Regional Program Options

Introduction

Funding for the towns served by NECCOG from the State has diminished and is not expected to rebound in the near future. A successful approach taken by NECCOG is the provision of regional services. For example: the Regional Revaluation Program, Regional Animal Services Program and Regional Paramedic Intercept Program each have realized significant savings and achieved increased services to participating towns.

At the January NECCOG meeting members discussed additional programs that NECCOG could offer. These programs included:

- Audit Services
- Social/Veteran Services
- Land Use Planner
- Regional Assessor
- Back Office Functions
- Training and Education
- Legal Services
- IT Administration and Security
- Common Permitting Software
- Household Hazardous Waste Collection
- Economic Development

Based on responses from the members, three of the proposal ideas had significant support to warrant possible immediate action: **Audit Services, Social Services/Veterans Advocate, and Land Use Planning**. Each of the other programs identified received some interest. However each needs more study and information to move forward in the immediate future (this budget cycle) to be a truly regional service from NECCOG. Accordingly, this memorandum details those services that garnered the most support and summarizes the other proposals in terms of how they can be explored for future action.

Each of the services examined follows the "3Es" to test whether or not they can benefit the participating towns:

1. ***Economy*** *– Will the proposed cooperative arrangement reduce the current program's costs now or in the future?*
2. ***Efficiency*** *– Will the proposed cooperative arrangement improve the current delivery of program services?*
3. ***Effectiveness*** *– Will the proposed cooperative arrangement allow local governments to deliver needed services that are qualitatively improved or that each would find difficult to provide individually?*[1]

Audit Services

The purpose of this proposal is to use the collective strength of 16 communities to secure a qualified municipal audit firm at a cost less than what each participating town could realize by seeking their own firm to provide such services. This proposal, in terms of concept and structure, is very similar to the current Regional Revaluation Program.

[1] Shared Services in Local Government, Office of the New York State Comptroller, Division of Local Government and School Accountability, localgov@osc.state.ny.us - Issued December, 2009

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Currently, all municipalities are mandated to have their financial statements audited annually.[2] Section 7-396 requires that municipalities notify OPM of the name of their auditor not less than 30 days before the end of the fiscal year. These audits are performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, the standards set forth for financial audits in the General Accounting Office's (GAO) Government Auditing Standards (2011), the provisions of the Federal Single Audit Act of 1984, as amended in 1996, and U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments and Non-profit Organizations, and the provisions of Sections 4-230 through 4-236 of the Connecticut General Statutes concerning the State Single Audit Act. Typically audit firms are retained for a three year period; although many towns engage audit firms for longer periods. To secure audit services each town must develop and issue a request for proposals (RFP). The RFP must be properly crafted in terms of qualifications, audit elements, evaluation criteria and should include a form of contract written to the benefit of the town - <u>not the proposer</u>. The RFP process can be an expensive and time consuming undertaking.

The regional approach would have NECCOG through its contracts attorney (Shipman and Goodwin) develop the RFP and related form of contract (just as we did for the revaluation service). Members towns would have the ability to then interview the respondents and evaluate the price of the regional approach prior to committing to participate. Similar to the revaluation program, NECCOG would hold the contract with the audit firm and be responsible for making payments to that firm. The participating towns, by a contract with NECCOG, would annually pay NECCOG their share of the total contract.

Would such an approach save money for participating towns? We will not know until we actually issue and evaluate an RFP for such services. However, it seems reasonable that if an audit firm had the opportunity to serve a significant number of towns for a set period of time, that they would provide a more attractive price than can be gained through individual town approaches.

The approach taken with audit services would also apply to Legal Services and IT Services.

Regional Veterans /Human Services Advocate

The purpose of the Human Services/Veteran's Advocate Program is to assist people in the region to efficiently navigate public and non-profit programs to obtain needed services. The Human Services/ Veteran's Advocate is <u>not</u> intended to be an administrator of programs or any attempt to preempt public or non-profit human service or veteran service providers.

At one time each municipality had a "welfare" office. These were eliminated in the 1990s with so-called "welfare reform." The result today is that persons are left to their own devices to determine what assistance may or may not be available and from what group. Barriers to proper information are many and can include limited English proficiency, mental or physical health issues, financial (real or perceived), educational attainment, drug and alcohol issues, children's health, domestic violence and learning disabilities.

[2] Sec. 7-392. Making of Audits and Fling of Statements

Currently towns are required to have an "agent for elderly persons[3]", they are enabled to have a "municipal agent for children[4]" and the statutes allow towns to establish a local veterans' advisory committee and requires any town that has not established its own local veterans' advisory committee and does not otherwise provide funding for a veterans' service officer to designate a town employee to serve as a veterans' service contact person[5].

Based on our review of the region, our towns are in technical compliance with the statute in terms of having in place an agent for elderly persons and veteran's services. We were not able to determine if any town has a municipal agent for children. In terms of having a person or office dedicated to understanding and assisting persons in need of various social/human services - we found no evidence of such a service being provided by any member town. Additionally, in all cases the services that are offered are limited in terms of availability. Office hours for seniors and veterans are limited as are the office hours for many of the region's town halls.

Regional Veteran Population

	Post 9/11	Gulf War (8/1990 to 8/2001)	Vietnam era	Korean War	World War II	Total
Ashford	57	59	86	6	0	**208**
Brooklyn	59	106	244	45	50	**504**
Canterbury	15	71	209	51	13	**359**
Chaplin	11	32	54	10	14	**121**
Eastford	7	12	38	7	7	**71**
Hampton	12	29	80	28	7	**156**
Killingly	161	172	344	147	35	**859**
Plainfield	112	292	418	91	67	**980**
Pomfret	0	31	111	38	18	**198**
Putnam	43	80	198	68	34	**423**
Scotland	42	17	63	3	3	**128**
Sterling	47	42	40	18	0	**147**
Thompson	93	78	113	82	121	**487**
Union	3	10	34	4	0	**51**
Voluntown	29	37	112	40	9	**227**
Woodstock	82	161	175	0	24	**442**
Region	773	1229	2319	638	402	**5361**

Source: 2016 Census American FactFinder

NECCOG's proposed services would differ from the current situation in that it would be: comprehensive - covering the full scope of needs and it would be more accessible - it would operate five days per week. The result would be that more people could be assisted and in a more timely manner - improving outcomes for those in need.

