The Sharing Economy among towns.

INNOVATIVE IDEAS: REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR A MORE VIABLE CONNECTICUT

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities
Dear CCM Member,

We are pleased to present Innovative Ideas: Regional Cooperation for a More Viable Connecticut. From airbnb to zipcar, the Sharing Economy is rapidly redefining business models across industries. It is an economic model in which individuals are able to borrow or rent assets owned by someone else. The sharing economy model is most likely to be used when the price of a particular asset is high and the asset is not fully utilized all the time. Translating these concepts to local government can save municipalities and their property taxpayers money. Sharing both the costs and benefits of equipment, programs, and studies with neighboring towns makes each stronger than they are alone.

Some ideas are reprinted from Connecticut Town & City, the bi-monthly magazine of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), others have been obtained from Councils of Government (COGs).

Connecticut Town & City developed these stories from many sources, including visits to Connecticut municipalities; suggestions from municipal officials; newspapers and magazines in Connecticut and other states; publications of the National League of Cities; and publications of other state municipal leagues. We would be happy to hear from readers about any ideas we should publish in the future.

This publication provides just a sampling of the innovative, effective and cost-saving regional partnerships among towns and cities in Connecticut. If you know of other interesting regional partnerships, please forward information on them to our Director of Communications, Kevin Maloney at (203) 498-3025 or kmaloney@ccm-ct.org.

Good Reading!

Joe DeLong,
CCM Executive Director

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The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) has long been committed to working with towns and cities regionally to help municipal leaders run their communities more effectively and efficiently. A wide range of regional initiatives take place across the state in 2015 -- and have for past decades -- that save property taxpayers money while providing municipal services more efficiently to enhance community life.

CCM has consistently supported voluntary measures for towns -- through state legislation, local ordinances and regional agreements -- to work together regionally to save sparse resources, while providing better quality services.

As many Connecticut citizens are aware, towns have a long history of working together regionally on everything from economic development, equipment sharing, and police and emergency services; to waste water treatment, education services, health programs, social services and many other core programs for residents and businesses.

Here are just a few examples of local option efforts to support these regional programs:

Allowing towns to work together regionally on any service that a town government provides alone. CCM championed this statute, which enables two or more municipalities to jointly perform any function that each municipality may perform separately by entering into an interlocal agreement.

More recently, legislation passed that allows an agreement between municipalities to share revenue received for payment of property taxes. The chief elected officials of two or more towns may initiate a process for municipalities to enter into an agreement to share revenues received for payment of real and personal property taxes.

Legislation also exists for a negotiated agreement to promote regional economic development and share tax revenue from new economic development. The chief elected officials of two or more municipalities that are members of the same economic development district may enter into an agreement to promote regional economic development and share the real and personal property tax revenue from new economic development.

The Regional Performance Incentive Program is a piece of legislation strongly backed by CCM. Grant proposals can now be submitted by any Council of Government (COG), any two or more municipalities acting through a COG, or any economic development district. The goal is to encourage municipalities to jointly participate in projects that will produce measurable “economies of scale” that will benefit the municipalities providing desired or required services and lowering the costs and tax burden related to providing those services.

The next frontier for expansion of regional cooperation efforts is often between boards of education in neighboring towns and inter-municipal cooperation between the board of education and the general government in one community. Cooperative efforts for positions in finance, public works, parks and recreation, and information technology are a few examples. CCM has always supported efforts towards local officials’ long-advocated desire for meaningful cost savings -- savings that can be achieved without sacrificing high-quality public education.

Local officials appreciate efforts towards regionalization of education, as education expenses account for the vast majority of municipalities’ budgets. CCM serves as a clearinghouse of information for general government and local boards of education, and is eager and willing to partner for examining ways to achieve efficiencies.

CCM hosted a workshop at CCM’s 2015 Annual Convention on the “ABCs of Regional Collaboration for Towns and School Districts” in collaboration with the Capital Region Education Council. This workshop focused on latest and best practices for replicating existing regional programs, participating in low-risk opportunities that can be quickly implemented, and strategizing for long-term successful collaboration. The workshop also provided an opportunity for towns to assess their “regional collaboration score,” and better understand how to develop a regionalization plan to save money and provide greater services.

Time-tested and successful regional models for education and general government will continue to provide for cost-efficient return on investments for Connecticut residents and businesses for years to come. And CCM’s advocacy efforts have played -- and will continue to play -- a key role in a variety of legislative changes to further open up voluntary new steps for regional and inter-municipal cooperation across Connecticut.
Existing state statutes enabling regional cooperation

summarized below are a number of examples of existing state laws that enable municipalities to enter into either regional or inter-municipal agreements for myriad purposes, such as to pursue economic development, regional and charter schools, and municipal shared services jointly.

CGS Section 7-148cc - Joint performance of municipal functions.

Two or more municipalities may jointly perform any function that each municipality may perform separately under any provisions of the general statutes or of any special act, charter or home rule ordinance by entering into an interlocal agreement pursuant to sections 7-339a to 7-339l, inclusive. As used in this section, “municipality” means any municipality, as defined in section 7-187, any district, as defined in section 7-324, any metropolitan district or any municipal district created under section 7-330 and located within the state of Connecticut.

CGS Section 7-148bb - Agreement between municipalities to share revenue received for payment of property taxes.

Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes or any special act, municipal charter or home rule ordinance, the chief elected officials of two or more municipalities may initiate a process for such municipalities to enter into an agreement to share revenues received for payment of real and personal property taxes. The agreement shall be prepared pursuant to negotiations and shall contain all provisions on which there is mutual agreement between the municipalities, including, but not limited to, specification of the tax revenues to be shared, collection and uses of such shared revenue. The agreement shall establish procedures for amendment, termination and withdrawal. The negotiations shall include an opportunity for public participation. The agreement shall be approved by each municipality that is a party to the agreement by resolution of the legislative body. As used in this section “legislative body” means the council, commission, board, body or town meeting, by whatever name it may be known, having or exercising the general legislative powers and functions of a municipality and “municipality” means any town, city or borough, consolidated town and city or consolidated town and borough.

CGS Section 7-148kk - Negotiated agreement to promote regional economic development and share tax revenue from new economic development.

The chief elected officials of two or more municipalities that are members of the same federal economic development district, established under 42 USC 3171, may initiate a process for such municipalities to enter into an agreement to promote regional economic development and share the real and personal property tax revenue from new economic development. Such agreement shall provide that the municipalities agree not to compete for new economic development and shall specify the types of new economic development projects subject to the agreement. The agreement shall also have terms providing for (1) identification of areas for (A) new economic development, (B) open space and natural resource preservation, and (C) transit-oriented development, including housing; (2) capital improvements, including the shared use of buildings and other capital assets; (3) regional energy consumption, including strategies for cooperative energy use and development of distributive generation and sustainable energy projects; and (4) promotion and sharing of arts and cultural assets.

CGS Section 4-124s, as amended by Section 253 of Public Act 13-247 - Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP)

Grant proposals may be submitted by any Council of Governments (COG) in Connecticut, any two or more municipalities acting through a COG, any economic development district(s) or any combination thereof. An individual municipality may only submit a proposal for funding to connect to the Nutmeg Network. The goal of RPI is to encourage municipalities to jointly participate in projects that will produce measurable “economies of scale” that will benefit the municipalities providing desired or required services and lowering the costs and tax burden related to providing those services.

CGS Section 7-148kkk, Public Act 09-231 - Regionalism

This legislation authorizes chief elected officials of two or more municipalities that are members of the same federal economic development district, established under 42 USC 3171 to initiate a process to enter into mutual agreement to: (1) promote regional economic development and (2) share the real and personal property tax revenue from new economic development. The agreement shall: (1) specify that municipalities agree not to compete for new economic development and (2) specify the types of new economic development projects subject to the terms of the agreement.

