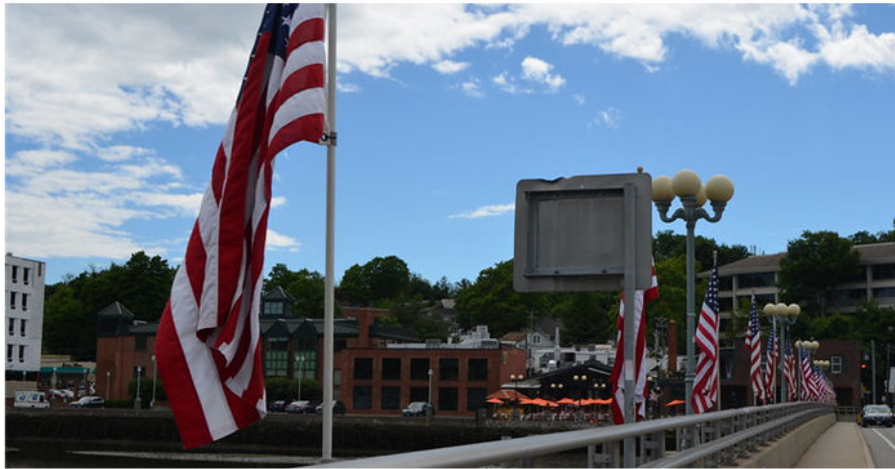


Western Connecticut

COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

For the fiscal year July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021

Western Connecticut Council of Governments 2021 Annual Report

For the fiscal year July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021

Table of Contents

1	WestCOG in 2021	2
2	Regional Services	5
3	Regional Planning.....	6
4	Transportation Planning	8
5	Environmental Planning.....	11
6	Economic Development.....	13
7	Emergency Management.....	14
8	Analytics	15
9	Recommendations for Legislative Action.....	17
10	Expenditure of Regional Services Grant funds	19

Requirements for the Annual Report per [CGS §4-66r](#):

- Summarize the expenditure of such grant funds. **[See Section 10.]**
- Describe any regional program, project or initiative currently provided or planned by the council.
[See Sections 2 through 8.]
- Review the performance of any existing regional program, project or initiative relative to its initial goals and objectives. **[See Section 1.]**
- Analyze the existing services provided by member municipalities or by the state that, in the opinion of the council, could be more effectively or efficiently provided on a regional basis.
[See Section 1.]
- Provide recommendations for legislative action concerning potential impediments to the regionalization of services. **[See Section 9.]**

1 WestCOG in 2021

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) is one of nine regional Councils of Governments in Connecticut (COGs), established per CGS §8-31b. A COG is a regional body consisting of the chief elected officials (mayors and first selectmen) of the municipalities within a planning region designated by the State of Connecticut.

COGs serve as forum to promote intermunicipal coordination and cooperation. At the direction of its board, and funding permitting, COGs can provide a range of services, from animal control to data analysis, from grant management to zoning assistance. WestCOG and its predecessors have served the region for over 50 years.

Following a decade of preparation, COGs are set to be recognized as county equivalents by the U.S. Census Bureau. County equivalency will result in the Census aligning its data products to the regional geographies designated by Connecticut (the planning regions). This change will improve the relevance and usefulness of Census data to COGs, providing the informational basis needed for the data-driven regional planning, policy, and programming of the 21st century.

Members

WestCOG consists of eighteen member municipalities:

Municipality	Chief Elected Official	COG Office
Bethel	Matt Knickerbocker	
Bridgewater	Curtis Read	
Brookfield	Steve Dunn	
Danbury	Mark Boughton (succeeded by Joseph Cavo)	
Darien	Jayne Stevenson	Vice Chair
Greenwich	Fred Camillo	
New Canaan	Kevin Moynihan	
New Fairfield	Pat Del Monaco	
New Milford	Pete Bass	
Newtown	Dan Rosenthal	
Norwalk	Harry Rilling	
Redding	Julia Pemberton	Treasurer
Ridgefield	Rudy Marconi	Chair
Sherman	Don Lowe	
Stamford	David Martin	
Weston	Chris Spaulding (succeeded by Samantha Nestor)	
Westport	Jim Marpe	
Wilton	Lynne Vanderslice	Secretary

Collectively, these municipalities account for approximately 610,000 residents, making the Region the second most populous in Connecticut.

Staff

WestCOG employed 14 persons in fiscal year 2021:

Title	Name
Executive Director	Francis R. Pickering
Deputy Director	Michael Towle
Finance Director	Patricia Payne
Finance Manager	Victoria Ricks
Office Manager	Cricket Carpenter
Senior Project Manager	Kevin Mahoney
Senior Project Manager	Charles Vidich
Project Manager	Paula Burton
Principal Planner	Kristin Hadjstylianos
Senior Planner	Todd Fontanella
Planner	Kristin Floberg
Associate Planner	Nicole Sullivan
Senior GIS Analyst	Nick Trabka
GIS Analyst	Tucker Beckett

Performance of existing regional programs, projects, or initiatives

WestCOG's regional services efforts have been well-received, with no adverse comments during the fiscal year (FY).