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[3] Section 7-127b of the General Statutes states: "The chief elected official or the chief executive officer if by ordinance of each municipality shall appoint a municipal agent for elderly persons. ..The duties of the municipal agent may include, but shall not be limited to, (1) disseminating information to elderly persons, assisting such persons in learning about the community resources available to them and publicizing such resources and benefits; (2) assisting elderly persons to apply for federal and other benefits available to such persons; (3) reporting to the chief elected official or chief executive officer of the municipality and the Department on Aging any needs and problems of the elderly and any recommendations for action to improve services to the elderly."

[4] Section 7-127c. of the General Statutes states that: " The chief elected official or the chief executive officer of each municipality may appoint a municipal agent for children…The duties of a municipal agent may include, but not be limited to, (1) annually determining the capacity of the municipality to provide services beneficial to children and families living in the municipality and coordinating such services provided by the state, the municipality and community-based organizations; (2) disseminating information to families with children and assisting such families in learning about the resources available to them; (3) assisting families with children in applying for available child day care subsidies; and (4) annually submitting a written report to the chief elected official, chief executive officer and legislative body of the municipality, on the services he has provided, his findings concerning the needs and problems of children in the municipality and recommendations for improving services for such children."

[5] Section 27-135 states that the "committee may (1) act as the coordinating agency in all matters concerning veterans and their dependents, coordinating the activities of public and private facilities concerned with veterans' reemployment, education, rehabilitation and adjustment to peacetime living; (2) cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and private agencies in securing services and benefits to which a veteran or his dependents may be entitled; (3) use the services and facilities of the veterans organizations so far as possible to carry out the purposes of this section; and (4) encourage and coordinate vocational training services for veterans."

The current system is complex. It involves dozens of programs and dozens of agencies - federal state, local, non-profit and more. "The welfare system was never created as a single system like Medicare or Social Security but instead as independent programs addressing a certain need. The result is a very bureaucratic system that is hard to use." A recent study demonstrated a similar frustration for veterans. "An analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs survey data found that younger veterans – those who served in the post-9/11 war period – are better versed in their benefits. But even among those veterans, 40 percent say they have little or no understanding of their benefits, a figure that climbs to two-thirds for those unfamiliar with life insurance benefits available. Among all veterans, 59 percent said their understanding of available benefits was "a little" or "not at all," according to the analysis of the VA's survey data." A 2015 study by the Legislature's Program Review and Investigations Committee concluded that "Connecticut compares poorly overall to other states in maximizing receipt of federal benefits for its veterans."

All Veterans in the Region

	At or Below Poverty Status	Disability Status
Ashford	8.2%	16%
Brooklyn	9.6%	17.8%
Canterbury	6.5%	17.4%
Chaplin	5.9%	15.4%
Eastford	4.6%	14%
Hampton	3.6%	12.1%
Killingly	10.2%	14.1%
Plainfield	7%	18.2%
Pomfret	4.6%	13.5%
Putnam	8%	18.2%
Scotland	2.4%	10.7%
Sterling	9.5%	19.2%
Thompson	6.4%	16.6%
Union	0.4%	13.2%
Voluntown	6%	18.8%
Woodstock	2.9%	18.1%
Region	5.98%	15.83%

Source: 2016 Census

For Veterans and eligible dependents (*Spouse of the veteran; Widow or widower of the veteran; Dependent parent of the veteran; Any person who acted as a parent to the veteran for five years immediately preceding the commencement of the veteran's wartime service; Child of the veteran until his/her 19th birthday; Child of the veteran between 19 years and 24 years of age while the child is attending high school, an institution of higher learning or some other accredited educational institution; Child of the veteran 19 years of age or older who is mentally or physically unable to support him/herself and was affected by the disability prior to his/her 18th birthday; and, Legally adopted children of the veteran*) the potential list of programs/services is extensive:

- Military Relief Fund
- Tax Relief
- Disability Compensation
- Medical Benefits
- Stand Down
- Pension
- Veterans' Service and Advocacy Representative
- Education and Training
- Reemployment Assistance for OEF/OIF Veterans
- VETS
- Portability of certain veterans' property tax exemptions
- VETSUCCESS
- Life Insurance
- Home Loans
- Disabled American Veterans
- CT Department of Labor Office for Veterans Workforce Development
- State of Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs
- Counseling / Hartford Veterans Center Benefits
- Agent Orange and Gulf War Helpline
- Military Support Program
- Veterans' Tuition Waiver Program
- Soldiers' Sailors' and Marines' Fund
- Burial Benefits
- Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP)
- Veteran Temporary Housing Program Information
- Veteran Residential Program Information
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- Aid & Attendance Pension
- Post 9/11 GI Bill
- Motor Vehicle Registration
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act
- Women Veterans' Network
- Military Records and State Memorials
- Protections under the federal Service members Civil Relief Act (formerly the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act)
- Canines for Combat Veterans

The following list of social service programs for people in general is not intended to be a complete one - in fact, it is not. It is presented to demonstrate the complexity of the current system and the inherent complexities of trying to understand and navigate it.

All Persons in the Region

	Age 62 and Over	Poverty Status	
		Male	Female
Ashford	17.80%	9.40%	8.50%
Brooklyn	24.10%	12.30%	6.80%
Canterbury	19.60%	5.00%	5.00%
Chaplin	16.80%	3.00%	8.70%
Eastford	20.80%	3.40%	4.20%
Hampton	23.40%	2.70%	3.60%
Killingly	17.60%	8.70%	13.30%
Plainfield	18.80%	4.80%	9.40%
Pomfret	19.80%	3.50%	3.80%
Putnam	21.10%	7.30%	12.00%
Scotland	19.10%	3.00%	4.30%
Sterling	12.10%	8.30%	7.90%
Thompson	21.70%	6.40%	8.80%
Union	26.00%	1.10%	0.00%
Voluntown	19.50%	3.30%	6.20%
Woodstock	23.40%	1.30%	4.60%
Region	20.10%	5.22%	6.69%
Connecticut	19.00%	9.40%	11.30%