CGS Section 2, Public Act 09-60 - Municipal option to Delay Revaluations, and Annual Adjustments in Property Values

Section 2 of this act authorizes any two or more towns to enter into an agreement to establish a regional revaluation program. Towns participating in such an agreement must provide for the revaluation of all parcels of real property encompassed within such towns at the same time and not less than once every five years, or must annually revalue approximately one-fifth of all such parcels over a five-year period. The act specifically allows a regional planning organization to be the coordinating agency to oversee a regional revaluation program.

CGS Section 7-136n - Joint issuance of bonds by two or more municipalities

This statute authorizes two or more municipalities to jointly issue bonds at their discretion, subject to the approval of the legislative body of each municipality. These bonds can be issues for the purposes of paying all or any part of the cost of any project or activity, including acquisition of necessary land and equipment therefore, entered into jointly.

CGS Section 7-137 - Regional economic development commissions

The statute authorizes any two or more towns, cities or boroughs having economic development commissions to join in the formation of a regional economic development commission. The area of jurisdiction of the regional commission shall be coterminal with the area of the municipalities so joining. The economic development commissions of the municipalities comprising the regional commission shall jointly determine the membership of the regional commission. A regional commission shall have the same duties and authority, in respect to its area of jurisdiction, as a municipal commission has in respect to the municipality.

CGS Section 7-148bb - Agreement between municipalities to share revenue received for payment of property taxes

On The Books

agreement to promote regional economic development, including acquisition of necessary land and equipment therefore, entered into jointly.

Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP)

The goal of RPI is to encourage municipalities to jointly participate in projects that will produce measurable “economies of scale” that will benefit the municipalities providing desired or required services and lowering the costs and tax burden related to providing those services.
This statute authorizes the chief executive officers of two or more towns, cities, or boroughs to negotiate an agreement to share real and personal property tax revenue. The public must have an opportunity to participate during the negotiation process. Each participating municipality's legislative body must approve the agreement by resolution. The agreement must contain all of the provisions on which the municipalities agree and procedures for amending, terminating, and withdrawing from it. The provisions can identify the tax revenue to be shared and collection and distribution mechanisms. Municipalities can enter these agreements notwithstanding other state laws, charters, or home rule ordinances.

**CGS Section 7-148cc - Joint performance of municipal functions**

This statute authorizes two or more municipalities to “jointly perform any function that each municipality may perform separately”. Each municipality is required to approve the agreement for joint action in the same manner as provided for the approval of an ordinance. The terms of each agreement shall establish a process for withdrawal from such agreement and shall require that the agreement be reviewed at least once every five years by the body that approved the agreement to assess the effectiveness of such agreement in enhancing the performance of the function that is the subject of the agreement.

**CGS Section 7-277a - Police Assistance Agreements**

This statute authorizes two or more municipalities to enter into an agreement for the temporary assignment of police personnel from one municipality to another. The agreement allows the chief executive officer of a participating municipality to request assistance from other participating towns when he or she determines it to be necessary “to protect the safety or well-being of his municipality.” For example, East Windsor and its neighboring municipalities (South Windsor, Manchester, East Hartford, Coventry, Glastonbury, Windsor, Hartford and the Connecticut State Police) have entered into an agreement to cooperate on mutual police assistance.

**CGS Sections 7-333 through 7-339 – Metropolitan Districts**

A Metropolitan District is a regional body formed when a central city establishes a relationship with any number of municipalities within the metropolitan area for the performance of any function, service or work that each municipality can perform on its own. Metropolitan districts are formed by a vote of the legislative bodies of participating municipalities or by the petition of the electors of those municipalities. Such a district may adopt a charter establishing its powers, duties, and means of financing. It is governed by a commission consisting of five to fifteen members selected by the legislative bodies of the participating municipalities.

**CGS Section 7-339a through 7-339i - Inter-local Agreements**

Chapter 105 of the Connecticut General Statutes authorizes public agencies to develop and implement inter-local agreements to provide for a number of shared services, equipment and other assets. The legislative body of any public agency may vote to enter into an inter-local agreement with any other public agency. Such action may be taken after a proposed agreement is submitted to the legislative body of each potential participating member and a public hearing is conducted. Once the legislative bodies have approved an agreement, an Inter-Local Advisory Board comprised of representatives from each of the participating agencies is formed. Agreements may provide for the contracting of services, personnel, and equipment between or among participating agencies, and must include certain specified provisions, such as cost sharing, the resolution of disputes and the receipt of state or federal funds.

**CGS Section 8-139 - Joint action by two or more municipalities**

This statute authorizes the legislative bodies of two or more municipalities to: (a) create a regional or metropolitan planning agency and to authorize such agency or the planning agency of any of such municipalities to make a comprehensive or general plan of the area included with in such municipalities as described in section 8-127, and (b) exercise the powers granted in this chapter to the legislative body of any municipality. In all matters under this chapter requiring the approval of the legislative body, such approval shall be by the legislative body of each municipality only as to the portions of the redevelopment plan situated in such municipality.

**CGS Section 8-169j - Joint activity by two or more municipalities**

This statute authorizes two or more contiguous municipalities to enter into an agreement for the purpose of jointly carrying out a community development activity. Such an agreement may include provisions for furnishing municipal services to the project and sharing costs of and revenues from the project, including property taxes and rental receipts. The statute also authorizes each municipality that is a party to the agreement to make appropriations and levy taxes and issue bonds in accordance with current laws.

**CGS Section 8-196 - Joint projects**

Any two or more municipalities by vote of their respective legislative bodies may, through their respective development agencies, jointly initiate a development project where the project area is to be in one or more of such towns, and after approval by the commissioner of the project plan therefore if any state aid is to be requested under section 8-190 or 8-195, enter into, and thereafter amend, an agreement for the purposes of jointly carrying out the project plan through their respective development agencies, which agreement may include provisions for furnishing municipal services to, and sharing costs of, and revenues, including property tax and rental receipts, from, the development project. A proposed form of the agreement to be entered into by such towns shall be included as part of the project plan. In furtherance of its obligations under such an agreement, each town which is a party thereto may make appropriations and levy taxes in accordance with the provisions of the general statutes and may issue bonds in accordance with section 8-192.

**CGS Section 32-224(f) - Provisions of joint municipal development projects**

This statute authorizes the implementing agencies of two or more municipalities, after approval by each municipality’s legislative body, to jointly initiate a development project if the project area is to be located in one or more of such municipalities. After approval by the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development of the development plan for an y project for which state aid is to be requested under CGS Section 32-223, such implementing agencies may enter into and amend an agreement to jointly carry out the development plan. Such an agreement may include provisions for furnishing municipal services to the project and sharing costs of and revenues from the project, including property tax and rental receipts.

The development plan shall include a proposed form of the agreement to be entered into by the municipalities. Each municipality which is a party to an agreement may make appropriations and levy taxes in accordance with the provisions of the general statutes and may issue bonds in accordance with CGS Section 32-227 to further its obligations under the agreement.
What the State Can Do to Foster Regionalism

- Develop model regional cooperation codes for municipalities that can pass legal muster. This would encourage towns and cities to engage in regional cooperation efforts and help them avoid legal and other pitfalls when establishing ordinances and reaching agreements.

- Increase state financial and other incentives for cost-effective intermunicipal and regional cooperation. While the 2015 General Assembly enacted and allocated $3 million in FY13, and $7 million thereafter to Councils of Government (COGs) for regional service grants (COGs would have to submit a spending plan for the funding to OPM in order to receive a grant), this amount is not enough to foster concerted regionalism. Such investments would pay more than four-fold in dividends to municipalities – and the State.