The primary challenges faced in the program have been:

- **Public emergency.** WestCOG has operate without suspension or reduction in capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to strong internal preparation for disasters and disruption. In 2020, emergency needs and changing regional priorities displaced existing workloads, causing some projects temporarily to fall behind. All projects were back on schedule by FY 2021. It should be noted that COVID-19 has resulted in a reordering of priorities, with economic recovery from the pandemic rising to the top of the list. New federal funding programs present opportunities (e.g., ARPA) for the region's members; however, developing eligible projects and grant applications to take advantage of those programs is a new challenge for WestCOG.
- **Resource limitations.** The larger and more complex the region, the broader and deeper the opportunities for service sharing are, as are the analytical and logistical challenges in evaluating, preparing for, and launching such services. Under normal conditions, resources would suffice for gradual development of shared services; a faster approach would require significantly more. Given the urgency associated with new federal opportunities (deadlines are aggressive), WestCOG anticipates that the largest growth in its regional programs in the current fiscal year will be in coordinating the response to these opportunities.

All current FY projects are on track and, barring unforeseen disruptions, expected to meet targets. Descriptions of specific projects may be found in the following pages.

Opportunities for service provision on a regional basis

There is strong interest on behalf of COG members in regional services. Regional opportunities WestCOG is pursuing include:

- Pandemic response and public health coordination
- Economic development and recovery
- Public safety services and facilities
- Infrastructure finance
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and IT architecture
- Broadband network
- Animal control
- Waste management
- Drinking water quality assistance
- Housing affordability planning
- Sustainability planning
- Grant funding report
- Strategic planning
- ARPA project coordination

As noted in the following pages, all of these activities have made progress over the last fiscal year.

COG members have also expressed an interest in the following, which WestCOG does not have the resources to prosecute at present but may do so in the future:

- Tax and fee portal, enabling payment bundling across local departments and municipalities and automatic billing, with a shared payment processor (for lower interchange rates)
- Coordination of student transportation, particularly for out-of-district trips
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Coordinator
- Brownfields assessment/cleanup/redevelopment Program
- Veterans Services Coordinator
- IT coordinator
- Purchasing coordinator

2 Regional Services

Regional Viewer

WestCOG provides an interactive, online regional GIS web viewer. The viewer maps parcels in conjunction with other layers of interest to municipalities, businesses, and the public. Viewer functions include map design, abutter property selection, layering of planning datasets such as zoning, flood zones, impervious cover, building footprints, tree canopy, and current and historical aerial imagery (2019, 2018, 2016, 2012, and 1990 imagery is available for viewing), and query/search, as well as a link to assessor property cards. Parcel and property data are updated at least annually. The viewer can stand in for or substitute for a municipal GIS viewer.

WestCOG has developed an Extract Transfer Load (ETL) tool to automate the import of new data into the regional viewer.

☆ [WestCOG's Regional Viewer](#)

Regional Firing Range Implementation Plan

In conjunction with Winbourne Consulting LLC, WestCOG conducted a Regional Public Safety Study to evaluate options for the sharing of public safety facilities and/or services in five municipalities (New Canaan, Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, and Weston). Based on the study's findings, a follow-up plan was commissioned to provide implementation guidance for one or more regional firing ranges. Based on regional interest, the geographic scope was expanded to include all WestCOG members. The plan draws on discussions with police departments and addresses indoor and outdoor ranges, types of firearms, types of applications with firearms. The plan is set for release by the end of 2021.

Regional PSAP CAD/RMS Implementation Plan

As a second follow-up to the Regional Public Safety Study, Winbourne LLC and WestCOG created an implementation plan for regional Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) facilities and Computer-Aided Dispatch/Record Management Systems (CAD/RMS). Requirements to migrate to newer technology are expected; the transition entails substantial cost. Regional systems can spread these costs across a larger service area. This plan takes a "crawl/walk/run" approach to allow communities to first consider sharing software before investing in a regional system. The process included CAD/RMS demonstrations for and discussions with public safety officials on the implementation of shared CAD/RMS. The plan is set for release by the end of 2021.

Regional Waste Management

WestCOG retained the services of Barton & Loguidice Engineers (B&L) to develop a Regional Waste Management Study. The study involved interaction with an advisory committee consisting of people with expertise in the respective area and/or responsibility for implementation. Recommendations for implementation were developed with consultation of and involvement of the committee and of WestCOG. Responsibility for implementation of the recommendations will be a local responsibility, with WestCOG playing a supporting role if requested. The study was released in July 2021.

☆ [Regional Waste Management Study](#)

Regional Animal Control

WestCOG, in partnership with RFA LLC, evaluated the potential for sharing of animal control facilities and services in Western Connecticut. Based on analysis of existing facilities and operations, the study provided a list of recommendations for adoption. The study was released in August 2021.

