

# Western Connecticut

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

## 2019 ANNUAL REPORT



*For Reporting Period July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020*



# WCEDD 2019 Annual Report

Reporting Period July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020

This Progress Report tracks activities according to the following six WestCOG 2017 CEDS goals:

1. Foster Regional Planning and Cooperation
2. Develop an Improved Business Climate
3. Cultivate Support for a Diverse Workforce
4. Improve and Maintain Transportation and Public Infrastructure
5. Foster A More Sustainable and Resilient Region
6. Cultivate a Positive Regional Identity

Questions regarding the development of this report, or items within can be made directly to:  
Mike Towle, Deputy Director at WestCOG, [mtowle@westcog.org](mailto:mtowle@westcog.org)

Or

Todd Fontanella, Senior Planner at WestCOG, [tfontanella@westcog.org](mailto:tfontanella@westcog.org)

## 2019 WCEDD Activity List

### Regular Occurring Activities during the Reporting Period

- Western Connecticut Economic Development District (WCEDD) meetings were held quarterly on a regular basis.
- Activities throughout the year were tracked.
- Staff activities supporting the CEDS were detailed in WestCOG's Annual Reports, which were circulated to all WestCOG officials, member communities and made available to the public on WestCOG's website.
- Staff interacted with EDA's regional representative on an as-needed basis.

### Brownfields Remediation-EPA Brownfields Technical Support

Goals 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1

WestCOG staff, working within the CT Brownfield Initiative Program, explored grant applications to support the Town of Redding for EPA remediation of the Gilbert and Bennett Wire Mill Property. This property is adjacent to the Danbury Branch of the Metro-North Railroad and has significant Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) potential.

### CARES Act Recovery Assistance Grant

Goals 5.2

In July staff prepared support documentation to the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) as part of a multi-COG application to secure funding to offset the economic hardships that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Per the State of Connecticut's consolidated grant application for statewide long-term recovery coordination, resiliency planning, business retention, and business assistance, WestCOG proposed to be an implementing partner on the Recovery Coordinator portion of the project, working closely with regional Long-Term Recovery Committees.

### CT Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) LTR 1 Economic Development Subcommittee

Goal 5.2

Established following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This Subcommittee's purpose is to engage local stakeholders in DEMHS Region 1 in identifying economic needs unmet through local resources, which are transmitted through WestCOG and the other eight COGs to Connecticut's Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. This Subcommittee is active and is expected to remain so through 2021.

### Hazard Mitigation Planning

Goal 5.3

WestCOG's former agencies (SWRPA and HVCEO) received funding to complete Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMP) for all 18 communities in the WestCOG region. The HMPs are a bridge to potential FEMA Mitigation funds and grant opportunities. HMPs are designed to provide

residents, businesses, and emergency responders with information on natural hazards including floods, coastal storms and nor'easters, hurricanes, blizzards/severe winter storms/ice storms, drought, sea level rise, earthquakes, and dam failure. Additionally, the HMPs have an emphasis on providing mitigation goals, objectives, and strategies for each municipality in the region. The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG), along with its member municipalities, is developing its first regional Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) for all 18 communities. The Plan is expected to be complete in December.

## Municipal Stormwater Support Service (MS4)

### Goal 5.3

To achieve economies of scale, WestCOG provides MS4 stormwater planning services regionwide. These include a stormwater management template, stormwater infrastructure mapping, directly connected impervious cover mapping (DCIA), and case study IDDE efforts; WestCOG monitors advancements, resources, and updates from DEEP, other COGs, and UConn CLEAR regarding the MS4 permit. All products developed by WestCOG are replicable and available statewide. In this past year WestCOG worked closely with CTDOT, MetroCOG, and UCONN to develop a regional GIS schema, to allow towns to collect data to meet the requirements of the MS4 permit. To offer an additional resource on which work started this year, WestCOG developed a project to assist municipalities with the daunting task of mapping all their stormwater infrastructure (Permit deadline: July 2020). WestCOG hired a dedicated GIS staffer to assist with this effort. The Analyst has trekked through streams, located outfalls, digitized site plans, and developed a data collection process for municipalities to reach their 100% mapping targets.

