

Scope of Study

Connecticut's Regional Planning Organizations

The Office of Policy and Management (OPM), under C.G.S. Sec. 16a-4a(4), is responsible for the designation and redesignation of “logical planning regions” within Connecticut. OPM has designated 15 such planning regions. Through local ordinances, the municipalities within each of those regions have voluntarily created a Regional Planning Organization (RPO) to carry out a variety of regional planning and other activities. The three types of RPOs defined in state statute are a Regional Council of Elected Officials (RCOE), a Regional Council of Governments (RCOG), and a Regional Planning Agency (RPA).

Regional Planning Organizations have planning authority to consider a broad range of matters affecting the health, safety, welfare, education, and economic conditions within their geographic area, but they have no separate taxing authority (i.e., they must rely on town, state, federal and private funds). For example, they are required to develop a Conservation and Development Plan at least once every 10 years detailing recommendations concerning general use of the area within their boundaries, including land use, housing, various forms of transportation, recreational areas, schools, and public utilities. Although OPM has no approval authority over those plans, the RPOs must submit the plans to OPM for review and comment on whether the plans are consistent with the State Plan of Conservation and Development, and the RPOs have to note on the record any inconsistencies with the state plan and the reasons why.

AREA OF FOCUS

The study will compare and contrast the breadth and depth of the activities undertaken by each of the 15 Regional Planning Organizations in Connecticut. The study will also examine the range of services such entities could provide in the future, identify ways to promote best practices that encourage regional collaboration among municipalities, and indicate whether a regional model exists that fosters this concept.

AREAS OF ANALYSIS

1. What was the original intent/reason for establishing Regional Planning Organizations?
2. What is the scope of the state's authority to define regions within Connecticut for planning and other purposes, and to what extent has the state made use of that authority?
3. Do state agencies have adequate authority to encourage regional collaboration?
4. What is OPM's statutory role with respect to reviewing and coordinating regional planning activities, particularly within the framework of the State Conservation and Development Plan, to what extent has OPM exercised that responsibility, and have any changes occurred as a result?

Scope of Study

5. How have the roles, responsibilities, and resources of Regional Planning Organizations in Connecticut changed over time?
6. What types of conservation and development planning efforts occur at the state, regional, and municipal levels, and how do those activities interface? Who has responsibility for overseeing plan implementation, and how are those efforts measured?
7. For each of the existing Regional Councils of Elected Officials (two), Regional Councils of Government (eight), and Regional Planning Agencies (five):
 - a. what process is used to select representatives from the member towns;
 - b. what activities are currently performed for one or more member towns;
 - c. how many staff resources are available; and
 - d. what is the organization's budget?
8. What are the key similarities and differences among the RPOs in Connecticut in terms of the functions and activities they perform on behalf of their member towns and in the way they are funded?
9. What is the capability of each type of RPO to assume a greater role in efforts to regionalize the purchasing of commodities and the provision of services in areas such as housing, transportation, and economic development? What are the obstacles to performing those functions?
10. What federal and state incentives promoting regional cooperation are available?
11. What mechanisms have been used in other states to successfully implement regional strategies for procurement and service delivery at the municipal level?
12. For selected federal programs, what requirements exist for regional entities seeking to perform planning and other functions on behalf of local/state governments?