- Empower Councils of Government (COGs) to:
  - deliver services on a regional basis; and
  - make land use decisions on regionally-significant projects.

- Reinvest in planning and technical assistance capacity at OPM to assist COGs and municipalities in collaborative efforts.

- Strengthen collaborations with partners to enhance the ability of the Connecticut Education Network, the “Nutmeg Network”, to provide essential high speed Internet access and data transport to, among others, towns and cities at affordable rates.

- Eliminate the red tape and bureaucratic obstacles with state entities that thwart municipalities’ ability to engage in regional cooperation efforts.

- Make greater staffing investments in entities like the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR). ACIR previously had the staffing wherewithal to publish important documents like a compendium of all significant regional cooperation efforts by towns and cities. This publication gave municipalities and the State examples of successful regional efforts that could be emulated across the State.
The 17 member towns that make up the RiverCOG are involved with a variety of regional cost-effective initiatives that leverage the expertise and resources throughout the expansive Connecticut River Valley region, including one idea that involves a popular tourist attraction.

A study conducted earlier this year explores possible expanded uses for the 21.7 mile-long Connecticut Valley Railroad Park in addition to the Essex Steam Train. The 300-acre park runs between Old Saybrook and Middletown. The train carries tourists along the lower 13 miles from Haddam to Old Saybrook. One of the most successful tourist trains in the nation, the Essex Steam Train drew 160,000 riders in 2014. The study, which will be used in long-term planning, looked at extending the tourist train nine miles, adding passenger and/or freight rail and adding a multi-use recreational along the least developed portions. COG officials emphasize that the study is just that – an opportunity to explore ideas.

“The goal of this thing was to give the COG board policy for long range planning documents,” said Jeremy DeCarli, RiverCOG associate regional planner. “Obviously, there's no project at hand so nothing's going to be built anytime soon.”

Some of the ideas drew mixed reaction. Officials say there is strong opposition to freight rail and interest in developing a multi-use trail in Haddam.

In other RiverCOG activities, officials support a study that analyzes the economic value of non-market amenities in the region. The first study of its type in the state, it provides a baseline analysis and program to understand the economic value of the region's substantial tourism based attractions.

A sub-regional statutory “Gateway Commission” is helping to protect the environmental and scenic resources and economic value for the lower Connecticut River Valley. Made up of eight member towns, the commission receives administrative and fiduciary support from RiverCOG.

The Municipal Technical Assistance Program is a new shared service program providing member towns with support services which include but are not limited to: auxiliary zoning or planning support, editing, AICP support, economic development assistance, geospatial mapping, workshop planning and comprehensive plan support. The program augments a member town’s workforce and work program with affordable temporary or short-term assistance. It is particularly helpful to smaller towns with limited staff.

Another area where the RiverCOG has successfully facilitated regional consensus is in the Regional Land Trust Exchange, an association of all thirteen land trusts in the region as well as the town of Salem. The Exchange is an informal organization organized and staffed to provide shared services and cost saving measures to member towns, conservation commissions, and particularly their local land trusts. This program has been an invaluable support program to local land trusts and conservation commissions which do not have staff support to conduct research into best practices for stewardship, preservation techniques and mapping.

The Exchange is currently working towards formalizing their association and exploring the idea of the COG providing back office support to the land trusts and other volunteer organizations such as fire departments and ambulance.

Additional RiverCOG initiatives either ongoing or under review include economic development, animal control, a geospatial database, a regional agricultural commission, a household hazardous waste program, natural hazards mitigation plans and emergency management.
Cooperative Capitol Region

CRCOG has history of regional collaboration

With a history of more than 30 years of collaboration on a wide range of projects to benefit individual member-towns and the region as a whole, the Capitol Region Council of Government has long recognized that the strength of the region is directly tied to the strength of each of its municipalities.

And while regional cooperation has recently become an issue whose time has come, CRCOG has initiated a number of cooperative services that have been saving its members time and money for years, including purchasing, permitting, planning and more:

In 2010, CRCOG launched its first regional E-Government system, the CRCOG Regional Online Permitting System (www.viewmypermitct.org). Funded in part by a state grant, CRCOG contracted with a GIS contractor to build a first-of-its-kind-in-Connecticut regional permitting system that is completely web-based.

Currently, 17 towns use the system and several others are due to come online soon. The system was specifically developed for the needs of Connecticut municipalities and features many time-saving functions, such as a direct link to the State Department of Consumer Protection’s license database. The system is accessible by the public and by government employees from any web browser.

Residents and contractors can take advantage of 24/7 access to permit applications and track the progress of their projects. Local government employees can enjoy the fully automated back-end tracking system to streamline their review processes, enter data from the field and manage various kinds of permits.

The Capitol Region Purchasing Council (CRPC) is a voluntary purchasing cooperative serving over 100 municipalities, boards of education, and public agencies within the Capitol Region -- and beyond -- that has provided services to member-towns for forty-seven years. It functions as a supplemental procurement office for its member municipalities and as a central clearinghouse for the collection and distribution of purchasing-related information and expertise.

CRPC’s cooperative bidding is facilitated by a streamlined, web-based bidding system that is secure and automated and allows CRPC and its members to manage all competitive and other procurement processes on the Internet. No special software on members’ computers is needed.

The Municipal Services Department also convenes the CRCOG Municipal Services Committee which helps towns and cities save tax dollars and enhance operating efficiencies. In 2010, CRCOG made Municipal Services a separate functional department. Municipal Services now encompasses three distinct functions within CRCOG: Municipal Service Sharing (including Solid Waste Activities), the Capitol Region Purchasing Council (above) and the CRCOG IT Services Cooperative.

The Municipal Services Department also convenes the CRCOG Human Services Coordinating Council which is comprised of First Selectmen and Mayors, Town Managers, and other municipal officials responsible for the administration of local governments. Committee representatives are appointed by the Mayors and First Selectmen of CRCOG member municipalities.

The Committee meets monthly and under the auspices of the Policy Board, provides programming direction to CRCOG staff in support of the Municipal Services mission. As required, the membership appoints sub-committees to assist in its work.

Building on its strong history of utilizing the Nutmeg Network for member communities, the Capital Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) has identified a number of new opportunities ripe for regional success.

The timing couldn’t be any better. The recent COG consolidation that resulted from the work done by the state’s Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies (M.O.R.E) Commission means towns and cities are working together now more than ever.
The Connecticut Metropolitan Council of Governments is pursuing regional solutions to a number of diverse municipal challenges including:

**Brownfields Assessment and Cleanup** - Metro COG’s Brownfields Working Group, an advisory committee made up of municipal representatives, has helped secure federal and state funds for planning, assessment and cleanup of the region’s brownfields. More than $50,000 has supported environmental assessments of five sites in three towns and $290,000 is committed to remediate two sites.

**Project Management** - Metro COG provides assistance with grant administration, transportation planning studies, and project development for projects that frequently have a regional component, such as a long-term strategic plan for an optimized transit system or an engineering study to identify transportation improvements along a corridor shared by two towns. In addition to transportation planning, Metro COG is assisting municipalities with conservation planning. An Urban Tree Canopy assessment and a Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan are benefiting all Metro COG communities.

**GIS Webviewer** - Provides regularly updated, high quality parcel and aerial data to residents, businesses, and state and local staff, as well as direct access to Vision Appraisal field cards and FEMA Flood Hazard maps. The webviewer is part of the support for local economic development departments, which has also included the purchase of ESRI’s Business Analyst and the implementation of a site selection application. Through Metro COG’s Geographic Technical Advisory Committee (GTAC), member municipalities provide guidance and technical assistance. Costs related to the initial hardware, software, data collection and development were entirely funded by a 2012 Regional Performance Incentive Program grant and the GTAC continues to guide the program.