Source: 2016 Census American FactFinder

- Alzheimer's Respite Care Program
- Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD
- Birth to Three
- Board of Education and Services for the Blind
- Business Intelligence and DSS HealthIT
- Care4Kids
- Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics
- Child Support and Divorce
- CHOICES is CT's State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) for Medicare Beneficiaries
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program
- Community Options
- Connect-Ability
- Connecticut AIDS Drug Assistance Program (CADAP)
- Connecticut Behavioral Health Partnership - CTBHP
- Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders (CHCPE)
- Consumer Problems
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services
- Department of Rehabilitation Services
- Disability Services
- Domestic Violence
- Durable Medical Equipment
- Economic Security - Financial Assistance
- Electronic Visit Verification
- Energy Assistance
- Energy Assistance - Winter Heating
- Fatherhood Initiative of CT
- Financial Education
- Food Assistance
- Employment and Training
- Grandparents As Parents
- Housing - Temporary
- Housing Options for Seniors
- Human Services Infrastructure
- HUSKY Health (Medicaid & Children's Health Insurance Program)
- HUSKY (Medicaid) Coverage for Breast and Cervical Cancer
- Immigration
- Jobs First
- Legal Aide
- Limited Proficiency in English
- Literacy
- Long-Term Care
- Med-Connect (Medicaid for Employees with Disabilities)
- Medicaid Nursing Home Reimbursement
- Medicare Savings Program
- Money Follows the Person Program
- National Family Caregiver Support Program
- Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT)
- Nutrition Assistance Programs
- Refugee Assistance Program School Based Child Health (SBCH) Social Work Services
- Renter's Rights
- State Supplement for the Aged, Blind and Disabled
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - SNAP
- Temporary Family Assistance - TFA
- Traumatic Brain Injury Implementation Project
- Welfare to Work (Department of Labor)
- Women Infants and Children - WIC
- Farmers' Market Nutrition Program
- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
- Home Energy Solutions
- Low Income/Subsidized Private Rental Housing for Families or Single Adults
- Non-Portable Public Housing Rent Subsidy Program
- State Financed Congregate Housing
- Low Income/Subsidized Private Rental Housing for Older or Disabled Adults
- Adult Residential Care Homes
- Next Step Supportive Housing
- Partial Hospital/Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)
- Assessment for Substance Abuse/ Mental Health Evaluation
- Group Homes
- Residential Program for Women Involved in Community Justice System
- Medication Assisted Treatment Close to Home (MATCH)
- Recovery Housing
- Project Home: Homeless Permanent Supportive Housing
- Housing Discrimination Based on Lawful Source of Income
- Food Awareness and Safety Training (FAST)/Qualified Food Operator Course (QFO)
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)
- Expanded Food And Nutrition Education Program

The above programs and services, again, are not complete and does not include the multiple organizations (public and non-profit) that manage these programs. These organizations include:

- 2-1-1
- Access Community Action Agency
- The Arc of Quinebaug Valley
- Catholic Charities, Diocese of Norwich, Inc.
- Generations Family Health Center
- Habitat for Humanity of Eastern Connecticut
- Natchaug Hospital
- Planned Parenthood
- Salvation Army
- Senior Resources Agency
- Visiting Nurse Association
- Windham Regional Community Council, Inc.
- Northeast Placement services
- TEEG
- TVCCA
- Day Kimball Hospital
- Backus Hospital
- Windham Hospital
- Various HMOs
- Department of Veteran's Affairs (state and federal)
- Department of Children and Families
- State Department on Aging
- Aging and Disability Resource Centers in CT
- Banking Department
- Office of Child Advocate
- Consumer Council
- Criminal Justice Commission
- Connecticut Council of Developmental Disabilities
- Disability Rights Connecticut, Inc
- Department of Developmental Services
- Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
- Economic and Community Development
- Connecticut Department of Education
- Office of Health Care Access
- Department of Housing
- Commission on Health Equity
- Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities
- Department of Insurance
- Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- Board of pardons and Paroles
- Psychiatric Security Review Board
- Division of Public Defender Services
- Department of Public Health
- Department of Rehabilitation Service
- Department of Social Services
- State Insurance Risk Management Board
- Office of the Victim Advocate
- Workers' Compensation Commission
- United Services
- Perception Programs, Inc.
- Community Health Resources
- Connecticut Psychiatric Society
- Connecticut legal Services
- Social Security Administration
- USDA Rural Development
- IRS
- Lifebridge Free Life Insurance, Mass Mutual
- Connecticut Department of Revenue Services
- Connecticut Department of Agriculture
- ALICE - Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed
- Home Energy Solutions
- Social Security Administration
- Dayville Affordable Housing
- Killingly Housing Authority
- Multiple Sclerosis Society
- Feed the Need Soup Kitchen
- Food Pantries
- Friends of Assisi Food Pantry
- Health Departments
- Daily Bread - Putnam
- Cooperative Extension
- Community Kitchens of Northeastern Connecticut

As demonstrated the number of programs and providers is extensive. It is not reasonable to expect a volunteer or existing staff within a town hall to have the expertise needed to assist persons in the community to navigate the current system.

The overall responsibilities for this staff person include conducting outreach activities, greeting and screening Veterans and others in the region seeking services, conducting program eligibility and assessment, identifying community resources, providing information and referral services. The Regional Veterans /Human Services Advocate will:

- Assist Veterans and others in the region seeking services and assess their needs.
- Network with community members, non-profits and VA to ensure the program is marketed community-wide.
- Recruit targeted individuals for program participation, workshops, community meetings, surveys, and other activities by developing and distributing outreach materials, directly contacting targeted community members, networking with appropriate community organizations.
- Maintain close professional relationships and liaisons with local, state and federal service organizations in the target area. Make presentations regarding the services of assigned programs to ensure that appropriate referrals are made to regional non-profits and/or the VA, respond to agency inquiries concerning services, and attend workshops and conferences as appropriate to maintain knowledge of issues facing Veterans and others in the region.
- Use appropriate technology (including social media) tools to accomplish job functions; understand and utilize available technology as customer service, communication, and data gathering tools.
- Maintain files and records of individuals served, services provided, outreach activities conducted, surveys completed, and other general reporting as assigned.