☆ [Regional Animal Control Study](#)

Municipal Data Tool

WestCOG worked with consultant Axiomatic to develop a framework for web tools for access to and visualization of municipal data. When complete, the tools will facilitate data interpretation and benchmarking so, for instance, communities can more easily see where they stand with respect to their peers. The data behind this project are derived from CAMA data collection and CAMA standardization efforts (also discussed in this report). Once input data are available and ready, the project will be ready to go live (anticipated for FY2022).

3 Regional Planning

Regional Affordable Housing Plan

In recognition of the regional nature of housing, WestCOG began development of a comprehensive Regional Affordable Housing Plan. The plan includes a review of the past efforts to address affordable housing in the region and state; a housing market analysis; housing needs assessment; review of incentives and disincentives; land and services availability; and discussion of strategies that can be used to increase affordable housing developments in the region. Each municipality who opts to adopt the plan will have a specific municipal annex that outlines the strategies they are pursuing to increase affordable housing in town over the next ten years; the plan will meet their requirements under CGS §8-30j. A draft of the plan is expected for release later this fall, with meetings to develop municipal annexes, conduct public engagement, draft community values statements, and make final edits scheduled before adoption meetings start in early 2022.

Statutory Guidance

Recent changes to state law (under Public Act 21-29) necessitate all zoning regulations in Connecticut to be reviewed for compliance and potentially revised. These changes include new limits on municipal authority in housing, parking, and food businesses, as well as new mandates and expanded authority in the areas of water quality, sustainability, and renewable energy. WestCOG has given presentations on these changes to its members, with further assistance expected in these areas in the coming months.

To assist municipalities assistance with expanded zoning requirements under PA 21-29, WestCOG released *The Case for Riparian Corridor Protections: Zoning Strategies to Reduce Pollution of Inland Waters and Resultant Hypoxia of Long Island Sound* (described under Environmental Planning).

Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications Task Force

WestCOG established the Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications Task Force on October 17, 2019, to develop a coordinated strategy to make the region a digital leader. The regional approach to address the rollout of fifth generation broadband worked towards creating a standardized strategy to facilitate a more consistent and coordinated approach to economic development and the protection of community character and public health; an important factor for telecommunication providers' willingness to work with municipalities on the design of its facilities. It has also been central in creating a comprehensive assessment that weights the cost and benefits of the various strategy options while identifying gaps in municipal telecommunication strategies and recommending improvements.

The Task Force culminated with the release of a final recommendations report in September 2020. The report includes the land use strategies municipalities can use to address wireless telecommunications changes as fifth generation broadband is deployed. WestCOG and the task force received the 2020 CCAPA Planning: *Planning of Wireless Technology Award* on March 18, 2021, for the final recommendations report.

☆ [Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications Task Force's Final Recommendations](#)

Land Use Referrals

Proposed changes to municipal zoning regulations and maps, subdivision ordinances, and Plans of Conservation and Development ("referrals"), are evaluated by WestCOG for consistency with the regional Plan of Conservation and Development and to reduce conflicts among municipalities. WestCOG responded to 110 referrals this past year.

Planners Lunch

WestCOG convenes regular educational and collaborative sessions for municipal planners to build capacity and facilitate intermunicipal collaboration in the region. Discussion items included:

- Housing Affordability: By the Numbers (August 2020)
- Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications Task Force (August 2020)
- Resilient Connecticut (May 2021)
- Regional Affordable Housing Plan (May 2021)
- Letters of Support

Letters of Support

WestCOG issues letters of support or letters of concurrence for municipal, private, and non-profit organizations for grant applications that are in alignment with the goals of the COG. In FY 2021, WestCOG issued 15 letters of support and consistency for:

- Brookfield, Danbury, Greenwich, New Canaan, Redding, Stamford: CTDOT Community Connectivity Grant Program, October 2020
- City of Norwalk, Safe Sidewalks Crossings and Trails, 4/8/2021
- Town of Redding, CTDEEP Brownfields Riverwalk Restoration Project, 4/15/2021

Photos of the Region

WestCOG began to host photos of the region on a FLICKR account in 2019. Images are organized by municipality. These photos are heavily leveraged in the drafting of WestCOG documents. The collection of photos is updated annually and made fully available for the public without restriction. Additional photos were added this year.

☆ [Photos of the Region FLICKR Page](#)

Regional Fee Schedule

User fees can be an important source of revenue for municipalities and help to reduce the burden on the property tax. However, information on fees is highly fragmented. To facilitate comparison and benchmarking among municipalities, and to provide an empirical basis to conversations about revenue diversification, WestCOG has developed a database of fees in the region and now is developing a repeatable system to maintain this dataset along with a site for communities to download and visualize the results. This project is expected to be fully operational in FY2022.