**Coastal Resiliency Initiative** - Recommended by the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan and funded through a National Fish and Wildlife grant, the Metro COG is partnering with the South Central Regional Council of Governments to strengthen the coastal resiliency of the two regions’ ten coastal municipalities. This initiative will plan for and assess the resiliency of the coastline, identify green infrastructure projects, and develop designs for the priority projects.
Bigger Umbrella
WCCOG finding savings, efficiencies for more member towns

WCCOG was created out of the January 1 merger of the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA) and the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO) and now includes 18 municipalities in the western part of the state. This year WCCOG wanted to ensure that their member municipalities maintain eligibility for FEMA funding by updating Hazardous Mitigation Plans (HMP). The preparation of HMPs had begun by SWRPA and HVCEO before the merger for their respective regions using grant contracts through the state’s Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS).

Those contracts have now been successfully reassigned to WCCOG. Council officials also unanimously supported a resolution that extended the performance periods for both grant agreements “to allow sufficient time for the preparation, review and approval of HMPs by CT DEMHS and FEMA.”

WCCOG has also formed several technical advisory groups that collaborate on a variety of initiatives including transportation and public works. Member officials say the groups have played a key role in the Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTCIP).

Cost savings are being realized through a Regional GIS Service Program and Data Delivery to all 18 municipalities – and through an initiative that enhances coordination among the transit districts and includes input from municipalities, stakeholders, and the public.

Quality of life issues continue to be important issues that can be tackled with a regional approach. WCCOG notes that its municipal officials and non-profits have formed a Regional Opioid Abuse Prevention Task Force with the intent to combat drug abuse and drug-related deaths. The group discusses ways to improve policy at both the state and local levels and has plans to create an action plan that is data driven.

Built for Success
Naugatuck Valley COG off to fast start on shared services

A top, shared priority in the Naugatuck Valley that is particularly well-suited to a regional approach is the reclamation of Brownfield sites since many Valley towns – like much of the Northeast part of the country – are still dealing with the environmental legacies of their industrial pasts.

The Naugatuck Valley Regional Brownfields Partnership (RBP), an association of municipalities and community organizations hosted by the NVCOG that favors context-sensitive approaches to brownfield remediation, has recently expanded to encompass 27 cities and towns in west central Connecticut.

The RBP provides municipalities with historic and technical reviews, grant preparation services, project management, and environmental expertise. More than 20 projects have been completed over the past 18 months, including environmental site assessments and cleanups in 12 municipalities.

Another important regional initiative underway in the Valley is the Naugatuck River Greenway, a planned 44-mile multi-purpose trail following the Naugatuck River from Torrington to Derby.

When complete, the Greenway will link 11 municipalities, reclaim the Naugatuck River for recreation, provide an alternate mode of transportation and drive tourism and economic development.

The Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee is hosted by the NVCOG. Several sections of the greenway have been completed and progress is underway to complete the remaining sections. The Committee and the NVCOG are working on an economic impact study to determine the economic benefits of future trail construction, and Watertown and Thomaston recently received State funding for both design work and construction of a new section of trail.

Other regional approaches include the formation of a Transportation Technical Advisory Committee comprised of public works officials to evaluate the needs and merits of transportation projects, and the Waterbury Area Transit Study which will use stakeholder input to identify ways to improve local bus service. The study will consider new routes, destinations, hours of service, improved waiting areas, and more.
Pedestrians, cyclists and commuters will have plenty to say about getting around Litchfield County and municipal officials are giving them ample time and avenues to say it.

The Northwest Hills Council of Government is polling residents and businesses through the end of the year on their wants and needs for transportation priorities through the unique 21-town region. The survey is one of the early steps of NHCOG’s comprehensive Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that will help guide future transportation decisions. Officials say the plan will consider all modes of travel – auto, biking, walking and public transit.

Revitalizing rail – specifically replacing tracks of the Housatonic Railroad – was something that had been on the radar for a while among the nine-towns that made up the former smaller COG, which merged in January with a dozen neighboring towns to become the NHCOG. Earlier this year, NHCOG leaders signed a letter of support to the Governor to include the Housatonic Railroad in the state’s long-term transportation plans.

“We’re just trying to make sure that when the governor is thinking about his 30-year transportation plan that he doesn’t forget these 37 miles of track, which are over 100 years old and are currently serving local employers,” NHCOG staff member Joyce Ayer said.

NHCOG officials say the RTP will shape the vision and priorities of the region and help secure funding to make it all happen. In addition to an online survey that can be accessed through NHCOG’s Web site, stakeholder comment will be solicited through a number of public forums on specific topics.

The first forum will address overall transit options throughout the NHCOG region. A separate forum will then be held on the Housatonic Railroad and the possibility of increasing passenger service. Bicyclists and pedestrians can weigh in during a third forum to discuss existing trails and future trail networks. Finally, after a draft plan has been developed, officials will hold a forum to invite comments on the plan’s findings.

Transportation is one top regional priority but NHCOG coordinates and administers many successful programs and projects of regional interest. By sharing the cost of the services regionally rather than each town taking on the full cost themselves, towns in the region achieve significant ongoing cost savings on services that include:

- Public Works Equipment Cooperative
- Regional Household Hazardous Waste Days coordination
- Regional Cooperative Purchasing Program
- Foundation for Community Health Prescription Assistance Program administration
- NW Corner Fuel Bank administration
- Staff support for NWCT Regional Housing Council and Housatonic River Commission

NHCOG also works on economic development issues in collaboration with the region’s economic development and planning agencies, as well as the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce. In 2013 the Northwest Connecticut Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy was completed including a specific action plan to guide improvements in economic conditions in northwest Connecticut over the next five years.
To make progress toward energy independence, save on electricity costs, and make the environment cleaner, 14 Connecticut towns are taking it to the streets, one house at a time.

Energy conservation begins at home. That’s the message of the Neighbor to Neighbor Energy Challenge – a three-year program that encourages homeowners to get energy audits to find out where their homes are leaking energy and then to make improvements necessary to keep the energy inside where it’s supposed to be.

“People say in this economy, it’s not the time to do this work,” said Ridgefield First Selectman Rudy Marconi. “Now is the time. Now more than ever.”

Ridgefield is one of 14 towns selected to participate in the Challenge, which is being funded by a $4.17 million federal stimulus grant. The goal is to get at least 10 percent of homeowners in each of the participating towns to reduce their energy use by 20 percent, resulting in an estimated $150 million in energy savings.

The program will help create new green jobs in the target communities and it offers towns rewards for getting more people to sign up for retrofits such as solar panels, solar-powered LED street lights, electric vehicle recharging stations, and other green products.

In addition to helping towns reduce energy waste and improve home comfort and safety, the Challenge also conducts workshops where residents can learn about available tax incentives, low-interest financing, and rebates for energy-saving upgrades.

The 14 towns participating in the Connecticut Challenge were grouped into four regional clusters:

• Bethany, Cheshire
• East Haddam, East Hampton, Glastonbury, Portland, Wethersfield
• Lebanon, Mansfield, Windham
• Ridgefield, Weston, Westport, and Wilton

The Connecticut Neighbor to Neighbor Energy Challenge is being funded as part of the BetterBuildings initiative, whose mission is to create a self-sustaining building energy upgrade market. Neighbor to Neighbor is one of 41 state and local government programs that provide high quality energy improvements to homes and businesses across the nation.

Who says there’s nothing new under the sun? How about savings of nearly 30 percent on utility costs?

Solarize Connecticut, a grant program that provides discounts to residents who install solar panels, is catching on in the state and towns are banding together to reach more people. Easton, Redding, and Trumbull are among those teaming up to help their residents tap into those solar savings. Their goal is to outfit 50 new homes in the region by February.