- Conduct individual town visits to ensure that the services of the program are regionally applied

This person would be housed at NECCOG and make routine trips to participating member towns to meet with individuals and groups. We have developed a lean annual budget of $61,700 ($42,000 salary, benefits (35%) and other costs at $5,000) for this program. Other overhead costs (office space, computers, software, phone, copying, mail, etc.) would be covered by NECCOG as part of our current administrative costs.

Land Use Planner

Each of the NECCOG towns has multiple commissions (Zoning, Zoning Board of Appeals, Economic Development, Planning, Wetlands and Watercourses, Aquifer Protection and Conservation) addressing land use issues. Matters addressed by these bodies are administrative and others are legislative (policy). Towns in the region vary in terms of professional assistance utilized. Four towns have in-house town planners (Brooklyn, Killingly, Woodstock and Thompson), three contract (Pomfret, Sterling and Hampton) and three (Eastford, Voluntown and Scotland) currently use NECCOG either on a contract or as needed basis for their professional planning needs,

The purpose of this position is to plan, organize, enforce, coordinate and implement town land use related programs and/or regulations. The planner provides leadership and technical assistance in all facets of community planning, zoning, wetlands and development issues. The position serves as advisor to all town Land Use Commissions: Planning and Zoning, Zoning Board of Appeals, Aquifer, Economic Development, Inland Wetlands and Watercourses and Conservation.

The essential functions or duties listed below are intended <u>only</u> as illustrations of the various types of work that may be performed. The omission of specific statements of duties does not exclude them from the position if the work is similar, related, or a logical assignment to the position.

- Administering, interpreting and explaining relevant regulations, including: Assisting public with information regarding the permit process and application of regulations
- Reviews land use (zoning, subdivision, variance, aquifer, wetlands) applications; prepares recommendations to the appropriate Commission(s)
- Providing administrative support to the Planning and Zoning Commission, Inland Wetlands and Watercourses' Commission, Conservation Commission, Economic Development Commission, Board of Selectmen and other boards/committees as assigned. Such administrative assistance includes: agenda preparation, notice requirements, minutes and the forwarding of commission packets.
- Organizes and implements effective, trackable procedures for reviewing and processing approved and projected development plans and construction to assure compliance with Town regulations and other regulatory requirements.
- Assist in the completion of agendas, minutes
- Researches Commission requests for information; provides detailed, accurate information and advice on planning matters; interacts with professionals associated with planning applications or projects, including surveyors, lawyers, engineers, and architects.
- Answers general questions regarding legal descriptions, floodplain information, zoning, census, and general community information.
- Conducts or coordinates special studies, at the direction of a Commission, relating to land use
- Makes presentations to boards, commissions, civic groups and the general public

- Recommends updates to regulations, plans and ordinances for the various land use commissions.
- Writes and administers grant applications for land use related projects.
- Assists the Planning and Zoning Commission in writing, revising, and updating the Plan of Conservation and Development.
- Attends professional development workshops and conferences to keep abreast of trends and developments in the field of municipal planning.

Qualifications, Skills and Other Requirements:

- Requires a B.A. degree in land use planning, or a related field, and five (5) years progressive experience in land use administration or any combination of education and experience sufficient to demonstrate thorough competency and full-scope knowledge of principles and practices as applied to community development, planning and land use administration.
- Thorough knowledge of the principles and accepted practices of land use planning, land use administration and enforcement.
- The position involves frequent interaction with the public, applicants, and municipal officials, requiring strong oral and written skills and the ability to interpret regulations firmly, tactfully and impartially.
- Ability to gain and retain effective working relationships with Town employees, Town officials, other municipal and governmental agency officials, and the general public.
- Considerable knowledge of modern trends and literature in the field of planning.
- Considerable knowledge of federal, state, and local regulations, and standards related to municipal planning.
- Ability to think conceptually, observe and evaluate trends, analyze data, draw logical conclusions, and prepare comprehensive reports.
- Ability to communicate well, both orally and in writing
- Ability to work effectively on multiple projects at the same time
- Sound knowledge of municipal government functions, policies, rules and regulations
- Site plan review expertise
- Working knowledge in the use of ArcGIS, GPS, permit tracking, and website software.

Utilizing the regional planner program will enable participating towns to buy into not only the expertise of a dedicated planner for their town - but the larger staff already in place at NECCOG. NECCOG has a long history of providing planning services to its member towns. These services include facilitating plans of conservation and development, drafting zoning, aquifer, subdivision and wetlands regulations, developing/updating zoning maps, economic development plans and serving as town planner of various towns. Currently, three staff members have planning expertise and we have our regional engineer to also assist in planning. This existing expertise and capacity will be significant to the participants as it will allow the new planner the ability to have back-up and to have a readily available group to collaborate for various town projects.

For this position we are assuming a $55,000 - $65,000 salary range, benefits (35%) and other costs at $5,000 (other overhead to be covered by NECCOG) or $79,250 to $92,750 annually. We do have some ability to utilize this person on regional projects should the participation not warrant one-hundred percent of the costs being borne by the participating towns. However, that calculation is dependent on which towns choose to participate.

Back Office Administrative Functions

Back office administrative functions generally refers to payroll, purchasing, accounts receivable and payable, general human resources (including recruitment & staff development) and IT support. Regional examples of this approach are limited and none exists in Connecticut. There are, however, examples of this service in Massachusetts that appear to offer significant benefits to their participating towns. These benefits include:

- Cost savings through economies of scale
- Increased administrative continuity to cover for holidays and staff sickness by drawing from a greater staff pool than would have been available to each separate town as often (especially for our smaller towns) there is but one person performing these duties
- Better access to a higher level of expertise and to the latest technology
- With this approach each town maintains its independence and its own identity.

The original and longest such service is provided by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) located in western Massachusetts. FRCOG provides a regional town accounting program for twelve of their twenty-six towns. "The Town Accounting Program is a fee-for-service program initiated by the FRCOG in 2005 to respond to the needs of several Franklin County communities for professional accounting services. Services include warrant input, journal entries, assistance with reconciliation of cash and receivables, year-end closing entries, Free Cash certification, assistance with tax recap and Schedule A preparation.[6]" "In conjunction with the FRCOG, eleven participating towns with populations under 2,000 have entered agreements to use the FRCOG's MIP accounting software, and all program towns are fully converted and using MIP. For town departments with high-speed internet access, accounting files are able to be viewed from the web. Additional town office staff have been trained to access their town's data on an inquiry-only basis in order to research account activity and vendor history.[7]" The staffing level for this regional service is six persons (four accountants and two program managers).

