



Hartford, CT NECMA

Regulatory Order/Family: Traditional/Middle America

Summary

Metropolitan Hartford is an intensely exclusionary region, dominated by small and medium-sized towns that obstruct the construction of apartments and do little to encourage long term affordability. The region's population has grown slowly in recent years but still sprawls rapidly. Furthermore, it is among the most racially and ethnically segregated regions in the United States, especially for a medium-sized metropolitan area.

Governance Framework and Growth Trends

The Hartford NECMA (including the municipalities in Hartford and Tolland Counties) had 1.2 million residents in 2000, up just 2.2 percent from 1990. The metro area has 58 jurisdictions; Hartford remains the most populous at 121,600 in 2000. Four cities and towns (New Britain, West Hartford, Bristol, and Manchester) have populations between 50,000 and 100,000. Twenty-nine towns and one city had between 10,000 and 50,000 residents in 2000, and 22 towns and one borough had fewer than 10,000. Between 1982 and 1997, the Hartford NECMA urbanized an estimated 45,000 acres of land, a 17 percent increase during a time when its population grew only about 7 percent. It is a classic "thinning" metropolitan area, with scant population growth overall and rapid deconcentration from the urban core. Hartford city's population declined 13 percent between 1990 and 2000, and both New Britain and Bristol declined or stagnated in the 1990s. About 13 percent of the land in the metro area is publicly owned, with 8 percent of the public land in state government control and the balance in municipal ownership.

Regulatory Environment

We received responses from three incorporated units and 34 towns in the Hartford NECMA, representing about 64 percent of the jurisdictions, 79 percent of the population, and 65 percent of the land area. All the most populous jurisdictions responded to the survey.

Based on these responses, we estimate that all the jurisdictions in the NECMA have plans and 96 percent have zoning. Plans are required in Connecticut, but zoning takes priority over plans in the event of a conflict between the two. Low-density only zoning is rampant in Hartford, with 34 percent of jurisdictions allowing fewer than 4 dwellings per acre and another 27 percent allowing between 4 and 7 units per acre. Furthermore, 20 percent of jurisdictions report having *reduced* maximum permitted density by over 10 percent in the previous 10 years compared with only 4 having raised it by over 10 percent. Hartford has the highest share among the 50 most populous metro areas of jurisdictions whose zoning ordinances would entirely prohibit our hypothetical apartment development: 63 percent, with 62 percent of the metropolitan land area and 36 percent of its population. At the other end of the density scale, only 14 percent of jurisdictions would allow densities to exceed 15 dwellings per acre; these jurisdictions account for about one third of the



metro area's 2000 population, but they tend to be located in the stable and declining parts of the region.

Few jurisdictions in metropolitan Hartford manage or control growth with tools beyond zoning. Fewer than 10 percent use either APFOs or impact fees, and about 5 percent are estimated to have growth control mechanisms of some kind. Eight percent had moratoria in 2003, and none used permit caps.

Affordable housing programs are better developed than the other tools in metropolitan Hartford. Like Massachusetts, Connecticut has a system in which jurisdictions where fewer than 10 percent of the dwellings are affordable are subject to overrides when they deny applications for affordable housing development.¹ The jurisdictions in the region have responded to this threat in two ways. First, Hartford is widely recognized for its voluntary affordable housing fair share program, which developed in the early 1990s under the leadership of the Capitol Region Council of Governments.² Second, a sizeable minority of local governments have adopted regulatory programs to require or encourage affordable housing construction. About 30 percent have inclusionary zoning or offer affordable housing density bonuses, and 10 percent have dedicated funding for affordable housing. The most active jurisdictions, however, are also the more populous ones. The semi-rural and exurban communities maintain both very low density and little action on affordability.

¹ Robert D. Carroll, "Connecticut Retrenches: A Proposal to Save the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure." *Yale Law Journal* 110(7) (2001): 1247– 86.

² Terry J. Tondro, "Fragments of Regionalism: State and Regional Planning in Connecticut at Century's End," *St. John's University Law Review* 73 (1999): 1123–1158.