“I am delighted that Easton is a Solarize community,” said First Selectman Tom Herrmann, who even had a solar audit performed on his home. “I know that there are many homeowners out there who have been thinking about installing a solar PV system, but have been hesitating to make the investment. Now that Easton, Redding, and Trumbull have come together, these systems will be so much more affordable.”

Electricity rates in Connecticut are among the highest in the nation. Connecticut’s 17.31 cents per kilowatt hour ranks third behind Hawaii (36.61 cents/kwh) and Alaska (19.28 cents/kwh).

Solarize Connecticut is offered through the Clean Energy Finance and Investment Authority (CEFIA) in partnership with SmartPower, a private marketing company. Municipalities who take part in the program provide outreach and education to residents to raise awareness and interest.

“Everyone who gets solar will get the lowest price point at the end of the program, even the first residents to sign up,” said Cathy Alfandre, chairwoman of the Easton Clean Energy Task Force. “When combining a federal tax credit with a state incentive, the cost of installing solar may never again be this low since state incentives are expected to drop off in the future,” Alfandre said.

Flexible funding options are offered from leasing to buying, according to installer Sunlight Solar. Leasing includes comprehensive insurance and warranty coverage for 20 years, “and the lowest monthly payments,” according to Sunlight Solar.

The solar audit on Herrmann’s home helped shed a bright light on what the Easton First Selectman could save. After a rebate from CEFIA and federal tax credits, he was looking at a potential 14 percent return on investment.

“It’s a very attractive return on investment,” he said.
A System That Works

ECHIC is Saving Towns Money

Three years ago, five northeastern Connecticut school districts and five municipalities partnered with EASTCONN to form the region’s first health insurance cooperative. The Eastern Connecticut Health Insurance Cooperative (ECHIC) was created with the goal of saving taxpayers money by reducing health insurance costs and increasing local decision-making related to the provision of employee health benefits.

EASTCONN, a public, non-profit, regional educational service center that serves 36 member Boards of Education in northeastern Connecticut, worked for two years with municipalities, school districts, and the insurance carrier Cigna to finalize the details of the insurance cooperative which includes the municipalities and school districts of Coventry, Griswold, Plainfield, Putnam and Tolland as well as EASTCONN.

The initiative followed the 2010 passage of Connecticut Public Act 10-174, which allowed school districts and municipalities to jointly purchase employee health insurance.

In addition to providing cost savings for its member communities, the ECHIC is also improving patient access to health care, enhancing care coordination, and achieving the goals of improved health, affordability and patient experience.

“Since the Health Cooperative’s inception, the involved Towns and Boards of Education have seen reduced costs and greater administrative flexibility. Our focus at this time is to encourage participation of our members in defined wellness programs and to ensure that the cost centers of our insurance program are the most competitive within the market place,” said Chairman Steve Werbner, who is also Tolland’s town manager.

Board member John Elsesser, town manager of Coventry, said, “Eastern Connecticut has always been innovative and has always worked collaboratively to come up with greater solutions. We take pride in having taken this collaborative approach to health insurance.”

Officials say the cooperative also provides the following benefits:

- customers benefit from improved care coordination and greater emphasis on preventive care
- primary care doctors are rewarded for improving patient health and lowering medical costs
- the program includes registered nurse care coordinators aligned with Cigna case managers

Care coordination is improving the health of ECHIC customers and helps manage medical costs by helping to close gaps in care, such as missed health screenings or prescription refills, reinforcing the appropriate use of hospital emergency rooms, increasing the number of preventive health visits and improving follow-up care for people transitioning from the hospital to home.

“Through this type of collaboration we have the opportunity to help transform the health care delivery system,” said Robert Hockmuth, M.D., Cigna’s senior medical director for Connecticut. “When we reward doctors for results and focus on prevention, wellness, health improvement and care coordination, we can create a system that works for everyone who uses, pays for or delivers health care.”

“Since the Health Cooperative’s inception, the involved Towns and Boards of Education have seen reduced costs and greater administrative flexibility.”

-Steve Werbner, Tolland
Six Municipalities Team Up For Sales Pitch
Corporate investors wooed from around the country

Instead of competing with one another for new economic development, six New Haven area municipalities joined together in August to woo corporate investors from as far away as Texas.

The potential investors got tours of the region by helicopter and boat, and were treated to an evening at the Pilot Pen tennis tournament.

The cooperative effort was a first for the area towns and rare in the state, said Eileen Buckheit, West Haven’s director of planning and development.

It grew out of a task force Mayor John Picard put together in response to the closing of the Bayer pharmaceutical facility in West Haven. Eventually the site selection tour was supported by area corporations, the state Department of Economic Development and the Connecticut Economic Resource Center in addition to the towns.

In addition to West Haven, New Haven, North Haven, Orange, and Milford participated in the tour. Among potential properties the eight investors saw were the Acorn Technology Campus in West Haven and the Food Terminal facility in New Haven.

Such regional tours have been more common in other states than in Connecticut, said Buckheit. She said one visitor mentioned it was his first such trip to Connecticut.

Besides Texas, the potential investors came from Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts.

Strength And Opportunity In Numbers
Naugatuck Valley Corridor designated an economic development district

Made in America could mean more specifically “Made in the Naugatuck Valley Corridor,” according to local officials who say the opportunity for more manufacturing in the region is greater than ever.

The 18-town Naugatuck Valley Corridor district recently won approval from the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) to be designated an economic development district. The federal designation, which comes two years after the state designation, will help pave the way for funds to help with economic development and infrastructure investments.

“It puts us on the map for federal economic development assistance and attention,” said Waterbury Mayor Neil M. O’Leary. “It puts our region on par with the major metropolitan areas across the United States and, to be direct, it puts our region in a priority position to access significant federal funds for economic development initiatives.”

O’Leary pointed to opportunities that exist in the manufacturing sector as prime examples of how the district can benefit from the collaboration.

“There is enormous opportunity, especially in the Northeast and particularly in Connecticut, for manufacturing opportunities,” said O’Leary, who is vice chairman of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Advance Manufacturing Task Force. “The federal government is finally recognizing that made in America means made in America.”

The district includes Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Cheshire, Derby, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Newtown, Oxford, Prospect, Seymour, Shelton, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott and Woodbury.

James Ryan, president of the Shelton Economic Development Cooperation calls the federal designation a “door opener.”

“If you don’t have this, the EDA won’t speak with you about federal investments,” Ryan said.

So far the EDA has been listening and several municipalities in the corridor are already reaping the benefits of the collaboration.

A Waterbury business park project has received about $1.2 million in federal and state economic development grants and matching U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grants. Derby received approximately $1.8 million in federal and state funds to help build an access road to industrial space.

“I like this idea of a cooperative effort,” said Oxford First Selectman George Temple. “I think we’re all in this together.”

The district has also anticipates applying for an $80,000 EDA grant to develop an operation plan for its next phase of economic development.

“It’s been a long ride, and now we truly are showing what regional collaboration can do for economic growth,” said District Chairwoman Sheila O’Malley, who is also the Derby Economic Development Director.
Geography Binds Cities Across The Country
Hartford has joined with 2 cities to attract convention and hotel business

The Greater Hartford Convention and Visitors Bureau has joined with two far-flung partners in a pact to boost business that connects not three regions of the state, but three regions of the country. The partners, Madison, Wisconsin, and Spokane, Washington, both are smaller than the Hartford area in terms of population, but all three are roughly equal in convention space and hotel rooms and thus appeal to similar-sized customers.

By combining their sales efforts, they should be able to help each other attract business because many conventions switch locations each year. Indeed some groups even have by-laws that require them to move around the country.

This rotation is the logic behind the partnership with Madison and Spokane, said Tom Farley, marketing director of the greater Hartford bureau.

