



New Hampshire Municipal Association 2021-2022 Legislative Policy Process

Final Policy Recommendations for Legislative Policy Conference October 2, 2020

General Administration and Governance

Local Authority and Efficiency

NHMA supports maintaining local government authority without infringement by the state, and supports measures that enable municipalities to exercise existing authority more efficiently and with greater discretion.

NHMA supports:

- Legislation granting towns the same authority to adopt ordinances that cities have under RSA 47:17;
- The authority of municipalities to regulate or limit the use of firearms on municipal property, and to regulate the carrying of firearms by municipal employees while on duty;
- Legislation allowing a town, by vote of its legislative body, to authorize appointment of the town clerk or town clerk/tax collector by the governing body, or by the chief executive officer based on a town charter;
- Legislation allowing municipalities to satisfy notice publication requirements through the use of electronic notification rather than newspaper publication, in addition to posting notice in public places.

NHMA opposes legislation that detracts from existing local authority.

Right-to-Know Law

NHMA supports the purposes of the Right-to-Know Law: to ensure the greatest possible public access to the actions, discussions, and records of all public bodies, and to ensure government's accountability to the people. NHMA also supports measures to make the law clearer and make compliance with public access requirements easier and less burdensome for public officials and employees and less costly for taxpayers.

NHMA supports:

- Reasonable requirements to make governmental records available electronically if no additional cost is involved;
- The ability to recover reasonable labor costs for responding to voluminous, excessive, or vexatious record requests;
- Exemptions from disclosure that are easy to administer and that provide appropriate protection for confidential and other sensitive information;
- An expedited and inexpensive process for resolving right-to-know complaints;
- Legislation and funding that provide support for education about the Right-to-Know Law.

Elections

NHMA believes that state and local elections should be fair and open, that voting should be simple and convenient without risking election integrity or security, and that election processes should be efficient without imposing undue burdens on local officials.

NHMA supports:

- Establishment of an independent redistricting commission to draw election districts fairly and without regard to partisan advantage;
- Local autonomy over town and city elections;
- More frequent state review and approval of electronic ballot-counting devices;
- Registration and voting processes that are not unnecessarily complex or burdensome, either to voters or to election officials;
- The use of secure technology such as electronic poll books to make election processes more efficient;
- Greater flexibility in the processing of absentee ballots;
- State assistance for the cost of accommodations for disabled voters in local elections.

Labor and Employment

NHMA recognizes the importance of municipal employees, the need for good working conditions, and the right of employees to organize if they choose. NHMA also believes municipal employers should be free to set reasonable terms and conditions of employment or negotiate the same with their employees or employee representatives, without undue state interference.

NHMA supports existing laws governing public employee labor relations, and opposes changes that impose greater burdens or liabilities on employers.

NHMA opposes:

- Legislation creating a mandatory “evergreen clause” for public employee collective bargaining agreements;

- Mandatory binding arbitration as a mechanism to resolve impasses in municipal employee collective bargaining;
- A right to strike for public employees;
- New mandated employee benefits, including any proposal to enhance retirement system benefits that may increase employer costs in future years;
- Unnecessary limits on municipalities' discretion in making hiring decisions;
- Restrictions on municipalities' ability to privatize or use contracted services.

Substance Misuse Prevention & Response

NHMA supports programs to address substance use disorder and response to substance use issues, to include treatment and recovery support programs.

NHMA supports:

- State funding to address substance use disorder for the following efforts:
 - Prevention
 - Treatment
 - Recovery
 - Enforcement;
- Legislation that supports prevention, treatment, recovery, and enforcement efforts.

NHMA opposes:

- Reductions in state funding for substance use disorder or recovery support programs;
- Legislation that makes it more difficult to address the substance use disorder problem in our communities.

Finance and Revenue

Property Taxes and Related Revenues

NHMA supports legislation that allows municipalities to manage property tax levies in a manner that stabilizes tax rates and ensures equity, fairness, and efficiency in the assessment and collection of property taxes.

