

House Transportation, Housing & Local Government

03/25/2025 Upon Adjournment

HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Marsha Porter-Norton Against La Plata County</p>	<p>March 25, 2025</p> <p>Good afternoon, members of the committee:</p> <p>My name is Marsha Porter-Norton and I am a La Plata County Commissioner. I am testifying in opposition to HB25-1198. La Plata County is a member of both Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI) and CCAT, and both organizations have raised a number of concerns with this bill.</p> <p>While HB 1198 aims to improve regional planning coordination—a laudable goal that we share—it misses the mark in practice. This bill sets up a mechanism within the Department of Local Affairs to coordinate planning and technical assistance to communities. However, given that many communities already conduct coordinated regional planning, we are concerned this bill has not had sufficient statewide stakeholder involvement. I fear it will duplicate existing work already being done while diverting stretched, diminishing resources that could be used in other, more productive ways.</p> <p>In southwest Colorado, the problem is not a lack of planning. We have the Regional Transportation Planning Commission; a regional broadband group; four housing authorities (Ignacio, and in Montezuma, La Plata County and Archuleta Counties). There is Region 9 Economic Development District (Region 9), an EDA organization that does effective work related to housing, broadband, and more. We also have a regional council of governments (SWCOG). We all work together “organically” and have many plans in place based on regional needs, capacities, and opportunities. HB 1198 does not clearly demonstrate how creating a new framework would enhance these existing efforts; it may, in fact, complicate or interfere with them.</p> <p>The bill contemplates a “regional planning framework”, but we are unclear on what this will be mean—i.e., what is the end result, outcomes, or products it will produce, and how will these enhance (or complicate) our existing networks and plans/ning? Without clear answers, the risk of redundancy is high.</p>

	<p>Will there be resources appropriated for this work to be carried out? If not, that is of high concern. La Plata County has lost millions in funding since 2000 due to legislative actions that cut the residential assessment rate making unfunded mandates almost entirely untenable from an implementation standpoint.</p> <p>To examine a few specific areas of planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• With water, the problem isn't lack of a vision or plans; the problem is allocation of resources for infrastructure. In La Plata County, rural water systems have high costs and must serve sparsely populated areas covering long distances. In short, what will improve water infrastructure planning is not more plans but is instead securing the millions in resources necessary to get water to where it's needed,• We already have a plan in place for regional transit. Again, the problem isn't a local of planning, it's a lack of money to fund rural transit which is particularly expensive,• Then, regarding housing: any projects around housing tend to be locally-based and funds are increasingly scarce, although I am proud of our county for its work with housing as we have attained State grants, we collaborate with DOLA, and entities here have secured Prop 123 monies. The plans are in place; what we need to produce more units at the local level is help with funding the costs of water, infrastructure, start-up costs and land. <p>Finally, the way the regions will be defined is vitally important. Our region consists of the five counties in southwest Colorado including Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma and San Juan, but it's unclear in the bill how the regions will be established. Additionally, Colorado's two Federally recognized Tribes are integral to what occurs in three of these counties and yet are not mentioned in the bill. I would ask that they be consulted, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and the Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe.</p> <p>This bill has laudable goals and ones that align with those of La Plata County. However, we believe this bill should be postponed until a lot more work is done at the local level, through CCI, to get much more clarity on desired outcomes. Also, the bakers may desire to hear from counties, planners, and local staff on gaps in regional planning then tailoring any future roundtable to those needs.</p> <p>Thank you. I appreciate your work for Colorado.</p> <p>Marsha Porter-Norton</p>
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	Chair, La Plata County Board of County Commissioners
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March 25, 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: Shaida Libhart, AICP

Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

Hello Madam Chair and members of the Committee. Thank you for your time today to testify in support of HB 1198. My name is Shaida Libhart. I am a professional transportation planner with nearly 20 years of experience. I am here today representing the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association as the Legislative Affairs Representative and Legislative Committee Co-Chair. APA Colorado advocates for policies that advance best practices in planning and local communities. HB 1198 addresses our community's and state's complex planning needs in a localized, voluntary, and bottom-up approach.

The 21st-century challenges facing the State of Colorado, its cities and towns, and its counties and are extremely complex and have significant interrelated impacts – including, but not limited to, housing for all, mobility for all, climate, air quality, adequate water for various users, clean water, adequate essential facilities and services, economic opportunity, contiguous and orderly development patterns, social equity, and healthy communities.

Building on the successes and lessons learned from the Water Basin Roundtables, this bill will establish integrated planning roundtables to facilitate coordination, discussion, learning, and resource sharing among local governments while bringing applicable state agencies to the table. There are many ways in which local governments coordinate today. Some are informal and others are formalized through intergovernmental agreements. However there are two things that commonly happen with the current formats.