Previously the bureau had explored alliances with capital cities such as Sacramento, California, and Austin, Texas, but the fit was not as good.

The three partners benefit from their similar convention capacity and geographic diversity. They already have shared some customers. Hartford and Spokane both hosted a Skate-America figure skating event. Spokane and Madison hosted the Outdoors Writers of America.

Land Swap Paves Way For 220 New Jobs
Costco membership warehouse store comes to New Britain

To bring 220 new jobs to town and nearly $500,000 in new taxes, New Britain officials have had to take the road less traveled. And they’ve had plenty of company along the way because a key step in the construction of a Costco membership warehouse store in the City is completing a complex land swap that involves New Britain, Newington, a few state agencies, the General Assembly and Costco.

“It is land with transportation easements on it, so it makes it pretty complicated to get easements released,” said New Britain Mayor Tim O’Brien.

The property in question is between the Iwo Jima Memorial Expressway and the Newington/New Britain town line. The state Department of Transportation has agreed to convey 15.5 acres from Newington to New Britain in exchange for about 68 acres of New Britain land plus a 23-acre conservation easement and the administrative cost of the conveyance.

Because the property concerns the sale of unneeded surplus property, it was included as part of a conveyance bill awaiting action by the General Assembly. All state conveyances are included in one large bill that will be voted on at the end of the current legislative session.

“At the mayor’s request, we asked if this particular conveyance could be done early,” said state Rep. Rick Lopes, D-New Britain. “We were told there would be an effort to do it early, but that it was highly unlikely that it would succeed since it would cause conflict with other conveyances that other legislators also wish to have done early.”

In addition to the state DOT’s involvement, the deal requires input from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) for wetlands issues and the state Department of Administrative Services (DAS), which manages state property.

Despite the deal’s circuitous route that wound through New Britain, Newington, and eventually to the halls of the state Capitol, city officials say Costco is expected to break ground before Labor Day.
Putnam Pitching Partnerships

Regional technical park wants to attract green manufacturing

The more the merrier, and in the case of a planned technical park in Putnam, the bigger the economic benefit.

Putnam officials are actively marketing partnerships in the first phase of its technical park to neighboring towns in order to maximize the state’s investment in it. If just one town signs on, state funding will increase from 50 percent to 75 percent under the Manufacturing Assistance Act.

The ultimate goal is to develop a 200-plus acre park that will attract more green manufacturing and industry with minimal environmental impact. The first phase – a 62-acre, six-lot parcel – will include a new YMCA and four additional lots that are available for sale. The town is offering 10 percent shares in the first phase for $80,000 and partner towns would get 10 percent of the land sales and park tax revenue.

It is an attractive idea for small towns looking for additional revenue sources. The marketing pitch is paying off. Brooklyn, Scotland, and Canterbury – towns with a combined population of about 15,000 – have all signed on to begin negotiations with Putnam.

Putnam Selectman Scott Pempek said that based on his town’s existing tax rate an investor could recoup the $80,000 in less than two years once all the lots are sold. Annual revenues would be about $8,400 after that.

The park would also feature passive recreational trails. Putnam plans to apply for state grants through its recreational trails program. Town officials say the trails and new YMCA would add to the recreational attractions already in the area. An easement along part of the popular Airline Trail allows for hiking, horseback riding, and bicycling.

Towns, Merchants Brand Together

Nine NW towns to replace downtown visual clutter with cohesive signage

The nine towns represented by the Northwest Connecticut Regional Planning Collaborative are putting their best collective face forward with uniform, simple signage that takes advantage of the area’s historic charm and reinforces the similar character of small New England villages.

The Regional Planning Collaborative has already held signage workshops with merchants in several towns, including Norfolk, Salisbury, Sharon, and Cornwall -- and there are more to follow. The goal is to help the towns replace downtown visual clutter with cohesive signage as part of an effort to bring more foot and tourism traffic to the northwest corner.

“When you come in to Canaan, it’s not just Canaan. It’s Salisbury, it’s Norfolk,” said Jocelyn Ayer of the Collaborative.

The deliberately simple signs recently approved for Salisbury were based on the idea that a unified look for area signage could help towns in northwestern Connecticut join forces to pull tourists to the area.

Simplicity was also the key for the design proposed for Norfolk – signs with just three categories: “café,” “shopping” and “parking.” Those generic categories avoid overwhelming visitors and their clean and simple design was intended to reflect the historic atmosphere of Norfolk. Another advantage of generic signs is that they do not have to be changed when a business opens or changes hands.

A business and tourism challenge for Norfolk is the seasonal nature of the local population. Many residents have second homes in Norfolk and visit only on the weekend. The signs are part of the effort to encourage them to patronize local businesses and help boost downtown merchants.

“One way to do that is to introduce them to all the great things we have here,” Ayer said.

Bella Erder, the owner of a jewelry store in downtown Norfolk, compared the downtown area to high streets in her native England, saying that in Norfolk there is not as much a sense of those streets. “You don’t see a bank, you don’t see a post office, you don’t see a shop front,” she said.

Because many streets with shops and businesses are off the main thoroughfare, the signs are intended to direct visitors who might otherwise drive right by, unaware of their existence. Signs serving a similar purpose have been well received in Salisbury.

The signage workshops have provided feedback that has helped towns apply their neighbors’ experiences to their own unique situations. For example, informational kiosks on the town green were discussed by Sharon’s business community, but not pursued because they did not believe people would stop at the green to look at them. Norfolk’s situation was just the opposite -- since stopping at the town green in Norfolk would be illegal, the idea of kiosks was quickly dismissed.
Our more towns have become AGvocates, members of an eastern Connecticut alliance intended to nurture local agriculture.

The new members are Eastford, Hampton, Windham and Woodstock. They join the original six - Ashford, Brooklyn, Canterbury, Franklin, Sterling and Thompson - which began collaborating last year, supported by a $46,000 state agriculture viability grant.

Jennifer Kaufman, AGvocate program director, said 10 of the 25 communities in Connecticut’s Last Green Valley Heritage Corridor are now AGvocate towns.

The AGvocate (Advocacy for Local Agriculture) program is intended to help towns strengthen farm-friendly regulations and generally improve the long-term viability of their agricultural businesses. Kaufman, as director, acts as a circuit rider providing technical assistance.

Member towns also are expected to share their experience, helping each other develop individual action plans to support local agriculture.

The town of Brooklyn, for instance, has created an agriculture commission since joining the program and also arranged for a new farmer’s market to begin this summer.

The AGvocate program recently received a second grant, in the amount of $50,000, that will keep it going through June 2011 and enabled it to add more towns.

Kaufman can be contacted at AGvocate@yahoo.com.
The sounds of summer wouldn’t be complete without the buzz of a few thousand outboards. Getting out on the water is one cool way to beat the heat in Connecticut and this past summer was no exception. Thankfully, municipalities with waterfronts – either shoreline or lakes and rivers – can rely on a “boatload” of help in keeping people safe.

“Unlike the road cop, we’re out there for safety – to prevent that accident, that drowning,” said Fairfield Police Officer Jim Wiltsie, a member of the department’s marine unit.

Marine officers’ jurisdiction extends to all state waters and local and state agencies often work together to patrol the waterways with an eye toward being proactive.

“We’d rather deal with people before they get out there and get in trouble and go through their boat with them and make sure they have things like the proper number of life jackets on board,” said Milford Police Officer Jeff Nielsen.

A veteran of the Milford unit, Nielsen knows that the work won’t cool off until the temperature does. Summer is prime time for recreational boating.

“It gets pretty busy out there,” Nielsen said. “A lot of people have the time off and they have relatives down and friends.”