4 Transportation Planning

Metropolitan planning, including LRTP and TIP

WestCOG hosts two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which are federally mandated, designated and funded transportation policy-making organizations. These MPOs together comprise the WestCOG Board, in addition to transit representatives, the COG Executive Director, and the Connecticut Department of Transportation. MPO designations provide access to federal funds, both formula-based and discretionary grants. To access these funds, an MPO must develop and maintain a Long-Range Transportation (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The two MPOs functionally operate as one region, with joint and concurrent meetings and shared documents. The federal FY2021-2024 TIPs for both MPOs were endorsed on October 15, 2020. The TIPs for Western Connecticut are programmed to deliver over \$2.7 billion in transportation investment during the federal FY2021-2024 period across the region.

WestCOG also plays a role in identifying and selecting projects under federal and state programs. Staff have provided technical support in the solicitations for Congestion Management and Air Quality proposals, FTA Section 5310 applications, and corridor study applications.

Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

WestCOG's TAG comprises municipal planners, engineers, public works officials, transit district representatives, and COG staff. The TAG collaboratively reviews and evaluates proposals, making recommendations to the WestCOG Board. Examples of recent TAG initiatives include prioritizations for federal and state funded project solicitations, assistance with the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) program, and regional efficiencies, transportation performance management, TIP amendments, and other important regional efforts.

LOTCHIP and Regional Engineer

The Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTCHIP) provides funding for projects on roads throughout the region. WestCOG solicits and develops projects and programs funds.

COG involvement enables efficiency in project delivery, freeing State resources for other activities. Responsibilities include application and design review, with WestCOG's Regional Engineer giving programmatic and technical guidance to municipalities to advance and implement critical infrastructure projects. To date and notwithstanding budget uncertainty, WestCOG received over \$89 million in LOTCIP funding (state FY14-21). WestCOG has committed to funding 48 projects that are in various stages of project development, ranging from design to completion.

Municipal Transportation and Engineering Assistance

WestCOG provides technical assistance to the region. Assistance includes programmatic and funding guidance, engineering review, planning studies, and data analysis.

WestCOG conducted a qualifications-based procurement for municipal "on call" assignments and released a Task Based Transportation Engineering Services - Municipal Guide (available on WestCOG's Transportation Resources webpage). This process allows municipalities to draw from a pool of regionally prequalified consultants for transportation engineering services, providing an option to save time and expense in contracting.

Regional Data Collection Program

WestCOG installs temporary traffic cameras that collect up to 50 hours of traffic video for an intersection. Outputs include turning counts for pedestrians, bicycles, cars and heavy vehicles. This data is used in a wide range of analyses, including level of service (LOS), pedestrian and cyclist, intersection signal timing and capacity, traffic control type and signal coordination. In addition, WestCOG deploys radar counters to collect bidirectional volume, speed, and vehicle classification for up to four, mid-block lanes. This program provides cost savings for member municipalities through equipment sharing and by using trained WestCOG staff to conduct analyses. WestCOG conducted 7 turning movement counts this year that were used in project design and safety analysis for the municipalities in the region.

WestCOG has 3 trail counting infrared devices and a processing application. Staff has been providing on-going assistance at the Fairfield Hills Trail in Newtown since February 2020. Assistance includes data collection and analysis for use in future applications for funding and studies that would improve the heavily used trail. The trail counters were also used to monitor trail usage at select parks around the region and can be requested for specific studies by municipalities.

WestCOG also continued conducting quarterly utilization counts for commuter park-and-ride and rail station parking lots across the region. This data was made available to the public through an interactive web application which will be regularly updated with new data.

☆ [WestCOG Commuter Lot Explorer](#)

Regional Transportation Safety Plan

WestCOG worked with CTDOT and VN Engineers to develop a Regional Transportation Safety Plan (RTSP). In 2017, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) published the Connecticut Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) to guide the State in reducing injuries and fatalities along Connecticut roadways. The RTSP is in congruence with the Connecticut SHSP. It will serve as a road map and strategy to help the Western Connecticut Region and its 18 municipalities

collaborate with the State in reducing injury and fatal crashes. It will also serve to increase safety awareness and allow the member towns, cities, and the region to focus on their transportation safety issues. Both MPOs endorsed the RTSP at the June 17, 2021, meeting.

☆ [Regional Transportation Safety Plan](#)

Bicycle Planning

WestCOG is developing a Regional Bicycle Plan that will propose and advance a connected bicycle network in the region. The plan will build on the recommendations from existing studies and will support regional corridors that will become the “spine” of a nonmotorized transportation network. WestCOG staff conducted a feasibility analysis for a bicycle facility on West Avenue in Darien. Staff analyzed the geometry, speed, and volume constraints of the road. A technical memo was prepared for Darien outlining the findings of the analysis and providing general recommendations for consideration. The bike plan is anticipated for completion in FY2022.

Trail Planning and Technical Support

WestCOG has been inventorying and collecting data on trails and their use in the region. The data will be analyzed, and plans for trail connections between communities, public facilities, and parks and open space will be developed. Technical assistance is provided to municipalities and land trusts to determine trail alignments, grants, trail enhancements, and feasibility of multiuse trails. WestCOG communicates and coordinates with CTDOT, CT Trail Census, and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection on issues regarding trails in the region.

