

CRCOG Legislative Committee Meeting MINUTES
Wednesday, October 15, 2025 3:00 PM - This was a virtual meeting.
For more information, email info@crcog.org or call 860-724-4283

Member

Brandon Robertson
Jon Colman
Jim Rupert
Jason Bowsza
Raúl De Jesús Jr.
Steve Stephanou
Ryan Aylesworth
Jonathan Altshul
Alex Ricciardone
Rob Aloise
Caitlin Palmer
Laura Frankowski
Donna Hamzy Carroccia

Organization

Avon
Bloomfield
Bolton
East Windsor
Hartford
Manchester
Mansfield
Newington
Southington
CRCOG
CRCOG
CRCOG
Kozak & Salina

1. **Call to Order**

Jason Bowsza called the meeting to order at 3:03 PM.

2. **Approval of minutes from September 29, 2025**

Jon Colman made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 29, 2025 meeting. Alex Riccadrone abstained. Jon Altshul seconded; motion passed unanimously.

3. **Staff Reports**

Matt Hart briefed the group on the legislature's special session for housing legislation and a special meeting with Senator Murphy's staff on the competitiveness of the region's federal transportation policies. Donna Hamzy Carroccia shared that November 12th and 13th are tentative dates for the General Assembly's special session. She also noted that while some have requested to expand the scope of the session, Senate Democrats are seeking to narrow it, limiting the number of items under consideration. It's likely that issues deemed time-sensitive but excluded from the special session may be addressed in the 2026 regular session through an emergency certified bill.

Donna also shared that CRCOG, CCM, COST, and OPM remain aligned on key

legislative priorities, and that the current challenge lies in securing legislative leadership's support. She and Matt Hart will meet with the Governor's Office following the meeting to discuss the proposal and determine the status of housing-related legislation.

4. **Discussion of 2026 Legislative Priorities**

- i. **HOUSING:** Matt emphasized the importance of focusing on a limited number of key legislative priorities while continuing to advance select initiatives from previous years. At the forefront is regional housing legislation, developed collaboratively with CCM, COST, and the other Councils of Governments.

He explained that while it remains unclear whether regional housing plans will become the statewide default, a likely outcome is that municipalities will continue to prepare five-year affordable housing plans, with an option to join a regional plan coordinated by CRCOG. This framework could particularly benefit smaller and rural communities. Matt noted that CRCOG will continue to promote the regional housing proposal, which may be considered during a potential special session next month.

- ii. **STEAP Grant Program:** Matt and Donna discussed a proposal to expand the allowable uses of the STEAP, a grant program widely utilized by CRCOG's smaller member municipalities. The proposed change would broaden eligibility to include uses such as planning initiatives, technology upgrades, energy infrastructure improvements, EV charging stations, and municipal fleet conversions.

- iii. **SITING COUNCIL REPRESENTATION:** The Committee discussed strengthening municipal representation on the Siting Council and protecting agricultural land, an issue of particular importance to East Windsor, Manchester, Bloomfield, and other CRCOG communities. Members noted that while some communities face theoretical or emerging pressures from renewable energy development, others, like Newington and Hartford, have not experienced significant impacts.

Key points included:

- The need to ensure municipal input in the Siting Council's consideration of solar, battery storage, and other renewable energy projects.
- Potential legislative approaches include:
 - Providing municipalities an appointment or a vote on specific petitions affecting their jurisdiction.

- Strengthening farmland protections through enhanced review standards by the Department of Agriculture (per PA 17218).
- Considering caps on renewable energy projects to balance development with community preservation.
- The discussion emphasized a multi-bill strategy, separating Siting Council representation, farmland protections, and renewable energy project standards into distinct legislative proposals.
- Committee members agreed to further refine the proposals for clarity and specificity before legislative submission.

iv. **MODERATE PILOT PROGRAM:** Donna discussed proposals to tax the endowments or investment income of private universities and non-profit institutions as a potential mechanism for revenue diversification for municipalities, which could help relieve pressure on property taxes. She noted that similar proposals have been discussed in prior years but have not gained traction, largely due to strong university lobbying. This concept may appear in CCM or COST agendas in the future. Matt and Ryan Aylesworth highlighted ongoing discussions regarding fully funding the PILOT program, particularly for state-owned property. Ryan noted that Mansfield has benefited significantly from the tiered PILOT structure, which mitigates funding volatility for municipalities. However, recent changes in property valuations may result in reductions in PILOT payments, prompting continued engagement with state legislators to address potential impacts.

v. **ENHANCE EDUCATION FUNDING:** The Committee discussed incorporating special education funding into the next legislative agenda. Members agreed that focusing on special education costs, particularly for students transferring mid-year between districts, is a manageable and high-impact issue.

Key points included:

- Addressing excess costs for host districts while balancing the budgetary impact on the original district.
- Narrowing the focus to special education rather than broader education funding (e.g., ECS) to allow for a more targeted legislative approach.
- Recognition of federal and state budget uncertainties, including recent developments affecting Medicaid and potential mid-year adjustments to municipal aid.
- Committee consensus that special education is a pressing and growing cost concern for many municipalities and should be prioritized in the

legislative agenda.

vi. **CONTINUATION OF 2025 PRIORITIES:** Matt highlighted the continuation of key legislative priorities from the previous year, including:

- Infrastructure investment, including multi-use trails
- Road safety initiatives, particularly Vision Zero
- Workforce development and shared services
- Sustainable energy solutions and municipal resiliency

He noted that staff are coordinating with the Connecticut Department of Transportation and participating in Vision Zero working groups to align CRCOG's legislative agenda with state efforts.

5. **Wrap-up & Next Steps**

The Committee reviewed the draft legislative priorities list and agreed it is well-focused. Jason noted that some issues, such as MSW, ambulatory care, and hospital solvency, remain important but may be addressed through other advocacy channels rather than the CRCOG agenda.

Key next steps and considerations include:

- **Unfunded mandates:** Explore the fiscal impacts of mandates beyond cataloging, emphasizing practical financial implications.
- **Special education:** Continue prioritizing this as a high-impact, narrowly defined legislative focus.
- **Transportation investments:** Support initiatives such as CT Fast Track East, Hartford Line improvements, and associated rail station investments, linking transit projects to housing and regional development.
- **Committee members emphasized coordination with CCM, COST, and state agencies to align CRCOG's priorities and leverage advocacy opportunities.**

The Committee will use the next meeting in two weeks to finalize the legislative agenda and incorporate any remaining adjustments. Once complete, the agenda will be presented to the Policy Board for endorsement at its November meeting, with consideration given to potential changes in Board membership due to upcoming municipal elections. Early finalization will allow CRCOG to begin engagement with key legislators and state agencies prior to Thanksgiving.

6. **Adjournment**

Steve Stephanou motioned to adjourn, Jon Colman seconded. The meeting adjourned at 3:57pm.