

**Regional Legislative Priorities – 2021 Session**

*The 21-member towns of the NHCOG are struggling to address many challenging issues and un-met needs in the wake of COVID-19. Many of the costs incurred by our towns are not being covered by federal and state programs, and municipal revenues are declining. Support from our area legislators is more critical than ever as we seek to be resilient and bounce back from this unprecedented pandemic. Your assistance is critical in supporting the following legislative priorities of the member towns of the NHCOG.*

**1) Continue to partner with our towns to control local tax increases.**

* Oppose legislative proposals that would have a detrimental financial impact on our towns, such as transferring a portion of teacher’s pensions to municipalities.
* Sponsor legislation to provide for virtual or hybrid town meetings over the long-term in cooperation with Connecticut’s Freedom of Information Commission.
* Support continued mandate relief measures. In particular, enact a higher prevailing wage threshold for renovation projects similar to what was done for new construction.
* Sponsor legislation that would allow towns, at local option, to adopt bi-annual budgets to enable longer-term budgeting and cost savings in municipalities.
* Sponsor legislation that would enable towns in a regional school district to adopt a 3-5 year rolling average for municipal assessments to minimize the fiscal impact in any one given year. Provide enabling legislation for the establishment of a Board of Finance for Regional Schools to better monitor and control spending.

**2) Develop a strategic plan and legislation to effectively address the escalating municipal solid waste crisis in Connecticut**.

* Creation of an implementable strategic plan and state financial support is critical to addressing the financial and technological issues faced by MIRA so that it can become a reliable and sustainable resource for our municipalities over the long term.

(*over*)

**3) Support voluntary regionalization and shared services.**

* The member towns of the NHCOG have long supported voluntary regionalism and have already regionalized many municipal facilities (schools, health districts, emergency dispatch) and services (cooperative purchasing, regional equipment sharing). Any new proposals should be presented as well-researched options and not state mandates.
* Support maintenance of funding for COGs and the Regional Performance Incentive Program to enable planning and implementation of additional shared services (e.g. construction of the “shovel ready” Litchfield Hills Regional Animal Facility).

**4) Release bond funds in a timely manner for priority local projects and avoid any mid-session hold back or reduction of funds that are budgeted for municipalities.**

* Town Aid Road funding is critical to all towns in Connecticut and should be released in a predictable manner along with funding to keep our state roads in a state of good repair.
* Maintaining state funding support for Education Cost Sharing, the Local Capital Improvement Program, and Small Town Economic Assistance Program is also critically important to our towns.

**5) Support implementation of the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and other regional plans.**

* Connecting every home and business to fiber-optic broadband is essential to long-term economic progress in our region and a core strategy in our CEDS Plan. We need state and federal support to help this initiative become a reality.
* Pass legislation requiring PURA to adopt One Touch Make Ready (OTMR) regulations. OTMR would streamline the process of attaching new fiber-optic wire to utility poles saving hundreds of dollars per pole and more than a year of time for municipalities trying to address their high speed broadband needs.
* Support the state, regional and local efforts now underway to address the un-met needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**6) Boldly address the State’s opioid crisis and other mental health issues**.

* Establish a sustained and collaborative partnership between state government, schools, and community organizations to address this crisis. Since most addictions start in adolescence, prevention work in schools is particularly vital.
* This issue has become even more critical due to the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations.

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*Adopted by NHCOG on December 10, 2020*