## Regional Performance Improvement Program (RPIP)

### Goals 2.3, 2.4, 3.4, 6.2

The State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) RPIP has made funding available to encourage municipalities to participate in voluntary inter-municipal or regional shared services and projects that have the potential to produce measurable “economies of scale”, provide desired or required public services, and lower the costs and tax burdens associated with the provision of such services. In Fall 2019, the WestCOG staff submitted a FY2020 \$285,000 application for the following initiatives relevant to economic development:

- Coordination Plan for Industry Needs and Higher Education (Pg. 33 of CEDS)  
Deliverable: Recommendations for educational institutions, companies, and other stakeholders to create and improve the “pipeline of employment”  
Cost: \$100,000 | Timeline: 1-2 years
- Regional Tourism Development & Marketing Plan (Pg. 33 of CEDS)  
Deliverable: A plan with action steps for the region to promote tourism and bring newcomers into the area.  
Cost: \$100,000 | Timeline: 1-2 years
- Regional Agricultural Viability Study (Pg. 34 of CEDS)  
Deliverable: Recommendations on the types of agriculture and what techniques (i.e.

biotech, conventional, organic) can be economically viable in the Western CT Region.  
Cost: \$100,000 | Timeline: 1-2 years

While OPM accepted FY2020 applications, it advised in July 2020 that it would not be awarding FY2020 Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) grants due to a shortfall of funds in the Regional Performance Incentive Account (RPIA). Staff is investigating other options for funding these initiatives.

## Regional Services

### Goals 1.1

WestCOG has received funding from OPM to research and implement regional services for its partner communities to create more efficient, cost effective, and improved government services. By leveraging best practices and technology, government can run more efficiently and offer a more attractive place to do business.

**Animal Control:** WestCOG, in partnership with RFA, LLC is developing a report on the potential for improvements, including inter-municipal or regional sharing, of animal control facilities and/or services in Western Connecticut. See the [Regional Animal Control Website](#) for more details.

**Public Safety:** WestCOG contracted with Winbourne Consulting LLC to conduct a feasibility study for the sharing/consolidation of selected public safety facilities and/or services. Specifically, Winbourne was tasked with evaluating the potential for cost savings and service improvements. The towns of New Canaan, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, and Wilton are all participating in this study. See the [Regional Public Safety Website](#) for more details

**Waste Management:** WestCOG contracted with Barton & Loguidice Engineers, PLLC to conduct a Regional Waste Management Project. This Project's purpose is to evaluate the feasibility and potential savings of the sharing or consolidation of municipal transfer station facilities and operations in the Western Connecticut Planning Region. See the [Regional Waste Management Website](#) for more details.

## UConn Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) Resilient Connecticut Project

### Goal 5.3

In February staff began a two-year engagement with CIRCA's Resilient CT Project which is developing a regional vulnerability assessment and climate adaptation planning process for the coastal COGs in CT. WestCOG staff work with CIRCA and its consultants to support the development and refinement of a regional scale vulnerability analysis. Staff is assisting CIRCA in identifying potential resiliency project opportunities, and subsequently develop evaluation criteria and provide guidance on the selection of projects to advance to design in Phase III of the Project. Staff are also assisting with regional engagement with constituents and advisory groups.

## Sustainable CT Fellowship

Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Sustainable CT is a voluntary certification program that recognizes communities for their sustainable and resilient efforts. The Program provides a list of best practices (actions) for municipalities to choose from, along with potential funding. A menu of nine categories constituting 55 actions and 1,645 certification points are offered. To be certified, a community must complete at least one action in each of the nine categories and receive a minimum number of points. This program is independently funded and originates in the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University. WestCOG was assigned two fellows to assist WestCOG member communities to participate in the Sustainable CT program.

## USDOT BUILD Grant

Goals 4.1, 4.2

WestCOG was awarded \$400,000 in BUILD funds for preparation of a Value Capture Analysis for the Danbury and New Canaan Branches of the Metro-North Railroad. This award will fund a study to determine whether a regional value capture mechanism such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or a comparable mechanism can be used on a regional, multijurisdictional level to generate funds required to support improvements along the two Branch Lines. These improvements will enhance safety and reduce travel times for passengers and are expected to be beneficial to freight movements. WestCOG has committed an additional \$100,000 in matching funds to this effort. The analysis is expected to begin in mid-2021 following execution of the grant with FTA.

## Western Connecticut Economic Development District, or WCEDD

Goal 1.1

WestCOG's multi-year effort to establish the WCEDD as a federally designated Economic Development District was realized in 2020, with designation announced by the U.S. Economic Development Administration in July. This status, which complements regional and state designation, enables the WCEDD to access additional grant funds to support ongoing regional economic planning as well as to apply on a regional basis for public works and economic adjustment grants.

## Wireless 5G Study

Goal 4-3

WestCOG established a Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications Task Force to develop a coordinated technology strategy. The task force was briefed by a variety of subject matter experts from the telecommunications industry, the legal profession, and Senator Blumenthal's office who provided insights into the challenges of managing the anticipated expansion of small wireless facilities across the state of Connecticut and in the eighteen municipalities of Western Connecticut. Specific municipal strategies to guide the development of fifth generation wireless telecommunication services include the adoption of a municipal

ordinance, a right of way ordinance, revised zoning regulations, and a municipal licensing strategy. See the [Wireless Taskforce Webpage](#) for more details.