Transportation Advisory Committees

WestCOG actively participates in numerous transportation advisory committees, where members share insight and feedback on statewide planning efforts and local projects. This past year, WestCOG has supported:

- Connecticut Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board
- Connecticut Association for Community Transportation
- Strategic Highway Safety Plan Steering Committee
- Merritt Parkway Advisory Committee
- Danbury I-84 Project Advisory Committee
- Norwalk 7/15 Interchange Project Advisory Committee
- Metropolitan Area Planning Forum
- Multi-State Freight Working Group
- Multi-State Resiliency Working Group
- TRANSCOM
- Active Transportation Steering Committee
- Safety Circuit Rider Advisory Committee

Danbury and New Fairfield Route 37 Corridor Study

Federal funding through the Surface Transportation Block Grant was secured for the Danbury and New Fairfield Route 37 Corridor Study. The study’s purpose is to analyze physical and operational

characteristics of Route 37 and recommend future improvements in the corridor. The corridor is a portion of Route 37, from I-84 Exit 6 in Danbury to 0.2 mile north of Route 39 in New Fairfield. The major objectives of this study are to discover solutions to alleviate traffic congestion levels, improve pedestrian mobility, and to promote safety as well as healthy and environmentally friendly modes of transportation. The Corridor Study was completed in June 2021.

☆ [Danbury and New Fairfield Route 37 Corridor Study](#)

Rail Improvements - Value Capture

The United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Transportation Discretionary Grant Program is a unique opportunity for the DOT to invest in road, rail, transit, and port projects that promise to achieve national objectives. The BUILD program enables USDOT to use a rigorous merit-based process to select projects with exceptional benefits. WestCOG was awarded an USDOT federal FY21 BUILD grant to conduct a Danbury and New Canaan Branch Value Capture Study. The study will investigate the feasibility of using alternative funding mechanisms such as value capture as a tool to pay for infrastructure improvements on the branch lines, including potential electrification an extension of the Danbury branch northward to Brookfield and New Milford, which has been a longstanding regional goal. Staff have begun coordination with FTA on the grant administration process and expect to begin the study in 2022.

Rail Improvements - Quiet Zones

WestCOG has received approval from CTDOT to conduct the New Canaan Branch Noise Pollution Abatement Feasibility Study. If approved, a consultant will be hired to assist with this three-municipality effort (Stamford, New Canaan and Darien). This study would analyze existing rail line and grade crossing conditions, determine what infrastructure improvements may be required at specific grade crossings at which trains currently must sound their horns, and where it would be feasible to implement quiet zones in the vicinity of these crossings. If implemented, residents and other sensitive receptors (churches, schools, medical facilities) in the vicinity of the Branch would potentially benefit. This implementation study is the next step following a meeting on train horn noise held in Stamford by State Representative Matt Blumenthal in January 2020 which was attended by the CTDOT Commissioner and other area legislators, and residents who worked together to organize the event. Many members of the public attended this event and shared their concerns for disruptions to their quality of life due to train horns.

5 Environmental Planning

Zoning for Water Quality

Following an explosion in scientific evidence pointing to the importance of riparian buffers as a means to reduce nonpoint source pollutants, Public Act 21-29 expands the responsibility of zoning commissions in protecting the water quality of Long Island Sound from 24 coastal municipalities to all 169 municipalities of the state. In expanding local authority – and responsibility – over coastal water quality, the law requires broader development and implementation of zoning strategies to

control the discharge of a wide range of water pollutants – including “dead zone” causing nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus.

WestCOG issued a comprehensive report to assist municipalities in meeting this new mandate. The report includes an extensive survey of current regulations among Connecticut municipalities and in peer states in the area of water quality and provides sample regulations for consideration. WestCOG presented the report publicly and distributed it to potentially interested parties.

☆ [The Case for Riparian Corridor Protections: Zoning Strategies to Reduce Pollution of Inland Waters and Resultant Hypoxia of Long Island Sound](#)

Municipal Stormwater Support Service (MS4)

WestCOG provides MS4 compliance support services for interested municipalities in the region. This past year WestCOG performed a pilot study in Brookfield to develop a stormwater data collection process. The study surveyed 240 catch basins and mapped over 17,000 feet of drain line. WestCOG offers support for communities to set up their own data collection efforts. WestCOG is developing a website and resources to be hosted for municipalities to implement their own data collection program.

Open Space Inventory

WestCOG secured funding from The Nature Conservancy to develop an open space inventory with the intention to incentivize communities to utilize the data for the flood resiliency planning. Current inventories of open space are severely outdated and require substantial effort to update. Additionally, many open space inventories do not collect open space information with the detail necessary to document and verify properties within the FEMA’s Community Rating System (CRS) program, which gives discounts on flood insurance. The project will address this, creating a readily available and easily calculated estimate of CRS creditable open space in Western Connecticut and in Fairfield County. The plan is expected for completion in FY2022 and will include a process for regular updates.