One is that many times state agencies are not at the table to participate in the conversations proactively. Planners must reach out individually to find the right resource and answers to questions, which can lead to less efficient time spent coordinating. Having more consistent participation from the applicable agencies would improve coordination efforts and provide a pipeline from local governments to state agencies with information that could be leveraged when developing future plans and any applicable legislation.

Second, local governments are tasked with multiple new state regulations, particularly from SB174 last year, and incorporating strategies from statewide plans, like the State Water Plan. State agency participation in regular coordination with multiple local governments would facilitate greater proactive communication around how best to meet requirements amid different contexts and challenges and develop plans that are complementary and supportive at various levels of government while maintaining the flexibility needed for local governments to develop individualized plans. There is a need for coordination and compatibility for complex challenges that transcend common boundaries.

I urge you to support HB1198 and in turn support planners with effective coordination tools in Colorado. I'm happy to answer any questions and thank you for your consideration.

March 25, 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: Scott Bressler, AICP

Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

Thank you Madam Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1198 today. My name is Scott Bressler, and I've been a transportation planner for the past 25 years here in Colorado. I serve as the Legislative Committee Co-Chair of the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association. I am urging you to support HB 1198 today because communities have limited resources that can help planners meet the many new requirements from recent legislation to support more efficient planning, especially where issues cross municipal boundaries.

Over the past few years, the Colorado Legislature has increased its recognition of the importance of planning and across disciplines. Several new bills have passed that recognize when we plan for housing we must plan for transportation, when we plan for housing we must plan for water, we must be thoughtful about future growth, and more. This bill more comprehensively identifies what has been included in recent bills by establishing an integrated planning framework that identifies the many planning components that our state, regional, and local entities already address in their plans. Incorporating this framework in HB1198 does not change the work that planners are doing, it recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of the work and establishes the why for regional planning roundtables for the long-term.

The regions that exist today can be vast and are not always at the right scale for local planning issues. Additionally there are times that local governments may be best situated to coordinate with localities in other regions based on their contexts and challenges. Providing regional roundtables that are flexible in scale and nature will allow for coordination to occur in ways that are most beneficial to the local needs.

By establishing an advisory commission, the roundtables will be able to be set up at the request of local governments based on geography and/or topical needs. By working collaboratively at this early stage, the roundtables will be established where they are needed and avoid a top-down delineation of regions and support the underlying need of broad, interdisciplinary conversation that is proactive but also functional to address unforeseen needs and opportunities.

Furthermore, as participation in the roundtables is voluntary, local governments will not have to dedicate time and resources if they do not deem it in their best interest.

I'll end by stating that regional entities also bring a lot to the table and will be encouraged, but not mandated, to participate. MPOs and COGs have many existing responsibilities and while they are intended to think regionally, this bill would support additional dialogue that can feed into their work and other efforts without placing added burden on their resources for establishing or facilitating the roundtables.

Again, the intent is to provide like-minded communities opportunities to work collaboratively to solve planning issues that cross municipal borders. Thank you for your time, and again, I am urging a yes vote for HB 1198.

March 25, 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: Rocky Piro, AICP

Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

Colorado has a history of creating enabling tools to address common issues that transcend local jurisdiction boundaries. Some of these tools include provisions allowing for intergovernmental agreements or creating districts with more than one locality. Over time, the state has also developed statutes *enabling* cities, towns, counties, regions, and state agencies to address various issues and challenges. Recent legislative sessions have provided more tools and guidance, including new actions to address housing shortages, multimodal mobility, water supply, climate, environmental justice, and more efficient land use patterns (such as transit communities).

In 2025, we have older statutory provisions now coupled with new statutes that tend to be single-issue focused, more permissive than directive, and limited in scope. They lack an integrated framework necessary for addressing 21st-century change and challenges that are more interrelated and complex.

Colorado has many different ways in which regions are defined for addressing interjurisdictional challenges. There are regions for addressing multimodal transportation. There are regions for addressing transit. There are regions that address water, including watersheds and water supply. There are regions for addressing economic opportunities. There are regions for addressing resource lands.

The American Planning Association Colorado Chapter supports establishing a regional commission to work with the various classifications of regions and identify the most effective way to address multidisciplinary regions for addressing 21st-century challenges and actions. In addressing multijurisdictional, multidisciplinary regions, the Chapter advocates that a region should be understood as a system of systems. Contemporary urban and regional planning provides models for integrated systems, which a commission should consider to address regionalism. Each regional system should be designed to address (1) environmental systems (including air quality, water, and climate), (2) built environment systems, including development patterns, buildable lands, housing, adequate facilities and services, and transportation, (3) economic systems, including regional economic resources, and (4) social systems and health.

