

CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY COUNCIL OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

Midstate Region:

Cromwell, Durham, East Haddam,
East Hampton, Haddam, Middlefield,
Middletown and Portland

Connecticut River Estuary Region:

Chester, Clinton, Deep River, Essex,
Killingworth, Lyme, Old Lyme, Old
Saybrook, and Westbrook

Acting Secretary Brenda Sisco
Office of Policy and Management
450 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

June 1, 2010

RE: Request for guidance in exploring the consolidation of two planning regions

Dear Secretary Sisco:

The 17 towns that comprise the bi-regional Connecticut River Valley Council of Elected Officials (CRVCEO) seek guidance from the Office of Policy and Management in the matter of combining the Connecticut River Estuary Planning Region and the Midstate Planning Region into a single state-designated planning region encompassing the Lower Connecticut River Valley and adjacent shoreline towns, with the City of Middletown as its urbanized center. CRVCEO recognizes that the authority for designation of regional boundaries is assigned to the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management.

In 1999, several chief elected officials from the Estuary and Midstate planning regions successfully sought state legislation which would enable officials from more than one planning region to form a joint Council of Elected Officials (PA99-82, CGS Section 4-124C). Subsequently, CRVCEO was created through the passage of resolutions by the legislative bodies of the seventeen towns in the bi-regional area. The CRVCEO has met regularly for the past decade, as have the two pre-existing regional planning agencies – Midstate and Estuary.

The chief elected officials of the Midstate and Estuary planning regions meet monthly to discuss matters of common interest. These discussions have included ways to strengthen their cooperative relationship. We believe that our towns share a common character which creates a distinctive regional identity. The Lower Connecticut River Valley and nearby coastal towns remain a series of distinct communities, linked by roads and water routes established during the agrarian past. Modern changes generally rest easy upon the land and water. Where economic hubs have developed, those hubs retain a modest, typically non-urban scale and density. Although there are suburban aspects to the region's development, the Lower River Valley is not closely linked with any of the larger urban areas on which it borders. In terms of "smart growth" the valley is not intended as a future growth center, except to provide basic needs for regional residents and visitors. The natural beauty and cultural history of the valley is highly valued and is a source of attraction for residents and visitors alike. It is the goal of the CRVCEO to maintain and enhance this distinct identity, rather than to evolve in a suburban sprawl pattern outward from existing larger urban areas. Middletown serves as a service center for the surrounding

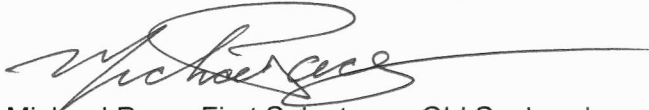
towns: for example, it includes a regional hospital and educational facilities while remaining largely a small residential city and college town at heart. A more complete discussion of the characteristics of the combined new, larger Lower Connecticut Valley region is enclosed with this letter.

CRVCEO is keenly aware of the statewide discussion of the role of regionalism in Connecticut. The organization has followed the issues of boundaries, preferred form of organizational structure, and future functions for RPOs. This uncertain atmosphere is a deterrent to increased regional cooperation, since towns do not know who their future partners will be. The CRVCEO requests that you, in your capacity as Secretary of OPM, provide guidance as to the appropriate way to combine our two planning regions into a single entity that can move forward with regional initiatives with some assurance that the partnerships of today will continue to be the partnerships of tomorrow. If the Legislature requires that there be fewer regional planning organizations, it is the intent of this organization to form a Regional Council of Governments and to maintain the existing regional planning agencies as regional planning commissions focused on land use planning matters. Matters of staffing, office location, work programs, and existing contracts can be dealt with through the statutorily prescribed process of conversion from a regional planning agency form of organization to a Council of Governments, once the matter of the regional boundary is resolved.

Thank you for your assistance and guidance.



Tom Marsh, First Selectman, Chester
Chairman, Connecticut River Valley Council of Elected Officials



Michael Pace, First Selectman, Old Saybrook
Chairman, Lower Connecticut Valley Selectmens' Association

Richard Eriksen, Town of Durham Representative
Chairman, Midstate Regional Planning Agency



Bruce Edgerton, Town of Deep River Representative
Chairman, Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency



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