

MEMORANDUM

To: Personnel & Finance Committee

From: Matt Hart, Executive Director

Date: August 12, 2024

Subject: FY 2023/24 Reflection Statement

I am pleased to provide this reflection statement in advance of my annual performance review. I have structured the memo as a set of observations about the past year, noting accomplishments, challenges, and growth opportunities. I have also prepared a set of recommended goals for the new fiscal year. I have inserted web links where I think are helpful to provide more context.

I'll begin with a review of key accomplishments.

First, I believe that we made *excellent progress on the goals* that the Board endorsed for me this past year. Here's a representative sample:

- *Federal infrastructure funding* – We have now helped our towns bring in approximately \$58M in federal funding for local infrastructure projects. Notably, we partnered with the CTDOT and the towns of Berlin, Newington, and Wethersfield on a successful \$2M RAISE grant application to improve safety along the Berlin Turnpike.
- *New legislation to facilitate service sharing* – We worked in collaboration with the Governor's Office, CCM, COST, and other COGs to obtain passage of legislation designed to make it easier for municipalities, school districts, and COGs to share local government services. I hope that this legislation will promote further interest in the State's Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP.)
- *Economic vitality* – We completed the update to our regional [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\)](#) and successfully recruited our first Economic Development Coordinator (Kim Bishop) to support regional economic development initiatives and to coordinate the implementation of the CEDS.
- *Safety & Vision Zero* – We established the first regional Vision Zero Task Force in our state. The Task Force is using our \$1M SS4A grant to update our regional [Safety Action Plan](#). The plan will incorporate the “safe systems” approach with the goal of dramatically reducing serious traffic-related accidents and fatalities and improving safety for all road users.

- *Enhanced rail and bus service* – In partnership with the South Central Council of Governments (SCRCOG), we reconvened the [Hartford Line/Fastrak Corridor Advisory Committee](#) to monitor and promote progress for these services. CTDOT and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) are also active participants.
- *Greater Hartford Mobility Study* – CRCOG staff critically reviewed the Planning & Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study for CTDOT’s [Greater Hartford Mobility Study](#) (GHMS), and advised the Policy Board to endorse the PEL in its role as the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The Policy Board unanimously endorsed our recommendation.
- *Strategic Playbook* – The Board approved our recommended set of strategic priorities for the next 3-5 years. The [Strategic Playbook](#) provides an important focus for the Board and our organization.
- *Member outreach & public relations* – We continued our efforts to promote public awareness of CRCOG and its services. CRCOG staff and I met regularly with policy board members, local legislative bodies, municipal staff, and other partners. We effectively utilized our social media channels to raise awareness of CRCOG’s brand.
- *New office space* – Under Pauline Yoder’s leadership, we successfully moved to our new office space at the Metro Center at 350 Church St. in Hartford. The new space is a big hit!

As a second accomplishment from the past year, I would highlight our work to better position CRCOG *to serve our members and the region*. Under my leadership, we have reorganized to create a new Department of Regional Planning & Development, and a new Division of GIS & IT under Municipal Services. We have added talented new staff using new federal and state funds and moved into a more contemporary office space. We have established a leadership team that is serious about building a healthy organizational culture at CRCOG and developed a strategic plan with a new set of organizational values and focus. We are breaking down departmental silos and staff morale is high. I am very pleased with the progress that we have made over the past 2.5 years to position the organization for future success.

Next, I will mention a few challenges.

For one, I have been surprised and somewhat disappointed that we have been unable to implement any of the three Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) grants for building inspection, tax assessment, and animal control services. We seemed to have had strong buy-in from our members when we submitted the grant applications, and I was confident that some number of our members would benefit from this state funding. However, we are not giving up and with the guidance of our Municipal Services Committee we will retool these grants with more of a workforce development/trainee focus.

A second item I would note relates to the Policy Board itself. I want to make sure that we are serving the needs of our towns and that Policy Board members are actively engaged at CRCOG. I believe that our meetings are convenient – they are primarily virtual and rarely exceed one hour in length. We try to schedule one informative presentation per Policy Board meeting and to move through the reports and business items expeditiously. I recognize that it can be more difficult to participate in a large virtual meeting than the in-person Board meetings that we used to hold. I plan to experiment with more in-person workshops and discussions in the coming year and would welcome any suggestions from the Board to promote more engagement, discussion, and information sharing between our members.

Lastly, I would like to offer some suggested performance goals for the new fiscal year and rating period. In lieu of a detailed and lengthy set of projects and initiatives (as has been my tendency), I recommend the following objectives:

- *Work the Strategic Playbook.* The Playbook contains our strategic priorities for the next 3-5 years. During the year ahead we will continue to focus on completing or making good progress on the projects and initiatives listed in the plan, including the following:
 - Completing the East Coast Greenway Gap Closure Study (closing the gap between Simsbury to East Hartford)
 - Making good progress on the update to our Regional Transportation Safety Plan, under the guidance of our Vision Zero Task Force
 - Beginning work on our regional housing strategy
 - Beginning work on our regional stormwater management study
 - Making good progress on the Plainville/New Britain RAISE grant trail project
 - Beginning the Berlin Turnpike RAISE grant safety project
 - Initiating our Capitol Region Bicycle & Pedestrian Priority Network Plan
 - Establishing our regional economic development program and pursuing key goals set out in our regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
- *Enhance CRCOG's technical assistance capabilities and offerings.* I think this is one of the ways we can be most impactful for our members, as referenced in our Playbook under *Public Sector Workforce Development, Shared Services, and Direct Services*. While we have long been a source for technical advice for our members, I believe that there is more we can do by adding toolkits and digital content on our website, bidding additional products and services important to our towns, and sharing information on a wide range of municipal topics.

- *Engage our members through informative workshops and forums.* Related to my desire to enhance our technical assistance offerings, I would like to see us utilize our new space to host informative workshops and forums for our members. This recommended goal is consistent with the *Governance & Communications* section in our Strategic Playbook. Some workshop/forum topics that I am considering include best practices in service sharing, Vision Zero and traffic safety, and transit-oriented development/community. These events could be a good way to bring Policy Board members and municipal staff together to learn from one another and to share good ideas and practices.
- *Raise our profile with Federal and State officials and other stakeholders.* Our relationships with our Congressional delegation, the General Assembly, and state agencies are important to our work here at CRCOG. To help build these relationships, I believe it is important to regularly interact with individual legislators and state agency commissioners and staff. I plan to continue this outreach effort in the year ahead with the assistance of our Government Relations Consultant (lobbyist). I would note that this goal is also consistent with the *Governance & Communications* section in our Strategic Playbook.
- *Continue to build CRCOG's culture of excellence and service to our members and the region.* Last year our team identified four organizational values to help guide our work – we strive to be *Member-Focused, Impactful & High Performing, Collaborative & Inclusive, and Innovative*. It requires a conscious effort on the part of leadership to emphasize these values and to instill them within our organizational DNA. I am committed to this work to develop our team to best serve our members and the region.
- *Remain committed to my own professional development.* I am a Credentialed Manager through the International City & County Management Association (ICMA) and commit to 40 hours per year of professional development activities. This year I am working to enhance my knowledge base in 1) the purpose and function of an Economic Development District (EDD); 2) housing policy; and 3) proven safety measures and other tools designed to improve safety for all road users. All these topics relate to key projects and initiatives underway at CRCOG. I will attend relevant seminars and workshops offered by organizations such as ICMA, the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), and the National Association of Development Councils (NADO).

In closing, I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I am very honored to serve as CRCOG's Executive Director. I look forward to your feedback regarding my performance and suggested goals for the new fiscal year.