Each regional roundtable that is created should also be tasked to address the integrated systems framework presented in the previous paragraph. Roundtables are anticipated to address ways to customize and tailor their work with the comprehensive framework to reflect their respective contexts best. Local jurisdictions in the regions work with the common integrated framework in a manner that embraces locally designed action.

March 25, 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: TJ Dlubac, AICP

Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

Thank you Madam Chair and committee members for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1198 today. My name is TJ Dlubac. I am a professional planner with 20 years of experience and founded CPS, a land use planning consultant firm focused on supporting local government clients across Colorado who do not have the staff resources or expertise to meet the growth pressures they've experienced. Our team currently supports 13 Colorado communities through our on-call services and have worked with over 30 communities throughout the state of Colorado. I testify today in the capacity of a planner advocating for supporting local government control and reasonable and appropriate regional coordination.

Colorado's rural and small municipalities are facing local issues that are more complex and regional in nature than ever before. As we attempt to address local needs such as housing, economic development, water resources, transportation, and housing, we must take a regional view. From my experience throughout the State of Colorado, a regional approach to local planning and land use issues is more desirable to localities than having to solve complex, regional problems alone. While some may say that there are already structures in place to support regional coordination for local governments, I would respectfully submit that the current frameworks we do have in this state are singular in scope and rigid in nature. By way of an example of how this proposed regional roundtable would work, let's look at the Town of Ridgway. This is a small, yet growing town in Ouray County, 45 minutes to Telluride and 30 minutes from the City of Montrose.

Depending on the topic, the term "region" may differ. For example, Ridgway is impacted by the housing and job market of Telluride. They are impacted by a broader tourism reach where Ridgway is a basecamp to hikers, campers, skiers, and outdoor enthusiasts that reach the summits of San Juan County. Meanwhile, the residents of Ridgway have to travel to Montrose for groceries, healthcare, recreation center, and other services. When we refer to water supply, the region shifts drastically depending on where water rights are decreed and how they are conveyed. Similarly, watersheds can vary depending on drainage and main stem systems. These are only a few.

I highlight this example to showcase how each of these important topics – housing, economic development, climate change, water conservation, etc. all fall into different "regions" all of which have different state departments or boards/commissions that oversee that particular topic. For example, we have Economic Development regions, Transportation Planning Regions, CWCB Basin Roundtables, and so on and so on. Ridgway, and the dozens of communities like them, are seeking the support that this bill proposes to provide - a resource to approach local issues at a regional level.

This Bill, HB1198, seeks to create a commission and subsequent roundtable that can help direct questions and resources to communities seeking to collaborate regionally to better address the local issues they face day in and day out. I thank you for your time this afternoon to hear how HB1198 will create a local control based approach to regional collaboration that we have not yet been able to realize in Colorado.

March 25, 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: Jenna Skinner, AICP

Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to offer my written testimony regarding support of HB 1198. My name is Jena Skinner, and I have been a professional planner for 25 years in the beautiful mountains of Colorado. I have worked in both the private and public sectors, with experience in home rule and county jurisdictions. As an active member of the planning profession, especially with APA Colorado, I urge you to support HB 1198 as a means to increase access to regional activities while decreasing the siloed effect of Colorado's large regions with cultural and geopolitical separations.

Over my career in the mountains, a repetitive theme constantly presents itself. Local governments actively seek to find what tools and methods others employ regarding the concerns we share: housing, water, wildfire, construction, wildlife, transportation, and economic growth. State agencies often do not look far enough into those jurisdictions to see what solutions planners seek. One of the most significant assumptions is that everyone has the exact issues of those shared concerns or area needs. And while that may be true on a macro scale, many microenvironments outside of the larger metropolitan areas have unique needs, unlike those experienced in urban centers. *The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place (George Bernard Shaw).*

A regional roundtable for planning will support the variety of challenges we face in the 21st century more productively. A common, integrated planning framework where planners can share their successes and failures regionally provides the appropriate learning forum for all communities. Collaboration provides areas with limited resources and mechanisms an opportunity and access to new tools to support planning regionally and across political borders, helping planners and decision-makers with more efficient planning. Bringing the State to the table will support better planning at all levels of government and encourage efficient use of resources, possibly decreasing spending by limiting the "reinvention" of existing solutions. Solutions that are unknown to folks because they lack awareness of their existence.

