

Building Sustainable Communities in the NY-CT Metropolitan Region

An unprecedented bi-state collaboration of cities, counties and regional planning organizations has come together to form the New York-Connecticut Sustainable Communities Consortium. The Consortium has submitted an application to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, a competitive national program designed to integrate housing, economic development, transportation and environmental planning in metropolitan regions. This summary describes what the Consortium is and what it plans to do.

Challenge

The New York – Connecticut region, which includes New York City, Long Island, the lower Hudson Valley, and the coastal region of Connecticut stretching from Stamford to New Haven, faces a unique set of opportunities and challenges as it strives to meet sustainability goals. By most measures, this is the most economically productive, energy efficient and transit oriented metropolitan area in the United States. With more than 14 million people and nearly \$800 billion in economic output, the region includes a diverse set of living choices that spans the densest urban core in the nation and a network of smaller cities and suburban communities.

At the same time, these assets come with a set of challenges that are as large and complex as the region itself. In the wake of the global financial crisis, the region needs to continue to adapt to an increasingly competitive international economy. It needs to maintain and upgrade the extraordinary but expensive infrastructure that allows this dense agglomeration to function, particularly its expansive transit network. To improve equity as well as efficiency, the region needs to improve housing affordability and access to economic opportunity for low-income households. And like other regions, it is only beginning to grapple with the enormous challenge of building resilience to the effects of climate change, a particular concern for this coastal region.

The Consortium

The New York-Connecticut Sustainable Communities Consortium was formed to meet these challenges and guide the region's transportation, housing, economic and other investment decisions. Included in the consortium are the nine largest cities within its planning area, two suburban Long Island counties, four metropolitan planning organizations, and two regional planning entities.

- **City of New York**
- **City of New Haven**
- **City of Bridgeport**
- **City of Norwalk**
- **City of Stamford**
- **City of Yonkers**
- **City of White Plains**
- **City of New Rochelle**
- **City of Mount Vernon**
- **Nassau County**
- **Suffolk County**
- **New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC)**
- **South Western Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO)**
- **Greater Bridgeport/Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (GBVMPO)**
- **South Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG)**
- **Long Island Regional Planning Council (LIRPC)**
- **Regional Plan Association (RPA)**

What is the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program?

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program is a centerpiece of the Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities, an initiative jointly implemented by HUD, the US Department of Transportation (DOT), and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The

Partnership is committed to advancing six overarching Livability Principles as a framework to help American families gain better access to affordable housing, more transportation options and lower transportation costs, while protecting the environment and reducing our energy dependence.

The Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program will support metropolitan and multijurisdictional planning efforts that integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation and

infrastructure investments in a manner that empowers jurisdictions to consider the interdependent challenges of these issues specific to their region. The anticipated outcomes of the grant program will be a generation of regional plans that address these integrated issues and illustrate how federal resources will be aligned to mirror local and regional strategies for achieving inclusive, sustainable communities. Scoring well on the Sustainable Communities Regional Grant Program would qualify the region for additional federal funding in the future.

Goals

Working together, the Consortium will develop livable communities and growth centers around existing and planned transit to enhance affordable housing efforts, reduce congestion, improve the environment and continue to expand economic opportunities. Specifically, the Consortium will:

- Integrate and enhance existing sustainability plans, filling in gaps and more closely aligning them with the six Livability Principles defined by the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities:
 1. Provide more transportation choices
 2. Promote equitable, affordable housing
 3. Enhance economic competitiveness
 4. Support existing communities
 5. Coordinate policies and leverage investment
 6. Value communities and neighborhoods
- Link strategies, on a metropolitan scale, to develop mixed-income housing, employment and infrastructure in locations connected by the region's two commuter rail networks – the MTA Metro-North Railroad and the MTA Long Island Rail Road
- Support project planning at the local level to engage residents and stakeholders in developing implementation strategies.

Public Engagement

The Consortium will coordinate stakeholder outreach and engagement processes with existing sustainability and regional planning efforts. In addition, the Consortium will establish specific structures to engage residents and other government and non-governmental entities in the process.

An Advisory Board of state agencies and regional non-governmental organizations and subregional committees will work closely with the Consortium members to ensure there is meaningful participation by a wide group of constituencies from throughout the region, including community interests, advocacy organizations, civic organizations and local municipal interests. Initial members of the Advisory Board include:

- Five state agencies: Connecticut Housing Finance Agency; Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development; New York State Department of State, representing the Governor's Smart Growth Cabinet; nyhomes/ NYS Department of Housing and Community Revitalization; and the Empire State Development Corporation.
- Five non-governmental organizations that serve both the New York and Connecticut portions of the Consortium planning area and that are nationally-recognized leaders in housing and community development, business and real estate development, the environment and climate change, and social and environmental justice: Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC); Urban Land Institute (ULI), International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)/ ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability; WE ACT for Environmental Justice; and One Region Fund, a partnership of private funders in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Subregional committees and working groups will be created for Metro-North and LIRR service areas to relate Consortium activities to local issues and plans. Each working group will select a chair to serve on the advisory board. Specific projects will also include participation by local stakeholders.

Projects and Activities

By structuring its activities around economic rather than political geography, the Consortium will facilitate dialogue, information sharing and relationships among new configurations of citizens and stakeholders. In some cases, economies of scale will be achieved. Already the Consortium is paying dividends: by jointly discussing and connecting program plans, some project designs have already been improved and joint contracting is being examined as a way to reduce program costs. Formalization of this collaboration – the Consortium itself – will allow these benefits and relationships to build.

Specific project objectives to be achieved with a Sustainable Communities Regional Plan Grant include the following:

- Develop regional strategies and a Housing Incentive Fund to integrate affordable housing and transit oriented development strategies.
- Launch a strategic planning process to build resilience to the effects of climate change in New York City, with applications for other parts of the region.
- Develop a network of transit-oriented development projects along the Metro-North system and I-287 corridor, including projects at key nodes in New Haven, Bridgeport, Norwalk, Stamford, New Rochelle and the Bronx.
- Advance four projects that will help integrate housing, transportation and environmental policies along the Long Island Rail Road network: development of a workforce housing strategy for Long Island, a regional transfer of development rights study in Suffolk County, a feasibility study for a major transit-oriented development project in Bethpage in Nassau County, and an interdisciplinary neighborhood planning initiative for East New York, Brooklyn.