

Vermont Legislative Research Service

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State Planning Offices

This report presents case studies of state planning offices in Colorado, Massachusetts, and Minnesota in response to a proposal to modernize and revive the former Vermont State Planning Office. The proposed Vermont office has many goals including the prioritization of areas of investment into Vermont's economy and people, aligned with climate goals and environmental sustainability; community engagement, equity; History

State planning in Vermont began in 1963 with the Central Planning Office, established by Governor Philip Hoff.

¹ By 1991, it transitioned into the Office of Political Research and Coordination (OPRC). At this point, the OPRC included a commissioner, who was appointed by the governor, two staffers, and a receptionist. The office's budget was continually cut until it was eliminated in the late 1990s. In an interview with the authors, Commissioner Post said the main issues the office faced were lack of staff, its lack of attention from the governor, and lack of planning implementation efforts.⁴

What Organizations Exist Today

A variety of governmental and nongovernmental organizations currently perform the functions of the proposed planning office.

Agency of Administration Strategic planning and continuous improvement are functions of the Agency of Administration. The Bruce Post, discussion with authors, March 9, 2021.

³ Bruce Post, discussion with authors, March 9, 2021.

⁴ Bruce Post, discussion with authors, March 9, 2021.

priorities.⁵ Each agency then composes their own strategic plan to move the needle on the governor's larger goals, and these strategies are compiled to form the master plan. The goals are operationalized and measurable so they can be tracked. Susan Zeller, the Chief Performance Officer in the Agency of Administration, emphasizes that planning needs to be a collaboration, and communication is essential when departments have conflicting approaches to the governor's goals.⁸ Having worked under three governors of varying political affiliations, she believes that coordination is strongest under the current administration because of the weekly cabinet meetings held by the governor.⁹ According to her, familiarity breeds cooperation.¹⁰

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) fulfills some planning roles, with a focus on community planning and economic development

Each of the following is a link to a document that is available on the ACCD website. The links are provided for informational purposes only and do not constitute an endorsement of the content of the document.

The DEC also partners with the U.S Environmental Protection Agency to establish strategic priorities and receive federal funding. This agreement is drafted every three to four years.¹⁷

Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) are independent planning bodies created by member municipalities, as required by statute.¹⁸ They aim to "Promote economic development...Preserve the natural beauty of Vermont; Obtain and maintain efficiency in government expenditure; [and] Safeguard and extend local autonomy in planning and development decisions."¹⁹ They engage with a wide range of planning areas, from emergency management to land use to environmental quality to economic development.²⁰

planning by the Municipalities, Regions and the State of Vermont²⁷ and achieve their goal of efficient planning, they help strengthen the capability of municipalities, exchange ideas and information, provide a space for coordination, and provide educational opportunities for those interested in planning from the general public to governmental agencies.²⁸

Colorado

Colorado's Office of Smart Growth was created in Title 24, Article 32, Part 32 under the Department of Local Affairs during the 1990's when development was surging.²⁹ Today, this office exists in statute but has been replaced by the Community Development (CDO) in practice.³⁰ Current CDO Director Andy Hill attributes the replacement of the Office of Smart Growth to their unwanted interference in local affairs.³¹ The CDO currently has three core functions: providing funding for local planning, acting as a liaison and advocate for local governments in interactions with the state government, and providing technical assistance and training for local governments during the planning process.³² The funding is provided for master plans through grants, which have specific criteria attached that give the state some say in planning despite their deference to local governments in the matters.³³ For example, the state will try to achieve specific climate, housing, or economic development goals via these criteria.³⁴ The latter two functions are derived from their supportive role for local planning, which ensures that local governments have a voice in development. The Office does not track outcomes resulting from their grants.³⁵ It ensures that the criteria are met and that their policy is followed, but they are lacking in staff to further analyze the effects of their funding.³⁶

Application to Vermont

Colorado's deference to local governments does not align with the proposal for Vermont's office, which would give state government the planning power; however, it does align with Vermont's current planning system, where the power resides in Regional Planning Commissions, or RPCs.³⁷ According to CDO Director Hill, local control can be problematic; however, she believes that local government authority is effective in light of the state's

²⁷ Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, "Bylaws

the Vermont proposal seeks to engage, but

Background

The DCAMM houses roughly 350 people between its six offices. Facilities Management and Design and Production are the largest offices within the Division of Capital Management and Maintenance. Efficient communication and coordination are necessary to manage projects. The DCAMM also has strong relationships with other offices in the executive branch, with biweekly and monthly meetings with the Office of Human Health Services and the Office of Public Safety, respectively.⁶² The DCAMM develops five-year capital plans every year. Due to their incorporation with Executive Office of Administration and Finance (A&F), budgeting, and analyzing these capital plans is efficient.⁶³ The process is not "incredibly bureaucratic" and the Governor and A&F have the final say.⁶⁴

The DCAMM creates master plans. Liz Minnis, Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Planning, emphasized the importance of meshing data with strategic goals.⁶⁵ The combination of the two results in effective capital plans, as she stressed the need to think long term, as the investment is utilized for multiple decades. Tapping the private sector due to their nimbler response to changing needs was also suggested, especially in terms of more short-term capital planning.⁶⁶

Application to Vermont

Due to the DCAMM's strict focus on capital asset management, its applicability to the more holistic planning office suggested for Vermont is narrow. The office also does not work in coordination with any of the Massachusetts RPA's.⁶⁷ The office is also significantly larger in scope than the other offices that have been discussed for incorporation within the Office of

DCAMM analyzes the energy efficiency of other agencies buildings and calculates investments and potential savings. The goal is to make energy efficient investments that pay for themselves. The DCAMM doesn't have to count this on their budget cap, as the money saved by these agencies from these investments is utilized for budgeting. The incentives and the outcomes from engaging in these clean energy investments are apparent and effective, and Liz Minnis estimates around \$0 million a year is saved from this approach.⁷² Members from all divisions within the executive branch are also on a climate action committee, which allows for this level of coordination.

Minnesota

The Minnesota Planning Agency (MPA) was established in 1965 after Governor Wendell Anderson assigned state planning to the agency via executive order. It had two primary functions:

1. Review current programming and future planning of all state departments and agencies, and
- 2.

Information Center is in IT Services as the Geospatial Information Office. Statute 4A.01 assigned the Commissioner of Administration as the state planning officer, who was “responsible for the coordination, development, assessment, and communication of information, performance measures, planning, and policy concerning the state's future.”⁸⁰ However, in email correspondence on March 15, 2021, current Commissioner and state planning officer Alice Robert Davis said that her office no longer provides the state's planning functions within the agency and provided no indication as to where the function now lies.⁸¹

Most recently, Governor Tim Pawlenty created Minnesota's Office of Continuous Improvement

still functioning and will be publishing another report soon, keeping with its ~~year~~-pattern, or if its operations have ceased.

The Minnesota office and the former Vermont office have similar histories in that they became underutilized and subsequently underfunded and then unfunded.⁹⁵ Tom Gillaspay argues a “successful strategic planning process for Minnesota will require an ongoing commitment of elected and appointed leadership, as well as sufficient dedicated resources to initiate and maintain it.”⁹⁶ This rings true for Vermont. The state has seen what happened to the office without commitment from state government but has also seen the benefit of governmental commitment through the governor and Agency of Administration’s Strategic Plan.

The stagnation of Minnesota Milestones also emphasizes the importance of something which Vermont already seems to have a handle on: setting an appropriate number of strategic goals. In a conversation with Vermont Agency of Administration on 5.07.17, I learned that the

