

# Capitol Region Council of Governments

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## MINUTES OF REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

April 19, 2007

### ATTENDANCE

#### Members and Alternates

Steven Adler  
Lamont Aheart  
Sue Bernardcyk  
Sandra Bobowski  
Horace Brown  
Jeffrey Carbonneau  
Marc Cerniglia  
Sue Errickson  
Linda Keith  
Pat Kennedy  
Rudy Kissman  
John Larensen  
Thomas Manning  
Brad Pellissier  
David Kelsey

#### Town

West Hartford  
Vernon  
Simsbury  
Hartford  
Manchester  
Suffield  
Canton  
Tolland  
Avon  
South Windsor  
Manchester  
Marlborough  
Bolton  
Somers  
Windsor

#### Others Present

Rebecca Augur  
Gian-Carl Casa

CRCOG  
CCM

Chairman Larensen called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

#### Adoption of Minutes

Kennedy moved to adopt the minutes from the March 15, 2007 meeting. Pellissier seconded. The motion passed.

#### Discussion of Current Property Tax Reform Initiatives

Gian-Carl Casa, Director of Legislative Services for the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) spoke about a number of legislative initiatives, especially those dealing with property taxes. Mr. Casa first gave some background on CCM, a league of cities and towns that provides a variety of services to its membership, including advocacy on the state and federal levels. He explained that a committee of mayors, first selectmen and town managers helps to set a legislative agenda for the organization each year, but CCM's lobbyists still spend a lot of time each year fending off legislation that would burden its membership.

Mr. Casa said that education financing is a priority issue for the organization because changes to the property tax system cannot really be achieved without first addressing education financing. He said that Connecticut is one of the states most reliant on property taxes to pay for education, and among the top states in terms of property tax burden. CCM works on two major fronts: 1) increase the state's share of local expenditures, and

2) decrease the cost drivers for local expenditures.

He went on to discuss the current legislative session. He began by describing the Governor's education budget proposal, which would increase state funding of education \$1 billion over five years. The plan is heavily reliant on increased income taxes. The General Assembly's Appropriations and Finance Committees made their final recommendations on the budget last week. Their budgets call for an increase in Education Cost Sharing money in the first budget year, but not the second, and not nearly as large an increase as that proposed by the Governor. In addition, the Appropriations and Finance Committees budgets propose to add money back to the Town Aid Road fund, PILOT payments and the payments to towns from the casino gaming fund.

Mr. Casa then discussed some ideas under consideration by the legislature for reducing the property tax burden, primarily by reducing municipal expenditures. One idea is to pool health care costs for municipalities, through either a mandatory or voluntary system. Health care costs represent 8-15% of municipal budget expenditures and are steadily increasing by about 12% a year. Using a statewide pool could generate significant cost savings for cities and towns, but there are many details that would need to be worked out including how this would impact union negotiations for benefits, how benefits would be decided, and other issues.

Another idea under consideration is a push for greater regional cooperation and shared services. The current budget proposal includes about \$10 million for incentives for intermunicipal service sharing. And about \$10 million for transit oriented development pilot projects.

Mr. Casa then indicated that the proposed appropriations and finance committees budgets are a basis for negotiation with the Governor. All of the proposals this year depend on large tax increases at the state level, and will likely be changed throughout the remaining process.

Discussion ensued concerning the costs of special education services and whether the state will ever move to a centralized state diagnosis program; binding arbitration and prevailing wage rates; cost savings from shared municipal services; the HomeCT campaign's affordable housing initiative; and the Clean Water Fund, which is proposed to get \$110 million in bond funds in each of the budget years.

Mr. Casa encouraged commissioners to go to CCM's website at [www.ccm-ct.org](http://www.ccm-ct.org) to keep current on legislative issues affecting towns and cities. He indicated that the Legislative Action Center portion of the website enables people to e-mail senators and representatives directly from there.

### **Report on Zoning, Subdivision, and Plan of Development Referrals**

Rebecca Augur reported on several zoning and subdivision referrals. There was some discussion on the Simsbury proposal to limit large-scale retail. Commissioners suggested changes to the current staff comment to include mention of the Route 44 Corridor study and particular concerns about traffic volume and safety.

Kennedy moved and Keith seconded adoption of the referral comments, with discussed changes. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Other Business**

Ms. Augur handed out flyers for the upcoming Connecticut Land Use Academy series of workshops for land use commissioners. CRCOG is sponsoring three workshops in May, to be held at West Hartford Town Hall. Ms. Augur asked commissioners to encourage their fellow local commission members to attend.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.