



Regional Legislative Priorities - 2016 Session

Each year the Northwest Hills Council of Governments prepares a list of legislative priorities to share with our area legislators. The major themes are similar from year to year and typically include “maintain state aid”, “oppose any new unfunded state mandates”, and “provide regulatory flexibility and relief”. We hope that these familiar underlying themes will continue to resonate with our legislators throughout this legislative session. This year we specifically ask that our legislators partner with the NHCOCG in focusing on the following three major areas of concern.

1) Revise Thresholds for Prevailing Wage. For over a decade, our region has advocated for changes in the State’s prevailing wage requirements. The current prevailing wage thresholds - \$100,000 for facility alterations and \$400,000 for new construction – have not changed since 1991. In partnership with the Connecticut Council of Small Towns and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, we maintain that the prevailing wage rates should not apply to projects for new construction, rehabilitation, or repair where the total cost is less than \$1 million and that the threshold should be indexed to the inflation rate. This change will enable our towns to build new infrastructure and maintain our existing infrastructure in a more cost-effective manner. The State’s current prevailing wage requirements have been shown to routinely increase the cost of municipal construction projects by 20% or more. Increasing the thresholds for prevailing wage will also serve to encourage our small local contractors to bid on projects that they now avoid because of the expense and red tape of dealing with prevailing wage requirements.

2) Repeal the Municipal Spending Cap Enacted by the 2015 General Assembly. This recently enacted legislation undermines home rule and effectively handcuffs towns from providing the level of service that local residents may want. Our local officials work very hard to control costs in the development of their municipal budgets, and closely monitor their municipal budgets throughout the year. To best meet local needs, our towns should retain the freedom and flexibility to adopt the local budget that is right for their town. If local residents wish to invest in their future by paying more than a 2.5% increase in any given year, they should be allowed to do so.

3) Keep a Watchful Eye Out for Onerous “Sleeper Bills”. A number of bills with significant municipal impacts have been passed recently by the General Assembly without adequate opportunity for public evaluation or discussion of the changes. Two notable examples are the requirement for COGs to employ a Regional Elections Monitor and the municipal set-aside requirements for small and minority business enterprises. There are increasing calls for transparency in all levels of government, and we should vigorously object to any rushed and unnecessary change in the rules through last minute legislative proposals or inappropriate provisions in the implementer bill.

As always, the NHCOCG appreciates the cooperation we receive from our area legislators and we look forward to enhancing this relationship by focusing on the above priorities during the 2016 legislative session.