Colorado is a diverse landscape with varied topographies, climates, cultures, histories, industries, and divides (literally and figuratively). To base planning on a one-size-fits-all mentality is unproductive. While issues may be similar, solutions may not be. Supporting HB 1198 allows local governments regional coordination that effectively supports State efforts and connects these governments at all levels.

I am proud to live in Colorado, and I am proud to live in the "mountain resort area" of Colorado. We feel the State often overlooks us for funding under the assumption that there is a lot of money in the mountains- and while we have a limited population of people with means, it does not mean that jurisdictions do and can close the gap of this economic inequality. For example, because our region lacks available and affordable land for housing coupled with a severe lack of resources and infrastructure, we consider regionalism a necessity for survival. Having the State at our table with the support and understanding that may be missing would be the most productive measure in planning, resulting in more effective legislation.

Supporting HB 1198 will foster collaboration and resource sharing, potentially leading to more efficient services and infrastructure, economic growth, and stronger regional identities while addressing shared challenges more effectively. That is good planning. Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this action. With this bill, Colorado grows stronger, together with less divide, more understanding, and purpose.

March 25, 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: Denis Balkas, AICP

Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

My name is Denise Balkas, and I am a former Colorado municipal planning director and member of the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association. My career spanned 30+ years in various cities across the country.

I am supportive of this legislation for two primary reasons:

1. THE CONCEPT OF REGIONAL ROUNDTABLES GIVES ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AN EQUITABLE SEAT IN THE STATEWIDE PLANNING PROCESS

As a practicing planner in Colorado for several decades, I heard frequent comments about urban vs rural, suburbs vs. central city and so forth. These comments usually reflected some sense of perceived unfairness related to geographic political influence, the allocation of resources, and the overall lack of equity. The legislation proposes that the geographic areas represented by each roundtable be locally defined. Roundtables will not be competing with other roundtables in having their issues articulated and in proposing solutions. At the conclusion of the roundtables' work, their findings will remain unique to each region and become part of a collective Colorado future vision that recognizes our similarities and differences.

2. THE WORK OF THE ROUNDTABLES WILL REPRESENT A LOCALLY CONTROLLED APPROACH TO STATEWIDE PLANNING NEEDS AND SOLUTIONS

Following comment number 1 above, the work of the roundtables will start and conclude at the local level. It need not be influenced or ranked by other regions. Quoting a colleague during a discussion about this legislation, *it is a bottom-up vs. top-down approach to local and regional planning.*

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.

March 25, 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: Susan Wood, FAICP

Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

Good afternoon, Chair Froelich and members of the Committee. I have been working as a professional planner in Colorado for almost 30 years and I am here representing the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB25-1198, which provides a framework for regional, collaborative planning in Colorado. Planning for our communities, our regions, and the State is essential for us all to have the future that we want regarding housing, water, transportation, education, resources, infrastructure and more. It cannot be done in a vacuum.

This bill is important because it provides a tool for jurisdictions, counties, cities, and towns, to work together toward implementation of these plans, by forming a roundtable to facilitate collaboration; reinforcement of shared values and goals; and a means to share ideas, which will lead to effective and efficient sharing of actions and resources.

Good planning is comprehensive and holistic, and community driven. It is best achieved when it is based on shared values and common goals. Good planning does not stop at jurisdictional boundaries. Natural features, water among them does not recognize a county line or city limits, nor do any number of other items we must plan for in communities such as air, stormwater, roadway networks, and housing needs.

Good planning also recognizes the intersectionality of issues meaning that actions taken to affect one area will have an effect in another, and thus they must be considered together. A dialogue is essential for success.

It is important to point out the work that Colorado does and has done to plan for our future, having produced the Colorado Water Plan, the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan and the Strategic Plan, and the GHG Roadmap, to name a few, as well as the work accomplished in the 2024 legislative session that links housing and land use with transportation and water. Also to be noted is the variety of plans that communities across the state have individually accomplished.

Again, this is an important bill because it establishes a roundtable, a tool, for jurisdictions to use to work together toward implementation of our plans through effective and efficient sharing of actions and resources. It offers a way to knit our planning efforts together.

Thank you for your time and I am asking for your support for HB25-1198.

March 25, 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee

From: Ned West, AICP, Sr. Planner

Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission

Thank you Madam Chair and committee members for the opportunity to testify in support of HB25-1198 today. My name is Ned West. I am a professional senior municipal planner with 17 years of experience working in mountain community local government. I am a member of the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA), testifying as such today. I urge your support of HB25-1198 because creating a common, integrated planning framework with regional and interdisciplinary forums will support the variety of challenges facing local governments across Colorado.