While the FRCOG is a fully in-house service the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission's Regional Municipal Accounting Program outsources their services[8]:

> *The success of our program is largely due to our shared commitment to five domains that focus on streamlining productivity and achieving consistency. These five domains of focus are:*
>
> - ***Outsourcing -*** *We have developed a contractual-base program with a CPA firm that has the appropriate capacity to provide* <u>*municipal*</u> *accountant services and oversight. The contracting firm is directly responsible for providing the accounting services on behalf of the PVPC. The PVPC provides administrative oversight of the program - including procuring the services, coordinating contractual and financial management, and providing program coordination - with oversight of participating Towns;*
> - ***Achieving Equity -*** *Transparency and control is very important for Towns. Our program allows participating municipalities to engage in quarterly evaluations to ensure greater quality and satisfaction of services received. During moments of procuring for services, participating municipalities get to be involved with the selection process;*

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[6] https://frcog.org/program-services/town-accounting-program/

[7] IBID

[8] http://www.pvpc.org/projects/regional-municipal-accounting-0

- ***Standardized software -*** *Each community that participates in the regional program must use the same accounting software so that it's streamlined to achieve consistency and keeps the program productive;*
- ***Remote Access -*** *This allows the contracting firm to have direct remote access to a municipal computer system at the participating municipalities when working offsite - this streamlines productivity and achieves consistency;*
- ***Standardized procedures -*** *Every participating municipality must be subject to following one standardized procedure. This will keep the program consistent and helps with productivity.*

Services include but not limited to (depending on accountant needs of municipality):

- *Warrant input*
- *Journal entries*
- *Assistance with reconciliation of cash and receivables*
- *Year-end closing entries*
- *Free Cash certification*
- *Assistance with tax recap and Schedule A preparation*

The benefits for Town's that participate in this program include:

- *Professional, qualified, trained staff*
- *Staff are mentored on specifics of municipal accounting, GASB, UMAS, partnering with DOR DLS*
- *Back up staff available if primary accountant is sick or otherwise unable to provide services*
- *No need to go through the hiring process*
- *No need to maintain employee paperwork*
- *No retirement issues*
- *PEACE OF MIND: Local officials know town accounting is being completed efficiently and effectively in adherence to Mass. General Laws.*

Recommend that NECCOG explore a municipal accounting program similar to those described in Massachusetts. To accomplish this a **special study committee** should be formed to explore this program option. This would include two to three CEOs, three town treasurers, three town accountants/bookkeepers persons and NECCOG's finance advisor.

Training

There are a range of topics that town hall staff and local elected persons would benefit from to assist them in better performing their jobs and to be in compliance with the law or related regulations. The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) provides ongoing education for local officials and the quality of their instruction is outstanding. Our intent is to complement their offerings and offer ongoing training on a monthly basis. This proposal is to put forth an annual training schedule on topics that would be beneficial to town staff and local elected officials.   Possible training sessions/ topics to be offered by NECCOG

- Using the Regional GIS Viewer
- Sexual Harassment
- Record Retention
- RFP/RFQ Process
- FOIA Practices/Meeting Agendas/Executive Sessions
- Social Media Policy
- Workplace Violence/ Active Shooter Training/ Building Security
- Hiring/Firing Practices/ Background Checks
- Public Relations
- Cyber Security/ Password Protection
- ADA
- Ethics/Conflicts of Interest
- Safety/ OSHA Standards

We can accommodate this service at no additional fee to the members.

Household Hazardous Waste

The member towns of NECCOG have limited opportunity/options to dispose of their household hazardous waste (HHW). Residents have no year-round HHW disposal option. Six of our towns, through the Midnortheast Recycling Operating Committee, are associated with the HHW disposal site located in Willington which offers twelve collection dates (five hours each day between April and November). The other ten towns offer sporadic one-day HHW events and many go two or more years between collection events. Often, these one-day events are not convenient due to their timing and/or lack of frequency - which diminishes participation. NECCOG and its member towns receive ongoing communications from residents seeking to dispose of HHW.

NECCOG has been awarded a Regional Performance Incentive Program Grant of $775,000 to build and operate (for two years) a permanent HHW facility. The Town of Brooklyn has offered to host the facility at their municipal garage/transfer station facility. The town's engineer, who is also the NECCOG Regional Engineer, has conducted a preliminary site analysis and has found it to be suitable for the HHW facility and related uses.

The Regional HHW facility would consist of a stand-alone steel pre-fabricated building, approximately 50 feet wide, 100 feet long and 35 feet tall. This approach (which would be the first of its kind in Connecticut) would make the HHW collection process fully contained and protected from the weather or other intrusions. This will make the site more secure in terms of trespass and containing any potentially damaging HHW materials from harming the environment. Within this structure will be a three-compartment, pre-fabricated storage units with 2-hour fire-rated steel construction to store HHW products. The storage building will be equipped with explosion proof lights and exhaust fans, a chemical resistant sump liner, floor grating, emergency eye wash and shower, and a dry chemical fire suppression system. The compartments will be used to keep labeled and dated drums or containers of incompatible materials separated. Each compartment will have its own door, passive ventilation, and containment sump. The structure will have the assurance of its manufactures warranty, UL classification, FM Approval and state certification. It will be designed to comply with EPA, OSHA, Uniform Building & Fire Codes, BOCA National Building and Fire Codes and the National Electric Code for use in Group H (hazard-containing) occupancies. Emergency eye wash and shower and dry chemical fire suppression system will be located in close proximity to areas of sorting and storage. The HHW facility floor, where waste unloading, shipping, identification, and packing occurs, will be constructed of structurally reinforced concrete, and sealed with an epoxy coating or other solvent barrier. It will slope to a locking drain or sump for containment of spills. The floor will slope slightly away from the storage unit and the outside walls of the structure, so that any accidental spills are more easily contained.