Private Well Water Quality Testing Information

Recent USGS studies have highlighted widespread uranium and arsenic contamination in private wells, prompting concerns that homeowners with untested wells may have unsafe drinking water. WestCOG began a pilot program to create and share public information about the health impacts of drinking water contaminants, the importance and methods of testing, and treatment solutions for when contamination is found. The goal of the program is to protect health by ensuring all residents have easy and affordable access to well water testing services and remediation techniques. WestCOG collected and prepared information for a homeowner guide, which is set for release in late 2021 or early 2022.

Sustainable CT

WestCOG Hosted Sustainable CT Fellows Chadwick Schroeder and Hamsa Ganapathi for the 2020 Summer Session. WestCOG provides office space, resources, and professional development for the hosted Sustainable CT Fellows. The Fellows work with WestCOG municipalities to register

and engage within the Sustainable CT Program which provide recognition and access to grant funds towards sustainable activities. Sustainable CT Fellows also provide support for WestCOG.

In June 2021, the next summer session began and WestCOG welcomed a new set of Sustainable CT Fellows, Valentina Jimenez and Liam Ford.

Snowplow Routes in a Year of COVID

As the COVID pandemic influences our lives in a variety of ways. WestCOG developed newly designed snowplow optimization routes accounting for varying amounts of reduced workforce due to staff callouts. Scenarios for 20% and 50% staff reductions were developed. The results have been shared with public works directors of WestCOG member communities who requested this data.

Winter Maintenance Training

WestCOG hosted a training session on environment-friendly and cost-effective winter maintenance techniques. The session covered environmental impacts of chlorides, effects of weather, anti-icing materials, de-icing/plowing, pavement temperature and application rates, and record keeping, and included an equipment calibration demonstration. This training is recommended for public works directors, as well as snowplow drivers. A recording is available on WestCOG's YouTube channel.

☆ [Winter Maintenance Training](#)

6 Economic Development

Western Connecticut Economic Development District

The Western Connecticut Economic Development District (WCEDD) is a state and federally designated Economic Development District that serves regional economic interests for WestCOG's eighteen member communities. The WCEDD meets quarterly to provide economic insight for the COG and to pursue the goals outlined by the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (CEDS). An approved and unexpired CEDS is required to qualify regions and municipalities for federal economic development funds. WestCOG developed and adopted a CEDS in 2017. It received state approval that year 2017 and federal approval in 2018. The CEDS is updated annually.

☆ [WCEDD Annual Reports](#)

EDA Planning Partnership Program

WestCOG's WCEDD was awarded a Planning Partnership grant through the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The grant will provide annual funding to assist WestCOG in implementing and maintaining its CEDS. As part of the upkeep for this program WestCOG is required to maintain Annual Reports reflecting WCEDD performance.

EDA Awards CARES Act Funds

WestCOG applied through the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) for CARES Act funds to fund the continuation of Long-Term Recovery process, re-tooling of the CEDS to address economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and development of a regional strategy for broadband networks.

Next-Generation Regional Sector Partnership

In conjunction with the Stamford Partnership, WestCOG developed a partnership of “tech-enabled, data-dependent” businesses in southwestern Connecticut. The partnership is set to begin convening soon and will serve as a vehicle for businesses in this critical sector to address workforce and other competitiveness needs as a group, and in conjunction with institutions and organizations active in education, workforce development, and economic development.

7 Emergency Management

Through regional partnership, WestCOG works with the Department of Emergency and Homeland Security (DEMHS), member communities, and neighboring COGs to prepare and plan for regional emergency response and mitigation. WestCOG falls within two DEMHS planning regions, Region 1 and Region 5, and takes part in Steering and Full Committee meetings and advocates for its member communities.

Covid-19 Pandemic Response and Recovery

WestCOG continued to provide COVID-19 support during FY2021. WestCOG staff coordinated with DEMHS and their Long-Term Recovery Program, convened regular meetings of the region’s CEOs, and provided legal counsel to the region. These activities enabled the region’s municipalities to coordinate their response to the emergency, providing them with consistent information, vital advice, a process to identify matters of shared concern, and to elevate them where needed for state action. This cooperation also resulted in cost savings using shared (rather than duplicative) resources such as a single attorney.

Long-Term Recovery Committees in the areas of health and human services; business and jobs; finance and philanthropy; education and technology; and arts, culture, tourism, entertainment, and recreation produced an inventory of unmet needs. With the Unmet Needs Inventories developed WestCOG has transitioned its role with Long Term Recovery to focus on economic development.

WestCOG submitted a grant application via DECD to EDA to fund continuation and expansion of economic recovery work in calendar years 2021 and 2022. This grant was awarded and is described under Economic Development.

Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

WestCOG, along with its member municipalities, developed its first regional Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) for all eighteen members. This plan, which was developed from an extensive analysis and stakeholder consultation, identifies actions and strategies for communities to reduce impacts from various disaster scenarios. An HMP helps communities understand risks, take steps to reduce natural hazard impacts, and makes them eligible for certain FEMA funds.