While many communities plan across borders today, collaborating with essential state representatives will support communities with limited resources who will benefit from an integrated planning framework to face today's complex challenges. Although I am in favor of local government control as the most efficient and responsive framework for serving the specific needs of communities, I am aware that many of the complex issues facing today's communities are often best addressed on a regional level.

Housing is one of the greatest challenges facing the economic vitality of rural mountain resort communities who support the demands of statewide tourism. The increasing demand for attainable housing for the local workforce places an unsustainable strain on the balance of the demands for goods and services and the workforce capable of providing them. Only through coordinated regional efforts may rural mountain communities face this challenge.

Water is a vital resource and is essential for the nation's food production, healthy ecosystems, and thriving communities. I have worked in partnership with the Blue River Watershed Group to establish a consortium of dedicated professionals across jurisdictional boundaries to develop a Blue River Watershed Wildfire Ready Action Plan through the CWCB to prepare for the inevitable response to catastrophic wildfire. Only through a regional planning effort can communities in a tributary headwater to the Colorado River be prepared to protect and maintain vital drinking water sources, the ecological resources supporting wildlife and healthy forests, and a clean and flowing Colorado River on which 40 million people depend for water and electricity in the American West. It is this example of state support through the grassroots efforts of regional partners that represents the value of state supported regional planning.

HB25-1198 will create an integrated framework for regional partners to coordinate with one and other and the state to address the challenges facing communities while maintaining local control over decision making for their communities, local land use, resource protection, and economic vitality. As such, I encourage your support for the establishment of a state commission to coordinate the creation of regional and inter-disciplinary roundtables for the betterment of the people of Colorado.

Testimony in Support of HB 1198

March 25, 2025

My name is Denise Balkas, and I am a former Colorado municipal planning director and member of the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association. My career spanned 30+ years in various cities across the country.

I am supportive of this legislation for two primary reasons:

- 1. THE CONCEPT OF REGIONAL ROUNDTABLES GIVES ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AN EQUITABLE SEAT IN THE STATEWIDE PLANNING PROCESS**

As a practicing planner in Colorado for several decades, I heard frequent comments about urban vs rural, suburbs vs. central city and so forth. These comments usually reflected some sense of perceived unfairness related to geographic political influence, the allocation of resources and the overall lack of equity. The legislation proposes that the geographic areas represented by each roundtable to be locally defined. Roundtables will not be competing with other roundtables in having their issues articulated and in proposing solutions. At the conclusion of the roundtables' work their findings will remain unique to each region and become part of a collective Colorado future vision that recognizes our similarities and differences.

- 2. THE WORK OF THE ROUNDTABLES WILL REPRESENT A LOCALLY CONTROLLED APPROACH TO STATEWIDE PLANNING NEEDS AND SOLUTIONS**

Following comment number 1 above, the work of the roundtables will start and conclude at the local level. It need not be influenced or ranked by other regions. Quoting a colleague during a discussion about this legislation, *it is a bottom up vs. top-down approach to local and regional planning.*

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.



March 25, 2025

RE: HB25-1198 Regional Planning Roundtable Commission—SUPPORT

Dear Members of the Transportation, Housing & Local Government Committee:

My name is Jo Feder and I am a Volunteer Lobbyist with the League of Women Voters of Colorado's Legislative Action Committee. I am writing in Support of HB25-1198 on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Colorado.

The League of Women Voters of Colorado (LWVCO) has been a nonpartisan organization for 105 years, encourages informed and active participation in government, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Our membership spans the state of Colorado with 18 local leagues operating in several regions around the state.

This bill establishes a Regional Planning Roundtable Commission within the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) to support local governments in meeting statutory requirements related to housing, land use, and other planning needs. The Commission may assist in developing an integrated framework that addresses natural environmental systems, development patterns, housing and housing needs, transportation, sustainable infrastructure, economic opportunity and employment, and the promotion of healthy communities.

The bill outlines the required expertise and affiliations for Commission members, with a strong emphasis on ensuring geographic, ethnic, and gender diversity. Initial appointments must be made by September 30, 2025, and members will serve without compensation. Funding for the Commission will be provided through the existing Housing Needs Planning Technical Assistance Fund (created by SB24-174, Sustainable Affordable Housing Assistance).

Local planning regulations, as well as regional and state strategic planning, are often fragmented, having been developed at different times and varying in scope and intent. It is crucial that both local and regional communities and governments adopt integrated, comprehensive approaches to managing growth and economic opportunity. Modern smart growth planning requires collaborative solutions to complex, interconnected challenges within a unified framework. A common planning framework ensures that these interrelated issues can be addressed effectively within distinct regional and local contexts.

We urge the committee members to **vote YES on HB25-1198**. Thank you for your consideration of this important bill.