The facility has not been acted on for two reasons. One, there is some resistance to the facility within the proposed host town; although the extent of that resistance is not fully understood. Second, there is concern that the grant will be "swept" by the state due to its current budget situation. NECCOG has none of the grant funds and there is some hesitation to commit to the construction of such a site and the liability that it might impose on the member towns.

The alternative is to conduct one or more one-day events and have each town pay its share based on amounts brought in by residents of the participating towns. NECCOG can (as it has multiple times in the past) issue a RFP to secure a qualified vendor and then move forward with such an event. Costs to each town are totally dependent on participation. Our past events cost approximately $55,000 to hold.

Regional Assessor

A Town Assessor's Office is responsible for the discovery, listing, and equitable valuation of all real and personal property within a town in accordance with Connecticut State Statutes for the annual generation of the Grand List (the record of all taxable and tax exempt property in the Town) - which includes real estate, business personal property and registered motor vehicles. The valuations are subject to ad valorem taxation on the assessment roll each year. The "ad valorem" basis for taxation means that all property should be taxed "according to value," which is the definition of ad valorem. “Assessors determine property tax assessments, but do not set the tax rate or calculate the tax bills. The rate is set by the municipality’s legislative body based partly on the total assessed value of taxable property.”

> Competence in assessment administration in the State of Connecticut shall be evidenced by a CCMA I or a CCMA II designation. Such designations shall be issued by the Secretary to persons who are recommended by the Committee. No person shall be recommended for either designation unless he or she has satisfied the applicable education and experience requirements and has passed the appropriate comprehensive examination.
>
> Section 12-40a-6. Assessor Certification

The Office preforms a range of statutorily mandated functions that necessitate the retention of a highly qualified individual. Most, if not all, of the actions of this office are dictated by statute. The key task of the assessor is to discover, list and value all taxable and tax exempt property including real estate, personal property and motor vehicles - in order to provide the tax collector with a base for revenue collection. The Assessor must be certified to sign the Grand List.

“Connecticut General Statutes require that beginning October 1, 2000, each assessor or member of a board of assessors that signs the grand list must be certified in accordance with section 12-40a. Consequently, many towns have made receipt of the state designation a condition of employment.” There are two types of certification: CCMA I and CCMA II. As explained in the Certified Connecticut Municipal Assessor Guidebook:

> *The CCMA I designation was established to identify professional assessors with the necessary understanding of the administrative practices and procedures, statutory requirements, and valuation techniques to serve in an administrative capacity in the typical Connecticut Assessor’s Office.*
>
> *The CCMA II designation was established to identify professional assessors with a greater breath of experience in the assessment field, as well as an advanced understanding of the valuation issues and techniques used within the assessment field. Unlike the CCMA I designation, the CCMA II designation requires a thorough understanding of the income approach to value.*

The certification for the assessor is renewed every five years. During that five-year period the assessor, in order to be eligible for re-certification must complete fifty hours of approved training. A key element in the re-certification process is the Annual School for Assessors at the University of Connecticut. This training is fundamental and essential to the proper operation of the office.

Real property assessments are made by computing 70 percent of the estimated market value of such property at the time of the last general valuation. Every 5 years the office conducts a revaluation of all Real Estate as defined by State Statutes. All other personal property is revalued annually. Additionally and because of the assessment process the office works with the Board of Assessment Appeals as required based on appeals made by property owners.The assessor administers state and local programs of tax relief, applies exemptions as permitted by state law and assists the public. The office requires a strong knowledge of the principles and practices of property valuation and assessment and the ability to interpret such on an individual basis. The Assessors Office is also an office that receives significant public inquiries (realtors, attorneys, developers and the public) due to the type of information maintained by the office. The office must also notify the public through public notice/ press release of various programs and their filing requirements and mailings of various types. The development of the Grand List and other statutorily mandated work must proceed according to law. The office also receives a regular (but unpredictable) flow of information requests from the public.

On an ongoing basis, the Assessor maintains and updates a wide range of records. Daily the Assessor deals with phone issues, customer service to walk-in customers including attorneys, real estate listers, and appraisers and of course town taxpayers. The office processes and files the Certificates of Corrections to the Grand List, transfers of property and mapping issues. The office balances all corrections with the Tax Collector and file the Certificates of Corrections for the month. The office is continually processing transfers of property, computing penalties for transfers that have Public Act 490, informing new owners of the need to file certain documents. Inspections are performed as necessary to new buildings in order to process prorated property assessments. The office files State of Connecticut reports as mandated.

While the Assessor's Office has a complex array of Daily duties - much of its work is Cyclical.

Month	Monthly Duties
January	‣ Primary concerns are the finalization of the Grand List in preparation for printing and signing into law
February	‣ Applications from elderly/disabled start to arrive for tax relief and additional veteran benefits ‣ Work begins with the Board of Assessment Appeals
March	‣ Process corrections mandated by the Board of Assessment Appeals are processed ‣ Elderly/Disabled Renters Program Activity (varies)
April	‣ State report M-37 due to OPM April lst ‣ Applications for elderly/disabled Renters commences. The applications for renters now (based on legislation changes last year) runs from April 1st to October 1st, so the Office has many interruptions.
May	‣ State report M-13 due to OPM by May lst ‣ Elderly homeowner's applications come to a close and Office begins taking renter applications

Month	Monthly Duties
June	‣ Report to State Forester due ‣ Work on sending the grand list to administrative software company - to produce tax bills ‣ Elderly/Disabled Renters Program Activity (varies)
July	‣ Report to VA due July 1st ‣ State report M-35 due to OPM by July lst ‣ Most of July is spent dealing with motor vehicle issues generated by the tax bills ‣ Elderly/Disabled Renters Program Activity (varies)
August	‣ State report M-59 due to OPM August lst ‣ Begin to prepare personal property declarations to be sent out in September ‣ Elderly/Disabled Renters Program Activity (varies)
September	‣ This month marks the filing period for Farm/Forest and Open Space applications ‣ Work on the veteran applications that have been filed ‣ The Assessor conducts inspections of property changes due to building permits issued since the prior 10/1. ‣ Notify disabled veterans of the need to annually file their percentage of disability. ‣ Review and declare to the State of Connecticut all reduction to the Elderly homeowner program ‣ Elderly/Disabled Renters Program Activity (varies)
October	‣ M-35P & M36P reports due to OPM by October 1st ‣ Farm/Forest and Open Space applications continue ‣ Property inspections continue ‣ Elderly/Disabled Renters Program Activity (varies)
November	‣ File 490 classifications with the Town Clerk ‣ Start work on Supplemental Motor Vehicle pricing and continue to process all new applications for PA 490 and other changes to the Grand List ‣ Value personal property for the grand list as filed by the taxpayer's declarations
December	‣ Apply exemptions as needed and work on pricing of the regular motor vehicle grand list