Future HMP activities include the development of an ‘HMP Web Application’. When complete, the application will be an online, interactive tool that will help citizens to visualize the extent of the natural hazards detailed in the HMP. This will include vulnerability and risk assessment data from hurricanes, storm surge, riverine flooding, drought, and wildfires. The application will serve as an extension of WestCOG’s plan, allowing for engaged public activity.

Completion of the web application and adoption of the plan are expected for FY 2022.

☆ [Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan Update](#)

Resilient CT

WestCOG, together with MetroCOG, NVCOG, and SCRCOG, is working with UConn's Connecticut Institute for Resilience & Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) to identify coastal and flood-related needs, catalog projects, and develop detailed Resiliency Projects for each region. The timing for this effort is well aligned for WestCOG, which will be simultaneously developing their first region-wide Hazard Mitigation Plan. WestCOG will be working with CIRCA and partner COGs to coordinate efforts.

Emergency Service Function Transportation (ESF1)

As part of supporting the DEMHS regions, WestCOG coordinates with transportation planners from NHCOG, NVCOG, and MetroCOG to develop and strategize transportation planning issues related to emergency management functions across DEMHS Regions 1 and 5. ESF1 attempts to provide a planning function annually. This year Diversion Routing support was provided. CTDOT provided diversion route plans to WestCOG to verify with the Emergency Management Directors within the region. This task was accomplished for WestCOG's ten northern members, with work for the southern eight members waiting on receipt of the diversion routes from CTDOT.

8 Analytics

WestCOG provides regional web-based analytics, mapping services, technical support, and training for WestCOG member communities as well for WestCOG's own planning initiatives. In addition to the projects listed within this document tagged with GIS label, the following services are provided:

- Analysis Request
- Map Design Requests
- Data Visualization Requests
- [Public GIS Data Inventory](#)
- Large Scale Printing Services
- Automating WestCOG Work Processes
- Data Request

Additionally, WestCOG develops and maintains its own regional planning data sets either from scratch or through standardizing municipal datasets. Datasets created and maintained at WestCOG include:

- Parcels
- Zoning
- Wetlands
- Land use
- Planimetric and Imagery
- Canopy
- Critical Assets
- Building Footprints
- Pavement
- Intersections

Regional Parcel Data

Following [PA 18-175](#), WestCOG coordinates with municipalities to collect parcel data and Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal (CAMA) data in the spring of each year. As many of these datasets are unique to their municipality, a substantial level of effort is required to bring them into a regional format. WestCOG is developing processes to automate this effort to allow detailed property data

that includes CAMA features. This level of automation is expected in FY 2022. Further automation efforts would allow for automatic upload and transfer of CAMA data from municipal databases to WestCOG servers, which would allow for a near Realtime CAMA dataset.

GIS Outreach

WestCOG serves on the CT GIS Network Steering Committee and the CT GIS Network Standards Subcommittee. In this capacity WestCOG develops partnerships and standards to connect GIS datasets across regions and for the state. The GIS network offers excellent exposure and networking to state regional and local partners.

Property Data Report – State Standard

Through the CTGIS network WestCOG works with OPM, CAMA vendors, and COG staff to develop a standardized schema for CAMA reports provided by assessors. The standardized report will allow assessors across the state to provide the same standardized report for each municipality regardless of their CAMA vendor. This will allow COGs and the public to have a readily available and repeatable inventory of property data. The standard is near completion and is expected to be ready for the May 2022 Property Data Collection.

Zoning Data Schema Standard

WestCOG appointed an intern, Peter O'Donnell, to develop a Regional Zoning Standard. This approach defines Residential zones by property size, commercial zones by density, and accounts for mixed use and special use zoning. This Draft Zoning Layer is available on WestCOG's Data Page.

Commuting Patterns in WestCOG

WestCOG created an interactive web map to illustrate broad dynamics in where residents choose to live and work within the region. This application was created with data acquired from the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program of the United States Census Bureau and represents the most recently available data within this product (2018).

☆ [Live-Work Dynamics Web Map](#)

Regional Data Hub

WestCOG created a Data Hub website where our GIS data can be stored and more easily accessed by the public. The HUB expands options within our data archive as it allows users to link with data directly or even explore the data even if they do not have access to GIS software (by using the built-in web viewers). WestCOG will continue to transition data resources onto the HUB site.

☆ WestCOG Data HUB

Demographics and Housing Analysis

WestCOG collected and presented data on demographics and housing in response to requests from COG members and legislators. The studies looked at population growth trends, zoning practices vs unzoned municipalities, Property tax burdens, and affordable housing. The collection of

housing and demographics analyses, visualizations, and videos can be found on WestCOG's Housing and Demographics page. Projects completed this FY include.

