

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

5 Connecticut Avenue, Norwich, Connecticut 06360
(860) 889-2324/Fax: (860) 889-1222/E-Mail: office@seccog.org

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 2010 SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTED BY SCCOG: 2/17/10

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, comprised of the chief elected officials and chief executives of twenty member municipalities, has annually adopted a legislative agenda concerning issues important to municipalities in southeastern Connecticut. Last year, the SCCOG took a different approach in formulating its legislative agenda, calling for revision to the three major funding streams controlled by state government, followed by specific legislation that the SCCOG asked the southeastern delegation to sponsor and support through to approval during the session. None of the major reforms requested were enacted by the General Assembly and only one of the eleven items of requested legislation were adopted. In baseball parlance, the General Assembly batted less than .100 last year in terms of addressing the requests of local government in our region. This is not an All-Star batting average and we are extremely disappointed in the General Assembly's lack of response. It is our belief that the legislative agendas of other municipalities around the state as presented by their Councils of Government, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, and the Connecticut Councils of Small Towns, meet similar fates on an annual basis. We believe this needs to change and that the times we are in require a renewed relationship between local government and our State Government in Hartford. Toward that end, we respectfully request that the southeastern Connecticut legislative delegation focus on four major issues of importance to cities and towns this session. These are:

Restoration of Aid to Municipalities. Over the years the State has significantly reduced or held flat aid to cities and towns as our costs for provision of services goes up. We are aware that in these tough economic times the State will look to all entities receiving State aid to accept cuts in order to assist the State in balancing its own budget. For too long, municipalities have suffered such aid reductions, but we no longer can afford to do so, so we say to you that these cuts are not acceptable. The State needs to make municipalities whole on long-standing agreements where the State subsidized the costs of municipal services that the State itself was not providing. Furthermore, formula based funding should be restored to previous levels where the cost of municipal service goes up annually but the rate of reimbursements from the State have declined (i.e. PILOT, MME, TAR, Veterans' exemptions, Mashantucket Pequot-Mohegan grant).

Mandate Relief. This includes adoption of legislation that prohibits future unfunded mandates similar to law that New Jersey just enacted; and the repeal of existing costly and burdensome mandates such as requiring municipalities to remove and store property left by evicted tenants, the mandate requiring towns to use in-school suspension, costly labor mandates, etc.

Alternative Revenue Sources to the Property Tax. Connecticut is one of only fifteen states to limit a municipality's ability to raise revenue other than primarily through the property tax. Legislation is needed to provide new local revenue options such as taxing hotel rooms, meals, rental cars, etc. and to allow the imposition of fee increases over what is set by state statute in

order to cover the municipal cost of providing services. Additionally, the current rate of the municipal real estate conveyance tax should be made permanent as this is an extremely important revenue to cities and towns.

Meaningful State Support of Regionalism. First of all it is noted that our cities and towns, especially those in southeastern Connecticut, have long held the concept that municipalities are all better off working together. The potential for coordination and cooperation between municipalities was the basis for organizing our Council of Governments. We applaud the State for recently recognizing the importance of regionalism, but are concerned that State government is not “putting its money where its mouth is”. This year the State significantly reduced funding to our state’s fifteen regional planning organizations from \$1 Million statewide to \$200,000 (none of which has yet to be distributed) and the Governor’s budget for next year proposes this line item be further reduced to \$100. The State’s successful Regional Performance Incentive Program of two years ago was never re-funded. State government is now considering the promotion of alternative municipal service delivery models and other cooperative ventures, but these efforts will be fruitless unless the State assists and incentivizes municipalities to implement them. Potential revenue sources could include a portion of the state sales tax and/or State bonding. Any future regional organizations or multi-municipal cooperatives should be voluntary in nature, and should not be mandated by State government. Finally, state statutes should be reviewed and amended as needed to expressly permit all forms of inter-municipal and regional ventures where two or more municipalities separately or through their regional planning organization choose to join together to provide a service to their residents and taxpayers.