Respectfully,
Jo Feder, Volunteer Lobbyist, Housing
Legislative Action Committee
League of Women Voters of Colorado
110 16th Street Mall, Suite 1326
Denver, CO 80202
303-863-0437

Date: 25 March 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing, and Local Government Committee
From: Dr. Rocky Piro, FAICP, Legislative Committee Member, Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association

Subject: Testimony in Favor of Establishing a Commission on Regional Roundtables

Colorado has a history of creating enabling tools to address common issues that transcend local jurisdiction boundaries. Some of these tools include provisions allowing for intergovernmental agreements or creating districts with more than one locality. Over time, the state has also developed statutes *enabling* cities, towns, counties, regions, and state agencies to address various issues and challenges. Recent legislative sessions have provided more tools and guidance, including new actions to address housing shortages, multimodal mobility, water supply, climate, environmental justice, and more efficient land use patterns (such as transit communities).

In 2025, we have older statutory provisions now coupled with new statutes that tend to be single-issue focused, more permissive than directive, and limited in scope. They lack an integrated framework necessary for addressing 21st-century change and challenges that are more interrelated and complex.

Colorado has many different ways in which regions are defined for addressing interjurisdictional challenges. There are regions for addressing multimodal transportation. There are regions for addressing transit. There are regions that address water, including watersheds and water supply. There are regions for addressing economic opportunities. There are regions for addressing resource lands.

The American Planning Association Colorado Chapter supports establishing a regional commission to work with the various classifications of regions and identify the most effective way to address multidisciplinary regions for addressing 21st-century challenges and actions. In addressing multijurisdictional, multidisciplinary regions, the Chapter advocates that a region should be understood as a system of systems. Contemporary urban and regional planning provides models for integrated systems, which a commission should consider addressing regionalism. Each regional system should be designed to address (1) environmental systems (including air quality, water, and climate), (2) built environment systems, including development patterns, buildable lands, housing, adequate facilities and services, and transportation, (3) economic systems, including regional economic resources, and (4) social systems and health.

Each regional roundtable that is created should also be tasked to address the integrated systems framework presented in the previous paragraph. Roundtables are anticipated to address ways to customize and tailor their work with the comprehensive framework to reflect their respective

contexts best. Local jurisdictions in the regions work with the common integrated framework in a manner that embraces locally designed action.

25 March 2025

To: Representatives of the Transportation, Housing and Local Government Committee
From: Dr. Rocky Piro, FAICP, member of the Legislative Committee, American Planning Association Colorado Chapter

Subject: Testimony in Favor of House Bill 25-1198

At Issue

The 21st century challenges facing the State of Colorado, its cities and towns, and its counties are extremely complex and have significant interrelated impacts – including, but not limited to, housing for all, mobility for all, climate, air quality, adequate water for various users, clean water, adequate essential facilities and services, economic opportunity, contiguous and orderly development patterns, social equity, and healthy communities.

While many individual jurisdictions have taken action to address many of these issues locally, other localities do not address the full array of these challenges – and if they do, it can be in a limited and piecemeal manner. The scope and nature of these challenges are truly interjurisdictional in nature, oftentimes at a regional scale. In the 21st century, integrated systems approaches are needed to address these issues more comprehensively and completely.

For Colorado and its local governments to be successful in solving these complex problems, a common integrated framework is needed that addresses the mutual impacts and interrelated aspects of these problems. A common planning framework ensures that all planning efforts are coordinated to work problem-solving at the local level, while also giving shape to regional and state efforts using the same basic structure. The common framework offered in HB 25-1198 offers a simple – yet fully complete – outline in a manner that respects local customizing and tailoring for actions based on distinct local context. At the same time, it raises a common awareness among communities across the state that there is a need for coordination and compatibility for complex challenges that transcend common boundaries.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Transportation, Housing, and Local Government Committee of the Colorado House of Representatives take action to approve House Bill 25-1198. The bill provides a common planning framework for localities in every part of the state to work together on complex challenges that transcend common boundaries and are regional or statewide in nature. The planning framework as presented in HB 25-1198 is adaptable and embraces customization for local application. At the same time, it provides a basic structure that informs regional planning and actions, as well as the work of state agencies to better support and relate to localities.