It can get just as busy inland, too. The 11-mile long Candlewood Lake, the largest lake in the state, is bordered by five towns – Brookfield, Danbury, New Fairfield, Sherman, and New Milford. It’s patrolled by a number of agencies, including the state Environmental Conservation Police, said EnCon Officer Captain Ryan Healy.

Marine officers can board vessels without probable cause in order to check for safety equipment and current boat registration. The officers try to make it a teaching moment as they reinforce safety rules.

“We’re not out here busting chops... people just forget,” said Fairfield’s Wiltsie. “Most of our enforcement is through education.”

The logistics of administering sobriety tests become a little more challenging on the water.

“First and foremost you want to make sure that you do all that stuff in a safe environment,” Nielsen said.

EnCon Officer Healy says marine officers are being trained on new sobriety tests which are performed while the suspect is seated. Healy and others say drunken boating offenses are not that prevalent except in fatal boating accidents.

Greenwich Police Lt. John Brown says that seeing a marine unit on patrol can be a strong deterrent. He explained during one weekend this past July dubbed “Operation Dry Water,” Greenwich officers stopped over 40 boats and made no arrests for suspected drunken boating.

“They had heard that we were bringing the intoxilyzers with us and they had seen our posters,” Brown said.

One of the busiest days of the summer for the marine patrols is July 4th when boaters come for the water by day and stay for the fireworks by night. Cooperation is the key to smooth sailing.
Eightmile River Towns Win “Scenic” Status
Lyme, Salem, and East Haddam win funding from the NPS

Years of teamwork by the towns of Lyme, Salem, and East Haddam have been rewarded with the Eightmile River they share being declared one of the nation’s wild and scenic rivers.

The federal designation opens the tap to annual funding from the National Park Service for management of the 40,000-acre Eightmile watershed. It also puts it off limits to construction projects such as dams.

Just as importantly it gives the river towns and allied conservation groups new leverage in winning funding from a wide variety of sources.

Protecting the Eightmile was considered vital because its placid waters drain an area largely spared development in an otherwise densely populated state.

The watershed has only 87 people per square mile, compared to the state average of 700, according to a Hartford Courant report. It also is home to 155 rare or endangered animal and plant species. Among them are the bald eagle, the frosted elfin butterfly, and the winged monkey flower.

The towns began working toward the wild and scenic mantle a decade ago and could not have won it without documenting the river’s ecological value and their own commitment to saving it.

Each eventually held separate votes declaring their desire for the protection. Also each had to agree on a mutual protection plan that prohibits most development within 100 feet of larger streams in the watershed and 50 feet of smaller streams.

Land trusts and conservancy groups joined the towns in the long preservation campaign, as did state officials and congressmen.

Atacking pesky, pervasive weeds that mar the beauty and enjoyment of Rogers Lake, the 265-acre body of water flanked by the towns of Lyme and Old Lyme, with organic methods has not slowed the growth and now officials have begun plans to study the most optimal weed control methods.

Lyme First Selectman Ralph Eno says his town doesn’t want to continue with organic methods and dredging would be cost prohibitive considering all the money both towns have already spent. Instead, officials are looking at implementing an herbicide program, including an $88,000 study to assess the potential impacts of herbicides on human health and wildlife.

The study also includes mapping the plants and developing a protocol to monitor water quality and protect the watershed. Formed by a dam along Town Woods Road in Old Lyme, the watershed encompasses nearly 5,000 acres.

The towns formed a joint committee in the fall of 2013 to explore ways to control the aquatic weeds. Both have set aside funds in their respective 2014-15 budget for the study and have applied for a $148,000 Small Town Economic Assistance Program grant to cover the cost of the project and a watershed study. The towns have retained the services of a Massachusetts-based environmental consultant for the study.

Stocked annually with trout and popular with boaters and anglers, the lake and its surrounding area offer a rich habitat for wildlife and aquatic birds. The unwelcome visitors, however, are pervasive milfoil, fanwort, and southern naiad aquatic weeds. The towns applied organic methods such as suction harvesting and benthic mats, an approach that uses a weighted blanket that rests on the lake bottom to prevent sunlight from reaching the plants.
Eight Towns Unify Permitting
Tracking building permits through a centralized website

Eight towns have joined together to issue and track routine building permits through a centralized website. The initiative, one of the results of state regional incentive funding made available in 2008, should make municipal operations more efficient at the same time it saves contractors time and money.

Expected to be up and running by March, it will allow contractors to apply for and receive permits without visiting a town hall for smaller jobs such as installing new siding or windows, according to a Hartford Courant report.

The eight towns participating, which are members of the Capitol Region Council of Governments, are Bolton, Coventry, Glastonbury, East Hartford, Manchester, Newington, Simsbury and Wethersfield.

Manchester General Manager Scott Shanley said he and other municipal officials, including the building department staff and information specialists, worked for months to develop the system.

The initial costs to the towns vary depending on their size, but each is expected to save in the long haul. In Glastonbury, Town Manager Richard Johnson estimated annual maintenance would be between $6,500 and $8,700 over the first five years.

Presently contractors must go to building departments in person to fill out forms. Then a clerk must verify the contractor is licensed and insured before entering the information into a file that may be digitized or not.

Under the online program, permitting and verification will be automated. Also applicants as well as residents will be able to check the status of the permits online as well as request inspections for completed work.

According to a CRCOG press release, the program uses software provided by Massachusetts-based ViewPoint Engineering Inc., which was chosen through a competitive process.

Once the system is in place, other towns will be able to join for $28,000 to $49,000, depending on the community’s size, Jocelyn Mathiasen, CRCOG special projects coordinator, said.

Three Towns Buy Pothole Patching Machine
Plymouth, Bristol, and Plainville plan to share equipment

The towns of Plymouth, Bristol, and Plainville have made a joint application for a state grant to buy a state-of-the-art pothole patching machine that would be shared among the three municipalities.

The joint application to the State’s Inter-town Capital Equipment Purchase Incentive program is for a grant up to $150,000 to buy the pothole patcher. The Python 5000, manufactured by Python Manufacturing in Saskatchewan, Canada, will bring a variety of benefits to the three towns.

Tony Lorenzetti, Plymouth’s director of public works, said the equipment will be able to do more hot or cold permanent patching throughout the year. The driver can accomplish all aspects of the repairs from inside the vehicle, including blowing the debris out of the potholes, so there will be no need for traffic control or multiple work crews at the patching site.

Bristol would house the equipment and use it two days a week and one day each would be set aside for Plymouth and Plainville to use it. During weeks without holidays, one day a week would be reserved for maintenance and emergency repairs. The dealer that would maintain the machine is located in Willimantic.

If no maintenance is required on the day off, towns could request the machine for emergency repairs and pay only the additional operational costs. Bristol would supply the equipment operator and the other towns would pay Bristol for their share of the operational costs.

The multi-town agreement would be in effect for five years. Then the three municipalities could mutually agree to extend it or work out a way to dispose of the equipment and share the proceeds.
Criminals’ Ill-Gotten Gains Put To Good Use

Police departments make needed purchases with federal and state funds

Crime may not pay for the bad guys, but police departments around the state are putting funds from seized assets to good use on training, equipment, and other law enforcement gear that just may save a life someday.

The departments are making the needed purchases with funds received through federal and state criminal asset forfeiture programs.

New Haven received $71,159 in federal and $49,307 in state asset forfeiture funds in 2013 and used the money for cell phones, lease of undercover cars, informant money, management training, equipment for narcotics unit vehicles, and other tactical equipment, Witkowski said.

Bristol police purchased a $50,000 shooting decision simulator designed to prepare officers for potential deadly force situations. The Department had previously rented a simulator for $4,500 each time. The purchased simulator, which the Department began training on in January, features about 800 “shoot, don’t shoot” video scenarios. Officers use a weapon similar to their service weapon but one that splatters paint.