Specific work includes:

- Record Building Permits, Certificate of Occupancy issued by Building Department include sketch of new construction or additions by utilizing CAMA system
- Contacts properties with open building permits in August – October to set up inspections for the assessment of partially completed construction annually.
- Conducts on-site, interior and exterior inspections for new and partially completed construction on residential and commercial structures. For new and partial construction, measures and takes photos. Enters data and photos into CAMA system, updates building sketches and sends out pro-rate notices to property owners.
- Reviews MLS data of listings and sales to determine if there is non-permitted construction work that should be assessed such as outbuildings, finished basements, additional bedrooms and bathrooms. Makes referrals to Building Inspector for non-permitted work.
- Responds to property owner inquiries on property data in the CAMA system and on tax maps.
- Process transfers of Property Ownership, and other documents pertaining to use and ownership.
- Process owner/address changes.
- Maintains database of tax map changes to be submitted annually to GIS web hosting and tax map maintenance company. The changes are from new surveys filed, property owner inquires and land records research. Reviews drafts and approves final maps to be printed and updated to GIS annually.
- Processes electronic printed field cards for all properties at least twice annually to be sent to GIS maintenance company for linking to GIS maps for on-line printing by public.
- Processes new applications and changes to existing PA 490-enrolled properties due to changes in use and sales. Files certification,

declassification and conveyance tax releases with the town clerk annually. Sends classification, declassification and change letters to property owners as necessary. Sends new property owners letter on increased assessment for next grand list and PA 490 enrollment information. As a result of land records filings, contacts existing owners of PA 490-enrolled land to file updated applications as necessary.

- Conducts periodic surveys of PA 490 farmland owners to determine if the land is still being farmed. Sends letters to owners of non-compliant property on need to conduct farming activities or be declassified.
- Calculates conveyance tax due upon sale of PA 490 properties.
- Administer Exemption Programs (Veterans, Blind, Totally Disabled, Dairy Farm, Handicapped Adapted Motor Vehicles, Farm Machinery, Active Duty Serviceman)
- In Admin system, pro-rates veterans, elderly and disabled benefits upon sale or transfer of ownership. Sends notices to property owners of assessment increases.
- Annually, sends out applications and letters to new and existing property owners for Additional Veterans, Totally Disabled and Elderly and Disabled Homeowner benefit programs. Reviews documentation with applicants. Maintains list of interested parties to be sent applications for these programs. Enters data into Admin system.
- Annually, sends out notices to apply to prior eligible and interested new Renter Rebate applicants. Meets with all applicants to process applications and enter data into state system - approximately five applications each year and sends monthly report to Office of Policy and Management.
- Research and process all property sales, transfers, name changes, probate certificates and other documents affecting real estate market values. Enters data into CAMA. Conducts any pro-rating of benefits in Admin system. Bridges data to CAMA. Records sales over $2,000 in OPM's on-line database. Sends out verification letters to new owners of these properties and processes and changes provided by new owners that affect market value of the sale. Add sale to summary of property sales placed in public-access notebook and printed property cards. Post new sales summary to website for public access.
- Process Commercial Motor Vehicle Exemption, Manufacturing and Machinery Exemption Applications
- Sends out Personal Property declarations to all existing and new business owners.
- Reviews trade name permit filings in town clerk's office for new businesses. Enters data into personal property CAMA system. Sends change notices to all personal property owners.
- Work with business owners to inventory existing assets and/or complete declaration correctly.
- Makes initial application for a business under the Distressed Municipality program. Receives compliance forms annually from eligible businesses.
- Process Supplemental Motor Vehicle (MVS) information. Goal to create a MVS grand list by December of each year
- Process Motor Vehicle Information for all vehicles registered in Town. Goal to have MV list as finalized as possible by mid-January of each year
- Process Certificates of Correction as needed for real estate, personal property and motor vehicles.
- Prepare required reports for State Office of Policy and Management as required
- Mail and Process Annual Income and Expense Reports
- Process tax exempt returns (Quadrennial or Supplemental)
- Process Grand List. Goal to have the grand list completed by mid-January of each year
- Process Board of Assessment Appeals (BAA)
- Maintains assessor's page on web site and assists other departments with posting their information
- Based on recorded maps and deeds updates data for the Town GIS Property Viewer
- Works closely with reval company every five years to re-evaluate property values

Most of the regions smaller towns employe their assessor on a part-time basis and several of the assessors serve more than one town. The assessors serving in more than one town are often referred to as "shared" employees. However, we are not aware of a situation where there is an actual contract for such an arrangement. Rather, it appears that the individual assessor makes individual compensation arrangements with whatever town retains them for these services. NECCOG suggests two approaches to proving assessment on a regional basis. The first, which in the short term makes the most sense, is to have NECCOG employ the assessors needed (dependent on the number and size of participating towns) and supply them directly. This is similar to how we provide animal control officers. NECCOG would be the employer and the participating towns would buy the service. Most, but not all, the assessor work would be performed at the participating town hall office. The second and more long term approach is to harness the power of the internet - in particular the Nutmeg Network - and eatables a similar structure to the way counties provide assessment services.

Either approach suggested in this proposal is not without controversy and we should move deliberately on this proposal. The first or simplest approach would be to hire one or more assessors and have them assigned to participating towns. For discussion purposes we are using the following cost projections: $70,000 to 75,000 for the program lead person (a fully certified assessor and Assistant Assessors (also fully certified at $50,000 - $60,000 plus benefits (35%) $164,700 plus office supplies/software/travel at $10,000. The total personal and costs will depend on the participating towns.