Background

The serious issues facing Colorado communities in the 21st century are bigger than any single jurisdiction. Here are some major examples:

- Air quality is among the worst among the states – and many of our cities have among the most polluted air in the country.
- Colorado has one of the worst disparities regarding poverty.
- There are more than 21,000 sites with PFAs (forever chemicals) and 20 superfund sites.
- Colorado ranks among the worst with a shortage of housing units, and the number of people with housing on any given night can be as high as 8,000 to 10,000.
- Our infrastructure – transportation, energy, water delivery, waste and storm water treatment – are deficient or inadequate in many neighborhoods and communities, and deferred maintenance threatens reliable delivery of services.
- Colorado ranks fourth worst in number of homes lost to fire, although annual average acres burned is well below other states.
- Without a change in course, Colorado is anticipated to face significant water shortages by mid-century.
- Sprawl remains a problem, with natural land converted to sprawl over the last two decades totaling an area as big as Rocky Mountain National Park (approximately 700,000 acres)¹

These are just some of the challenges which require more sophisticated and integrated systems approaches that go beyond business-as-usual problem-solving. Many of these issues are interrelated and require systems-based methods to address successfully. A common planning framework such as proposed in HB 25-1198 will go a long way in providing communities and regions across the state in having more robust and thorough resources to address 21st century challenges.

Integrated planning frameworks have been becoming state-of-the-art in planning practice since the 1990s. Both the Congress for New Urbanism and the Smart Growth Movement advanced new comprehensive models that look at planning issues in tandem, rather than piecemeal and incrementally. These models bring together land use, housing, transportation, economic opportunity, equity and health, character and design, and the environment into a single unified systems approach. Over the last 15 years, the American Planning Association has been helping states and communities across the country to move beyond siloed approaches to planning based on individual topics, to integrated systems-based planning models. The Association advocates a simple four part framework that successfully brings together the whole array of contemporary planning issues – (1) environmental systems (including air, climate, water, and critical areas), (2) built environment systems (including urban and rural development patterns, buildable lands

¹ Sources for information: Presentations at the *Planning to Thrive Symposium*, Colorado Center for Sustainable Urbanism, June 2022

analysis, transportation, essential facilities and utilities), (3) economic systems, and (4) social systems (including community services, housing, and social equity).

Rationale

For many of Colorado's complex challenges, there are *some* tools in state statutes which *enable* cities and towns, counties, regions, and state agencies to address these challenges. And in recent legislative sessions, more tools and guidance have been provided, including new actions to address housing shortages, multimodal mobility, water supply, climate, environmental justice, and more efficient land use patterns (such as transit communities). However, older statutory provisions coupled with these new statutes tend to be single issue focused, more permissive than directive, and limited in scope. They lack an integrated framework that is necessary for addressing 21st century change and challenges.

Colorado can no longer afford to address contemporary problems in silos and in isolation topic-by-topic. Housing solutions cannot be successful without addressing transportation and the adequacy of services. Improving air quality and addressing climate issues cannot be successful without addressing land use, transportation, and the natural environment. Overcoming inequities cannot be successful without addressing pollution exposure, mobility, and fair and decent housing.

Our 21st century challenges also transcend local jurisdictional boundaries and have impacts and consequences beyond these boundaries. Air pollution impacts basins that know no jurisdictional boundaries; housing markets are regional by nature, and mobility networks must be interjurisdictional. The paradigms that leave action on these challenges to more than 400 single localities (i.e., 360+ municipalities and 64 counties) or single agencies no longer serve us well.

The Colorado of the 21st century needs an integrated multi-faceted framework that allows us to address these complex, interrelated challenges in a more advanced comprehensive manner. Colorado needs to provide its cities, counties, regions, and state agencies with a common structure for addressing the complex, interrelated challenges of the 21st century in a simple all-inclusive framework.

A common integrated planning framework also provides a simplified resource to aid citizens and decision-makers in addressing current challenges, their impacts, and consequences. A common framework is NOT a uniform, standard regulation – rather it serves as a planning tool. It provides a structure for addressing common issues, while providing flexibility for customizing and tailoring responses to complex challenges in a manner that fully respects local decision-making.

