and initiatives
 - Discretionary funding administered by state agencies
 - State Bond Commission actions
- A. Connecticut General Statutes currently require consistency with the C&D Plan for significant state actions, state agency planning and State Bond Commission activity. However, the current C&D Plan is difficult to “implement” as it is largely a collection of unprioritized, broad policy statements. In addition to developing a more specific plan, critical to its implementation is the commitment of the gubernatorial administration and the General Assembly to enforce policy and project consistency, especially through discretionary funding awards.
- B. COGs play an important role in connecting state-level planning to local planning and decision-making. Appropriate methods for accomplishing statewide objectives can start to take shape at the regional level. Because of this, the Working Group makes the following recommendations around regional plans and their connection to the C&D Plan:
- Regional plans developed by the COGs should be required to be consistent with the C&D Plan.
 - Regional plans should position the region so as to achieve the various objectives/targets set out in the C&D Plan.
 - Regional plans should provide guidance for member municipalities' local plans.

- COGs should have increased access to state funding for projects which are consistent with the C&D Plan.
- Municipal POCDs may look to the regional plan for guidance in maintaining consistency with the C&D Plan. COGs should continue to review local POCDs for consistency with the C&D Plan and regional plan.
- OPM should review the COGs' POCDs for compliance and provide feedback in any areas in which deficiencies or lack of alignment exist.
- Detailed reports on progress towards identified goals should be included in updated local POCDs. COGs should review those progress reports and identify areas in which municipalities have not made sufficient progress toward stated goals and provide a report to OPM and the Continuing Committee on recommended remedies.
- Municipalities and COGs should have the ability to access state funding ONLY for projects that are consistent with the C&D Plan. To facilitate this, a mechanism should be developed such that when municipalities submit their approved local POCDs to OPM, they identify any conflicts with the C&D Plan objectives, and further acknowledge that projects in conflict with the C&D Plan will not be eligible for state funding.

C. Create a more regular feedback loop to track C&D Plan implementation progress and to provide more opportunity to address regulatory, policy, or financial hurdles to implementation. The intention is to engage state agencies and the Continuing Committee in coordination on C&D Plan implementation, perhaps once or twice a year, through an informal process. Ideally, state agencies would provide updates on planning and programming initiatives in support of the C&D Plan, and any conflicts or challenges that have arisen. The Continuing Legislative Committee would monitor implementation and have an opportunity to respond to implementation hurdles to the extent feasible. In addition to this informal process, OPM should publish annual performance measurement reports and incorporate an overall performance assessment in each subsequent iteration of the C&D Plan.

VII. Impact to Regional and Local Planning

The Working Group recognizes that the above recommendations result in a slight shift of planning responsibilities across levels of government, with the C&D Plan taking a stronger lead in driving regional and local planning. As such, the following recommendations

COGs

The recommendations of the Working Group emphasize the role of COGs in connecting statewide planning objectives with local plans and decisions. Additional funding for COGs to carry out this enhanced role should be provided. The bulk of COG funding is provided through DOT to enable their transportation planning responsibilities. Increasing responsibilities in monitoring and implementing statewide planning objectives should be acknowledged in the level of non-transportation planning funding COGs receive.

Local POCDs

Consider a local option for municipalities to adopt a regional POCD as their own local POCD. This would help align local plans to C&D Plan objectives and would help to avoid an often costly undertaking by municipalities. Towns would remain free to develop their own POCDs.

VIII. Legislative Recommendations

The recommendations in the sections above may require legislative changes to implement; however, the Working Group has prioritized the following recommendations for the 2023 session.

- A. Amend Section 16a-27 to eliminate the various mandates that have accumulated over the years and to clarify the breadth and focus of the Plan:
 - To establish a vision for sustainable development and conservation over the long term
 - To set measurable objectives for state investments over five years to encourage appropriate use of physical, natural, social, and fiscal resources
 - To encourage coordinated development by directing state resources administered to COGs and municipalities

- B. Amend Section 16a-28 to adjust process milestones
 - Enable more time for OPM to engage with stakeholders prior to submitting a first draft to the Continuing Committee – push to Dec. 1, 2023 (current “first draft” due Sept. 1, 2023)
 - Provide more time to publish draft Plan to OPM website – push to May 1, 2024 (current requirement is March 1, 2024)
 - Shorten public engagement period from five months to four months – consider changing from “public hearings” to referring the draft plan to COGs and municipalities for feedback
 - Shorten time from three months to two months for revisions following public engagement to still meet Dec. 1, 2024 deadline of transmitting next Draft Plan to Continuing Committee

- Maintain requirements for public hearing by the Continuing Committee to conduct a public hearing prior to recommending to the General Assembly
 - Require action by the General Assembly on any C&D Plan formally recommended by the Continuing Committee within three months, with inaction constituting an approval
- C. Further changes may be warranted as the C&D Plan gets developed, particularly to 16a-35c, Priority Funding Areas/ Locational Guide Map

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