



NARC

Building Regional Communities

National Association of Regional Councils

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Rural Benefits of the Livable Communities Act Talking Points

UNDERSTANDING LIVABILITY

Livability is offering opportunities for communities of all sizes and make ups to become better places to live, work and raise families. It is about fostering governmental partnerships that provide communities choices for comprehensive planning, investments and development that are cost effective and efficient, reduce congestion, generate good-paying jobs, meet environmental and energy goals, provide affordable housing, protect rural areas and green space, and revitalize Main Streets and urban centers.

FEDERAL ACTIVITY

Both chambers of Congress have introduced the Livable Communities Act (S1619, HR4690) that seeks to encourage livability through comprehensive regional planning and implementation. The Act has been approved by the U.S. Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee. These bills would provide performance-based, competitive funding to rural, suburban and urban consortia of local governments working through their regional planning organizations to develop and implement comprehensive regional plans that meet identified federal goals and address local needs in cross linking transportation, economic development and the environment.

RURAL FOCUS

The Act, as amended in committee, would work to ensure rural communities are able to benefit from LCA by allowing:

- At least 15 percent of the grant money to go to small and rural communities under 200,000 population;
- Grant recipients to be diverse geographically in by population-size;
- The Secretary of Agriculture to serve on a task force to ensure rural communities are included in funding; and,
- Rural applicants to request technical support while applying for a grant.

RURAL BENEFITS

(1) Economic Development: The Act would provide opportunities to stimulate local economic growth, for communities of all sizes. It makes efforts to specifically support rural and micropolitan areas. The Act would encourage local governments and regions to:

- Seek out collaborative partnerships across regions, cities, and towns to engage regional economic development strategies that can help direct resources and funding more efficiently and effectively throughout a region.
- Build the capacity of rural community-based housing development organizations to support affordable housing programs and projects.
- Stabilize communities experiencing population loss and significant property vacancies.

Example: Mid-American Regional Council (MARC), Kansas City, MO: Under its Small Cities Program, MARC has developed a Sustainable Growth for Small Cities toolkit for communities that serve less than 10,000 residents. Using the principles of transit-oriented development, livability and quality of life, leveraging local assets, and connecting small communities to regional partners, the toolkit provides resources and tools to promote economic development and investment.

(2) Transportation: The Act would provide funding to support sustainable transit-oriented investment. Transit options are especially important for rural regions and small communities, where many residents lack transportation alternatives. The Act would encourage local governments and regions to:

- Incentivize new business and residential development by increasing sustainable multimodal transportation choices
- Provide residents greater access to jobs, education and resources that contribute to the economic growth of the region.
- Adapt to local transportation needs with a variety of transportation options.
- Develop new infrastructure to support transit-oriented development through a new loan program.

Example: Central Texas Council of Governments (CTCOG), Belton, TX: CTCOG's Regional Thoroughfare & Pedestrian/Bicycle Plan develops a comprehensive, forward-thinking blueprint for the future of transportation in the central Texas region. The Plan focuses on regional solutions that increase community connectivity, not just through roadways, but bike and pedestrian passages as well. By increasing transit options, the plan will provide greater mobility and accessibility for the region's residents to jobs, services, housing, and resources.



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(3) Workforce/Technology Development: The Act supports regional economic development initiatives focused on the developing and improving the workforce through technological advances. The Act would encourage local governments and regions to:

- Increase rural access to jobs, education and training, as well as up-to-date technological resources for retaining a strong workforce through investing in technology infrastructure of a region (i.e. increased broadband access)
- Create and preserve workforce housing

Example: Green River Area Development District (GRADD), Owensboro, KY: In 2006, GRADD was awarded the Spirit of Kentucky Award for their ConnectGRADD program, a collaborative project that increased affordable high-speed internet services to rural and underserved areas. The ConnectGRADD program offers high-speed internet services at half of the price that internet service typically cost in the region, and continues to expand access to more than 90 percent of the region's residents.

(4) Agriculture: The Act works to save and preserve farmland while increasing the industry's capacity to grow economically. Agriculture is a vital industry in many rural regions throughout the country. The Act would encourage local governments and regions to:

- Plan and implement sustainable growth strategies that support local farmers and ranchers, as well as food businesses and service providers.
- Connect farmers to all aspects of a community, promote economic growth and advance public health in the region through initiatives such as supply chain efficiency and local food systems.
- Preserve agricultural land, natural resources, and open space as vital parts of rural areas and small towns for economic growth industries such as farming and tourism.

Example: Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC), Manchester NH: SNHPC is working to assist communities in establishing Local Agricultural Commissions. Under these Commissions, New Hampshire rural regions can utilize community-based partnerships to strengthen food and farming businesses, promote more efficient and sustainable local food systems and growth strategies, maintain heritage and rural character, protect agricultural space, and give residents and farmers access to new food resources and opportunities, increasing livability, connectivity, and economic growth in the region.

Example: Lane Council of Governments (LCOG), Eugene, OR: LCOG's comprehensive Ridgeline Open Space Vision and Action Plan maintains the area's rural character while enhancing community connectivity through bike and pedestrian trail networks, providing a framework for regional conservation and sustainable land-use, and leveraging local recreational and small business assets, like wineries and bed and breakfasts, to contribute to the overall livability and economic development of the region. LCOG will collaborate with local chambers of commerce and the Convention and Visitor's Association to highlight local assets and develop eco-tourism opportunities in the region.

(5) Preserving/Revitalizing Main Street: Main Streets and historic neighborhoods have often served as the economic and cultural backbone of small towns and cities across the country. Through the Act's grant programs, rural areas and small towns can:

- Engage in planning and implementation activities to revitalize or preserve Main Streets to foster new economic growth
- Encourage local industry, restaurant, and retail development
- Create walk-able, pedestrian friendly streets while still maintaining local community character

Example: Susquehanna Economic Development Association-Council of Governments (SEDA-COG), Lewisburg PA: SEDA-COG is currently working on a regional visioning plan, the Revitalizing River Towns Initiative, to enhance communities throughout the Susquehanna Valley. Using a livability framework, the plan will assist communities in revitalizing their Main Streets, developing sustainable and prosperous downtown areas, and preserving their historic and cultural neighborhoods. This initiative focuses on rural asset-development, increased economic opportunity, creating walk-able pedestrian and visitor friendly streets and enhancing the unique, authentic experiences that river towns offer, making them a better place to both live, work, and visit.