Conclusion

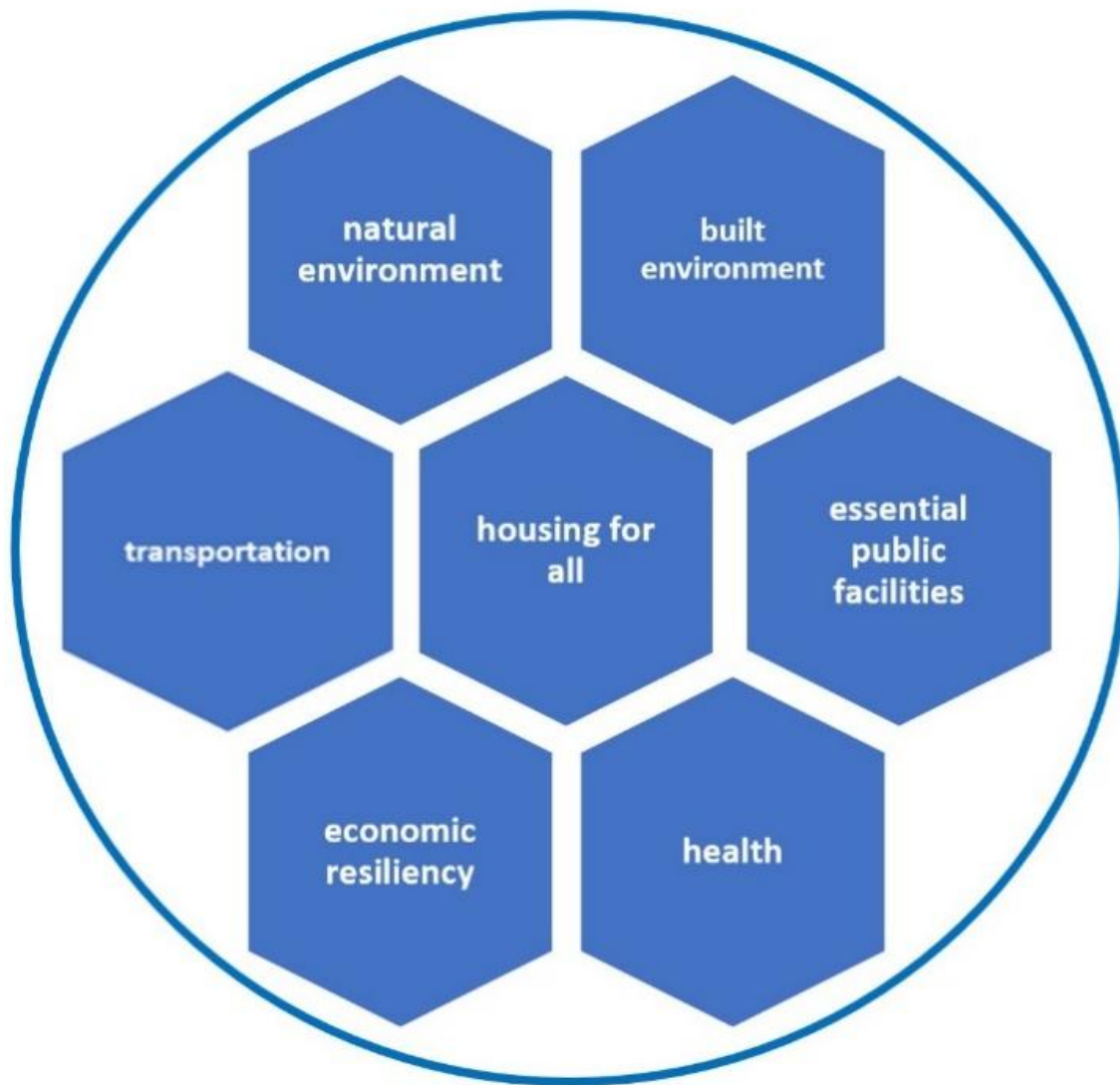
The paradigms of the 20th century are no longer adequate to address the multifaceted problems facing Colorado today. Business-as-usual thinking is responsible to a large degree why we have environmental degradation, housing shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and inequities. The solutions require the engagement of cities and towns, counties, regions, and the states. A common playbook is needed to involve the 350+ cities, 64 counties, regions across the state, and state agencies to produce practical and long-term actions.

There has already been work by numerous organizations, states, and localities across the country – including some in Colorado² – to design more integrated frameworks for action and decision-making in the 21st century. Among these models there are both similar features and some unique features. A framework for Colorado (see Figure 1, next page) can address all the issues discussed in this communication with an integrated system of seven overarching interrelated systems: (1) natural environment systems, (2) built environment systems, (3) essential infrastructure systems, (4) economic systems, (5) transportation systems, (6) housing for all, and (7) healthy communities.

The integrated framework in HB 25-1198 will actually streamline the way in which places and agencies work to address these issues. A common framework adds predictability for citizens, jurisdictions with common borders, regional bodies and districts, and state agencies. Again, a common framework is not offered as a regulation; it allows for local discretion to tailor how a jurisdiction is going address issues, it allows regions to tailor their approaches to design regional-local solutions, and it helps state agencies to work with a structure that better connects them to the work of cities, towns, and counties.

² See, for example, the recent comprehensive plans adopted by Aurora and Manitou Springs.

Figure 1: An Integrated Framework



for Colorado cities and towns, counties, regions, and state agencies
a comprehensive resource for planning, actions, and decision-making
application intended for customizing and tailoring