- Zoning Comparison Analysis
- State of Housing in Western CT
- Connecticut Property Tax Analysis
- Population Growth Analysis
- Residential Patterns and Trends by Race in The Northeast and The Nation
- Affordable Housing by the Numbers.

☆ [Demographics and Housing Website](#)

9 Recommendations for Legislative Action

In WestCOG's view, the following recommendations would advance service sharing and delivery cost savings. These are largely carried over from last year's report, but where legislative action has been taken, it is so demarked.

Expand opportunity through hybrid learning during normal times

The innovations produced in response to COVID-19 should not be lost when life returns to normal. Hybrid learning presents an innovative opportunity to expand educational opportunity at low cost. It can allow districts to offer a greater range of subjects than is possible in person (e.g., Chinese); home schoolers to use professional educators in subjects in which they may feel less comfortable (e.g., advanced STEM); and students who learn better with technology to be more fully integrated into education. Students regardless of district should have access to a catalog of online courses that are treated equivalent to in-person courses with respect to academic credit and requirements. In addition to high school courses, courses offered by universities and (community) colleges could be offered to capable students online.

New for 2021: PA 21-2 (the budget implementer) requires the state to establish a commission to study remote learning and to plan to implement a statewide remote school. Positive as these developments are, they will underdeliver on their potential if they fail to consider the remote and hybrid learning as a means to provide opportunity for learning individualized to students' needs, aptitudes, and interests beyond what traditional, in-person can feasibly offer.

Make the sharing of noneducational services the default

Municipal governments and municipal school districts can and have realized savings through the sharing of noneducation services, e.g., finance, HR, IT, facilities maintenance. However, examples remain the exception rather than the rule. This is because service sharing is legally an 'opt-in': services are not shared unless both parties agree. Reversing this assumption, so that intermunicipal sharing of noneducation services is required unless both the municipal legislative body and municipal school board agree not to, would accelerate service consolidation and deliver savings. Noneducation service sharing should be the default. (Require an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in'.)

Consolidate special districts

The 446 special districts in Connecticut greatly outnumber the 169 municipalities in the state. Some have outlived their original purpose, to provide a service that the host municipality did not (e.g., fire protection); others exist because state law does not allow municipalities to vary mill rates by district or taxpayer to account for differences in service level (e.g., public water and sewer vs. private well and septic). In some cases, a public service may be split among several independent taxing districts in a municipality. To reduce administrative duplication, and improve efficiency, municipalities should be empowered, at their discretion, to absorb noneducational special districts they host, or to compel the districts to merge; to facilitate this, all municipalities should be enabled to set different tax rates to reflect differences in service provision.

New for 2021: Special Act 21-12 begins to address this by studying the consolidation of fire districts.

Develop a municipal master agreement for service sharing

Legal, contractual, and logistical questions that attend efforts at service sharing often result in those efforts falling apart. Development and adoption of a master agreement that would a) act as a framework for service sharing, b) lay out a process to establish and govern sharing arrangements, c) cover the range of municipal services, and d) be authoritatively and definitively vetted with respect to Connecticut law would decrease the complexity and uncertainty of service sharing, increasing the number, breadth, and impact of projects that make it to completion.

Enable regional approaches in state mandates

Many of the mandates that are required of municipalities lend may be more efficiently met on a regional basis. These include, for instance, collection of vital statistics, issuance of dog licenses, and development of affordable housing plans. While state law enables municipalities to perform any of these functions jointly through a COG, whether such an arrangement would be deemed to satisfy a mandate is a gray area. Clarifying that municipalities may satisfy a range of mandates through collective action would enable more regional and share approaches.

Devolve administration of more state grants to the COGs along the lines of LOTCIP

The Local Transportation Improvement Program (LoTCIP), which delegates project selection and oversight to the COGs, has been a success, delivering projects faster and more efficiently than earlier, state-run programs. Other programs, including in the area of transportation, may benefit from a regional approach and should be considered for devolution to the COGs.

Allow specific changes to municipal charters with regard to regionalism, without opening the entire charter for revision

Some charters contain language that impedes service sharing. While this language may be addressed through charter revision, the cost, complexity, and unpredictability of the process often means that the language persists. Municipalities should be able to amend specific sections of their charter without opening the entire charter for review.

10 Expenditure of Regional Services Grant funds

WestCOG utilizes its Regional Services Grant (RSG) funds in accordance with its approved RSG Spending Plan, the state fiscal year 2021 version of which is summarized below. WestCOG is on track to carry out its RSG Spending Plan for state fiscal year 2022 within the fiscal year, assuming no interruptions to funding or process.

Activity	Cost
Municipal technical assistance, non-pandemic related	\$132,479.00
Strategic development	\$110,944.00
Regional animal control	\$90,411.00
Regional waste management	\$88,232.00
Regional economic development	\$66,732.00
Regional IT/systems architecture	\$11,558.00
Regional land use	\$77,222.00
COVID-19 response	\$31,128.00
Annual Report	\$3,609.00
Direct charges	\$43,048.00
TOTAL	\$655,363.00