

10 Reasons to Avoid Regional Plans

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Planning is not a one-size-fits-all exercise. Yet, that is exactly what regional plans attempt, while gradually silencing local officials and the public.

Here are 10 reasons to avoid implementing regional plans and councils. Cleaner Greener NY [1], also called the Capital Region Sustainability Plan [2], is a model of why community members and local public officials must work together and say "NO" to regionalization and regional planning.

See how many apply to your region's proposal.

1. Planners gain miniscule community participation when forming the regions, the plans or the councils

There over 1 million residents in the proposed Capital Region Sustainability Plan (CRSP). Despite claims of "stakeholder engagement" (CRSP p26), less than 300 participated in planners' workshops. In CRSP surveys, only 96 people, or less than .0001 percent of residents participated. (CRSP Appendix 16, p11)

2. Plans are prepackaged and do not represent unique community needs.

In spite of claims to the contrary, most plans encompass the same government sponsored top-down "livability" control features. CRSP includes the same "livable communities" (p99), fewer vehicle miles traveled (p128), and increased compact living (p105) as most regional plans. Cleaner Greener NY (CGNY) further promises the government and non-governmental organization pushed (NGO) standbys of virtually every plan: confiscation of open spaces (p75), forced environmental justice (p58), hi-speed rails (p63), and dilution of privately controlled farmland interests through conservation easements (p90).

3. Plans do not protect individual property rights.

Few regional plans mention the potential individual property rights infringements, tax increases or loss of potential wealth accumulation inherent in most proposals. None offers any method for protection against such losses. The CRSP contains no enforceable landowner protections.

4. Plans fail to protect communities against onerous regulations passed by regional councils.

Once installed, regional councils or consortiums, have immense power to pass regulations with minimal or no local input. The CRSP offers a seat for council representatives. However, having a community representative sitting on a larger multi-county consortium is not the same as making planning decisions with local citizens and local public officials working together in your hometown. (CRSP p8)

5. Plans rely on questionable "experts" for critical advice.

The CRSP relies on the Apollo Alliance for assurances there will be green jobs, which are fundamental to the plan's success. Yet, Apollo advised on the 'stimulus program' assuring there would be shovel ready and green jobs if passed. A year later, we learned Apollo exaggerated the job potential. (CGNY p40, p44)

6. Plans release questionable or incomplete statistics, which create false impressions.

In the case of Cleaner, Greener NY, the plan optimistically depends on green jobs, stating the US had a 9.1% increase in these between 1998 and 2007. The authors omitted that NY actually lost 1.9% of their green jobs during that same period. They also failed to notify community members that Congressional hearings cast serious doubt on the permanency, quality or even existence of the green jobs claimed. (CGNY p37)

7. Promotes community solutions without explaining the potential negative effects.

The CRSP promotes conservation easements to protect farmland from development without addressing the loss of dominant estate status, potential for plan changes, the downsides of 'best practices' and a host of ways in which landowners can lose their property and its value while still technically being the owner. (CGNY p90, p100)

8. Councils open the door for government grants, which often contain restrictive policies to reduce vehicle use while forcing low-income housing and social justice.

The CRSP states that future grant monies will be necessary, but not their source nor stipulations that will be attached. (CRSP p8)

9. Regional councils confiscate much of local officials' power, leaving the community with less

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In the CRSP, 25 local leaders have already diminished their oversight by agreeing to allow Albany to take the lead in all grant processing. To protect constituents, public officials must carefully study all grants and report the implications to their constituents before approval. Grants are the doorway to regulatory control of community members' lifestyles, activities and residential opportunities. (CRSP p8) In NY, communities are already beginning to pay the price for regionalization before the plan is even approved.

10. Once formed, regional councils are virtually irreversible.

Once officials agree to form a region and council, if community members discover they dislike its regulations, how can they disband the entity and roll back the dictates? There is no provision in the CRSP for its break up or regulatory rollback.

[1] http://d2srrmjar534jf.cloudfront.net/6/d4/3/1266/andrew_cuomo_cleaner_greener_ny.pdf

[2] <http://sustainablecapitalregion.org/>

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