

# Comments submitted to the Vermont House and Senate Committees on Appropriations February 7, 2022

## Introduction:

- Comments submitted by Jack D. Cunningham
- Town of Wardsboro, Vt.
- I have been Wardsboro's Windham Regional Commissioner for 16+ years and am currently serving as Chair of the Project Review Committee, and Vice-Chair of the Executive Board.
- I am submitting comments relative to the States proposed funding of Regional Planning Commissions (RPC's).

## Background

- The State has level funded the RPC's for the past 20 years
- The Legislature has over time increased the responsibilities/requirements put on RPC's and their member towns.
- Much of the RPC's work is paid for by grants through State and Federal Agencies with the Federal Grants requiring match funding - ranging from 20% to 50% -- most of which comes out of the RPC's state appropriation.

## Resulting Problems

- Most grant work is very narrow in scope, with funds not applicable to other efforts required of the RPC's
- Member Towns are requesting/requiring more and more assistance each year
- The limited funding has created a non-sustainable funding situation
  - RPC's are limited in applying for grants as current funding greatly impedes the ability to match fund.
  - RPC's are experiencing increasing difficulty/inability to respond to member town requests for assistance
  - There is an increasing inability to take on other, non-legislatively required, but needed regional efforts  
(eg. energy/climate, housing, broadband, infrastructure and town planning related issues)
  - RPC's are experiencing **MAJOR** difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified staff - as pay scales are necessarily **FAR** below industry averages, and not competitive with neighboring states and many municipalities.

## Possible/Suggested Solutions

- Return to the originally legislated funding of 17% of the property tax fund
- Just inflation adjust the 2001 appropriation (approx. \$3MM would increase to approx. \$4.5MM)

## Examples of how the Windham Regional Commission has benefited just MY town alone in the past few years.

- T/S Irene
- Assistance with flood plain buy-outs
- Salt Shed grant funding assistance and project management
- Hazard mitigation

- Flood plain management
- Broadband planning
- Town Planning and Town Plan Review/Approval
- Water Quality issues
- Culvert and road signage inventories
- Advice on zoning applications and on proposed projects requiring Act 250, Section 248 (& 248a) permits.

**Simply put, over time, level funding is tantamount to reduced funding. The work of the RPC's can not continue anywhere near the level required by either the Legislature or their member towns based on 2001 funding.**

Thank you for your consideration on this most important funding issue.

Jack Cunningham