Purchases for other departments include:

- Middletown used state forfeiture funds to fix up undercover vehicles for confidential informants.
- Torrington used state forfeiture funds for narcotic “buy money,” the community outreach program “National Night Out,” phone system upgrades, a bite-suit for canine training, and policy upgrades.
- North Haven plans to use federal forfeiture funds toward the purchase of a decision simulator.
- Hamden used the funds to support its narcotics unit and to purchase a police dog, motorcycle safety equipment, and SWAT gear.
- North Branford police purchased an enclosed trailer for rapid deployment and it is used by both local police and the South Central Regional SWAT team.
- Shelton and Ansonia police both purchased new fingerprinting machines, which can take prints and quickly send them electronically to state and federal databases for identity checks.
- Orange purchased “Trent,” a drug detection Labrador retriever who is a recent graduate of the State Police K-9 Academy.
- Woodbridge police are using the funds to offset the purchase of a solar-operated speed sign used to remind motorists to slow down and reduce accidents.
Unity Multiplies In Northeast Corner
Joint revaluation being pursued by 12 member towns

In Connecticut’s mostly rural Northeast Corner property revaluation and economic development will soon be shared endeavors instead of being conducted individually.

The joint revaluation is being pursued by the 12 member towns to the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments that have agreed to hire a single contractor to do their appraisals.

“We are going forward and reviewing a recommended vendor,” said Council Executive Director John Filchak.

The towns expect to save around $750,000 collectively if the plan becomes a reality. It was developed by a committee of assessors and first selectmen.

Each town is expected to pay a base fee and then an additional fee per parcel, which will be adjusted according to the size of the base fee.

For economic development, the Northeastern Connecticut towns will join with the nine member towns of the Windham Council of Governments and Sprague to form a single region.

The change should make them eligible for funding from the federal Economic Development Administration and required state approval.

Historically, Connecticut has ranked last in qualifying for federal economic development funds, Filchak said.

The district is the culmination of a 10-year process that led first to adoption of a shared economic development strategy.

A similar regional economic development district is being pursued by 15 Naugatuck Valley municipalities in addition to Cheshire, Watertown, and Newtown. The plan was outlined in May at a forum hosted by the Valley Chamber of Commerce.
Senior citizens in Bristol, Plainville, Plymouth, and Burlington are benefiting from a partnership among police and social service agencies in their towns that is designed to better address their safety concerns.

TRIAD is a national model that brings together law enforcement, seniors, and social service organizations to improve the quality of life for seniors by providing social programs and by addressing their safety concerns.

The West Central Connecticut TRIAD program provides seniors in all four towns with valuable programs and information on a wide range of topics including how to protect themselves from scams and how to deal with storm preparedness.

A key advantage of TRIAD is that each town can cater to the needs of its own seniors while also drawing information and help from the larger group, said May Lynn Gagnon, Resource Development Director for the United Way of Central Connecticut, the lead organizing agency of the TRIAD program.

That effort evolved into a broader strategy to provide seniors with information to keep them safe both at home and on the streets.

The latest service enhancement came in May, when TRIAD kicked off a “Yellow Dot” program, giving police and emergency responders access to medical information if a car accident occurs.

When seniors sign up to participate in “Yellow Dot,” they are given a yellow dot to be placed on their car window. The dot lets emergency responders know that the car’s occupant has current medical information in the glove compartment.

It includes a list of medications and also a picture of the senior so responders can match the medical information with the senior.

Over the past several months, TRIAD has sponsored emergency preparedness training in Plymouth to discuss how to remain safe during inclement weather and a scam program in Plainville providing protective tips for seniors.

Future components of the West Central TRIAD program will include organizing kids to help seniors with lawn mowing and providing home safety information on issues like proper lighting and keeping hedges trimmed to ward off possible intruders.
Combined Health District
Plainville and Southington will share services and save money

Plainville and Southington are creating a new combined health district that officials expect to have in place by July.

The towns have been considering the formation of a combined health district as a way to qualify for more state funding and to share resources. Under the new district, Southington expects to better its budget by $100,000 through increased state funding and both towns plan to offer increased services by pooling staff and resources.

The individual health departments have worked closely together in the past with flu vaccination clinics and emergency planning efforts and representatives from both Plainville and Southington said they believe the district will run smoothly.

Chuck Motes, Southington’s health director, said the district will save money and enhance services for both towns.

“This means greater depth on your bench,” Motes said. “If either town develops a serious situation, both towns can bring in additional sanitarians to help out.”

Motes said many towns throughout the state have been successfully operating combined health districts since the 1960s and while the needs of each town are different, forming health districts have been beneficial to participating towns.

Plainville Town Council Vice-Chairman Christopher Wazorko said “This is a benefit for us to do more with what we currently have. We will have more resources.”

Both towns will have access to larger staff to address public health issues without additional costs. Each town will continue to keep the same employees in their offices but will now share services with each other.

Southington, with a population of about 42,000, has three sanitarians and Plainville, with about 17,000 people, has one and all four sanitarians will work for the new combined district.

The new district has filed the required paperwork with the state and is getting bylaws and regulations in place for a July 1 target date to start operations.

“If either town develops a serious situation, both towns can bring in additional sanitarians to help out.”
New Service Crosses Town Lines

Derby and Ansonia start “School to Career” program

As one of his first acts in a newly created position, Derby’s youth services bureau director enlisted neighboring Ansonia in a mentoring program aimed at instilling hope in potential high school drop-outs.

“I have a problem with losing kids. They all have good aptitude. It’s the attitude that is the problem,” said John Saccu.

The “School to Career” program he started with his counterparts in Ansonia matches students judged at risk of dropping out or engaging in crime with business people to acquaint them with work possibilities.

Saccu started his new job in January before the Board of Aldermen had officially approved the new position. Saccu said he didn’t want to lose time and Police Chief Gene Mascolo praised him for temporarily working without pay.

Mascolo along with former School Superintendent Janet Robinson sought the creation of the youth services position that is being funded from a combination of city, school, and state sources. Robinson has since become superintendent in Newtown.

Saccu predicted the bureau would gain even more funds because of its partnership with Ansonia. “The state loves it when towns collaborate,” he said.
Regional Trail
Preston, Ledyard, and Groton propose recreational trail, no vehicles allowed

Three towns, one trail, and a common goal for healthier communities. That’s the driving force behind a 14-mile trail that will eventually connect Preston, Ledyard and Groton. When the trail is complete there will be no motorized vehicles allowed, but plenty of hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding.

Work has begun on the Preston end and will eventually finish up at the popular Bluff Point State Park in Groton. While intended to be used as a recreational trail, town officials expect it to also provide an avenue for alternative, healthy transportation.

“People who live in Preston and Ledyard and commute to Groton could ride their bike to and from work,” said David Holdridge, Chairman of the Tri Town Trail Association, which is coordinating the efforts among the towns and several civic recreational organizations.

As the first major regional trail for southeastern Connecticut, it will connect 4,000 acres of state and local open space. About one-third of the trail will cover public land. Organizers say it will affect fewer than 10 private properties and span just seven road crossings. Beginning at sea level at Bluff Point, the trail will eventually climb to 400 feet. Along the way, it will connect residential areas, economic centers, parks, and stunning natural resources.

One of the largest landowners within the 14-mile trail is the city of Groton, which owns several large and contiguous parcels in Groton and Ledyard. Much of the city-owned land contains reservoir and water treatment plants that are operated by the city-owned Groton Utilities.

The Tri Town Trail Association used a grant from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to secure easements and hire an architect for the design of the northern section.

“This will be a great opportunity for our local residents to take advantage of a new trail,” said Preston Parks and Recreation Director Amy Brosnan.