The second option will require a study process. To do this we need to enlist the active participation of our assessors - similar to the way we did with the regional revaluation. To that end I suggest another study committee to fully flesh out the proposal and then bring it back to the member towns for consideration.

Economic Development

This program, consistent with the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) would provide a full service economic development office for the sixteen towns. NECCOG would assist existing businesses, start-ups and relocations with their varied needs to build a stronger regional economy. Assistance in:

> **…growing small town economies requires careful planning that capitalizes on regional strengths.**
>
> **Senator HEITKAMP, U.S. Senator North Dakota**
> THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL STRATEGIES IN RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
> Thursday, May 1, 2014
> UNITED STATES SENATE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON JOBS, RURAL ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENERGY INNOVATION, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY,
> Washington, DC

- Real Estate Searches using the region's GIS capacity and developing a new GIS Economic Assistance Viewer
- Working directly with the regional Workforce Investment Board, three Chambers of Commerce, Town Economic development staff, EDED, USDA, Department of Labor, Tech Schools, High Schools and Higher Education to develop and enhance the region's workforce
- Maintain a current data set on the region which is fully integrated into GIS
- Conduct , Facilitate and Keep Current on the economic trends to better develop the region and respond to change
- Assist towns with site visits
- Maintain a strong Social Media presence for the region in terms of putting the best face on the region
- Complementary Development that enhances, protects and maintains the region's natural resources
- Develop a regional branding strategy and complementary marketing strategy - community.
- campaigns to support editorial calendar for Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, and Tumblr, appropriately maintaining the brand voice across platforms to engage followers - Run cross-platform social advertising campaigns

Economic development is not a static activity. It requires constant attention from someone skilled in ensuring that the region's brand is cultivated and cared for and that it's marketing strategy is kept on track. The Regional Economic Development Director will serve as the business community liaison and first point of contact for both existing business owners as well as owners of businesses who wish to locate in the region, providing a general overview of the respective steps involved in starting a business in the region — including explaining various towns' permitting processes for development. Advise boards of Selectmen and the Economic Development Commissions on complex, often confidential, economic development plans or policy issues. As necessary, apply for and manage grants related to economic development. Researches economic trends, and prepares corresponding reports and recommendations related to strategic economic development.

This program, in addition to the new staff person, would have in place an advisory committee to ensure the diversity of interests in economic development are "at the table" to best steer and recommended policies and actions. NECCOG has such a group already delineated in its bylaws as part of the CEDS structure and process.

For this position we are assuming a $50,000 - $60,000 salary range, benefits (35%) and other costs at $10,000 (other overhead to be covered by NECCOG) or $77,500 to $91,000 annually. We do have some ability to utilize this person on regional projects should the participation not warrant one-hundred percent of the costs being borne by the participating towns. However, that calculation is dependent on which towns choose to participate.

Land Use Inspection/Enforcement

The purpose of this proposal is to provide professional, technical, administrative, and inspection work related to the interpretation and enforcement of the Town Land Use Regulations (Zoning, Subdivision and Wetlands) for each participating town within the NECCOG region.

Each NECCOG town has responsibility to enforce its respective land use regulations. Currently, with the exception of Plainfield and Killingly, each of the 16 towns enforcement and inspection for land use is a part-time task. The number of hours varies from town to town and some towns have this person assigned to other responsibilities - such as town planner functions. Land use activities are, while in general slower than they were in recent years (2005-2009) are routine and must be attended to in a timely, knowledgeable and professional manner.

Professional training, while not required (at this time) is available for each land use inspection/enforcement role. The Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officials (CAZEO) has a certification program administered through the Center for Public Policy and Social Research at Central Connecticut State University. They additionally have a certification program for support staff who primarily support the ZEO. More and more towns are making CAZEO Certification a condition of employment. While there is no comparable certification for persons acting to enforce inland wetlands regulations, there are any number of resources and skills that are essential to properly conducting the job. This starts with meeting the necessary Department of Environment and Energy Requirements (DEEP) to at as a towns "designated agent"; the basic knowledge of IWWC and the ability to read/understand site plans (fundamental to both). DEEP offers intermittent training for IWCW agency members and staff and there is the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetland

Commissions (CACIWC) which provides a wealth of information regarding IWWC resources and related issues.

NECCOG proposes, similar to our Engineering Program, is to hire a lead program person with the necessary credentials and experience to serve multiple towns as their "Town Land Use Enforcement Agent." Based on our understanding of the work and the current activity level of our towns, we believe that one such person could cover 3 to r towns. This, of course is dependent on the actual number and relative size of those towns actually choosing to participate. Additional staff would be hired to meet the full needs of the program depending on the number of participating towns. The Program, while based out of our Dayville location, would have a presence in each town hall and of course travel to the sites to be inspected. In terms of cost - it depends on the number of participating towns. Hypothetically, we could have two certified ZEO/WEO - one as the program lead at $47,500 and the other at $40,000 per, benefits (35%), travel at $8,000 and other at $5,000. Additionally, two vehicles paid by NECCOG at $22,000 each costed out to the program over a five year period or $8,800 per year - $139,925 annually

In terms of specific responsibilities a land use inspection/enforcement agent involve:

- Inspects single family homes, apartment buildings, businesses and vacant lands; Ensures compliance with applicable zoning regulations; Issues notices of violation; performs follow-up inspections as necessary
- Provides recommendations to applicants, and citizens regarding the regulations and enforcement procedures
- Responds to alleged violations; interviews complainants and witnesses; takes photographs of violations and documents activities
- Inspects property for abandoned or inoperative vehicles; issues notices for vehicle abatement if necessary; oversees abatement and removal of vehicles
- Inspects home occupancies to assure compliance is maintained
- Coordinates with various outside agencies regarding code enforcement activities including police, fire and health; reports abatements; prepares related reporting documents
- Serves as a resource to other Town departments regarding zoning and other code requirements
- Maintains records and prepares reports on inspections and surveillance activities
- Responds to and resolves citizen inquiries and complaints
- Assists in preparing case reports for court or administrative proceedings; testifies in court and at administrative proceedings as necessary
- Attends, as requested, regular monthly and special meetings of land use commissions
- Prepares a monthly Agent Report for the Town Boards and the First Selectman