



March 21, 2016

The Honorable Robert Introne, Chariman
Science, Technology, and Energy Committee
NH Legislative Office Building, Room 304
Concord, NH 03301

RE: SB 334

Dear Chairman Introne and Members of the Committee:

The NH Association of Regional Planning Commissions (NHARPC) is pleased to express its support for SB 334 to establish a commission to study the planning functions of the NH Office of Energy and Planning (OEP).

Since the merger of the Office of State Planning and Governor's Office of Community Services to form the OEP nearly a decade ago, there has been a gradual reduction in planning functions and funding at OEP. As proposed in 2015's HB 2, these roles and funding levels were to be reduced once again; however, these provisions were not included in the final version of the bill.

New Hampshire's municipalities are largely dependent on volunteer planning boards. Regional planning commissions (RPCs) work closely with OEP to provide essential technical assistance and planning support functions across the state. OEP's Municipal and Regional Planning Assistance program, State Data Center and Geographic Information Services provide valuable resources to RPCs and municipalities. Examples range from support when confronted with a complex scenario or availability of quality data regarding population or housing that can make the difference in preparing a successful grant application. Timely availability of accurate data of this type is critical in a community's ability to adequately plan for needed infrastructure improvements and growth trends.

OEP also serves state agencies by providing smart growth leadership and coordination. It is essential to retain good communication and coordination to ensure our limited state dollars are used most efficiently. In this role, OEP represents a direct link between state agencies, regions and municipalities in understanding the interrelationship of planning functions and sectors that would otherwise operate in isolation. Such coordination is key in effectively addressing economic development, transportation infrastructure and natural resources needs and issues.

Recognizing the importance of coordinated statewide planning, NH's RPCs have each spent the last several years developing updated regional plans through the Granite State Future initiative. This effort included the development of a summary document called the Statewide Snapshot which takes a comprehensive look at land use, housing, economic development, transportation and the environment. It sets forth the basis of issues and trends, needs and opportunities that can supplement the work of OEP and serve as a resource in updating the State Development Plan.

NHARPC supports a thoughtful process to consider the important role of OEP in serving our municipalities, our regions, and our State. The establishment of a study commission as proposed in SB 334 provides just such an opportunity.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you or your Committee members have questions.

Sincerely,

Glenn Coppelman
Chair

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