NHMA supports:

- The continuing right of municipalities to use any recognized method of appraisal upheld by the New Hampshire judicial system;
- Legislation to ensure that:

- property taxes are assessed to the proper owner by requiring that all owner name changes be separately filed at the registry of deeds when such an owner change is not created by a transfer of the property, and
- all liens, whether of a private or institutional nature, be filed at the registry of deeds, and that all changes to the name of a recorded lienholder be similarly filed;
- A legislative commission to study assessment and collection of property taxes and/or municipal utility fees on manufactured housing on land of another and on transient-type properties;
- Legislation ensuring fairness and accuracy in property tax exemptions including ensuring that all household income and assets are taken into account;
- Legislation that prohibits the use of the income approach by a taxpayer in any appeal of assessed value if the taxpayer refuses to provide such information as requested by the municipality;
- A legislative commission to study reimbursement through payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) for municipal services provided to exempt charitable properties, including charitable non-profit housing projects;
- Legislation amending RSA 80:56 to enable municipalities to charge a fee for any financial remittance issued to the municipality that is returned as uncollectible.

NHMA opposes:

- Legislation that directly or indirectly increases property taxes, including but not limited to new or expanded mandatory exemptions or credits, or changes in the process for valuing, assessing, or taxing specific classes of properties;
- Legislation that undermines the basic goals of the current use program or reduces the 10-acre minimum size requirement for qualification for current use beyond those exceptions now allowed by the rules of the Current Use Board;
- Legislation that expands the definition of “charitable” in RSA 72:23-1 unless the state reimburses municipalities for the commensurate loss of property tax base;
- An assessment methodology for big box stores that employs comparisons to “dark store” properties abandoned or encumbered with deed restrictions on subsequent use.

State Aid and Non-Property Tax Revenues

NHMA supports funding of state aid to municipalities, supports legislation authorizing local control over non-property tax revenue streams, and opposes legislation that reduces, suspends, or eliminates existing local taxes, fees, or state aid.

NHMA supports:

- Full restoration of revenue sharing under RSA 31-A;
- A state transportation policy that provides adequate and sustainable funding for state and municipal infrastructure and transportation systems and maintains at least the 12 percent share of state highway funds distributed to municipalities;
- Legislation authorizing the establishment of local option fees and providing for periodic adjustments to statutory fees to compensate for factors including, but not limited to, the

effects of inflation, such as an increase in the maximum optional fee for transportation improvements;

- Legislation to ensure the collection of unpaid bills for ambulance and other emergency services;
- Reimbursement from the state for the cost of municipal services provided to state-owned properties;
- Legislation amending motor vehicle registration enforcement laws to ensure collection of all state and local registration fees owed by New Hampshire residents;
- Legislation amending RSA 36-A:5 II to allow trustees of trust funds to invest conservation funds instead of only the town treasurer, if voted by the legislative body;
- Programming that supports reduced cost, cost sharing, or equipment sharing that upgrades or replaces aging or unsafe transportation network(s) for towns.

NHMA opposes:

- Suspension of the statutory catch-up provision of the meals and rooms tax distribution;
- Diversion of state highway funds for non-state transportation network purposes.

New Hampshire Retirement System (NHRS)

NHMA supports the continuing existence of a retirement system for state, municipal, school, and county government employees that is secure, solvent, fiscally healthy, and financially sustainable, and that both employees and employers can rely on to provide retirement benefits for the foreseeable future.

NHMA supports:

- Restoration of the state's 35% share of employer costs for police, teachers, and firefighters in the current defined benefit plan and any successor plan;
- Inclusion of participation by a municipal official designated by NHMA on any legislative study committee or commission formed to research alternative retirement system benefits plans or designs;
- Performance of an actuarial analysis of any legislation proposing benefits changes or other plan changes that may affect employer contribution rates.

NHMA opposes:

- Legislation expanding benefits that increase current or future employer contribution costs;
- Legislation that assesses additional charges on employers beyond NHRS board-approved rate changes;
- Legislation that expands the eligibility of NHRS membership to positions not currently covered by the plan;
- Legislation further restricting a municipality's ability to employ NHRS retirees in part-time positions or the imposition of any fees or penalties associated with such employment.

Education Funding

NHMA supports a revenue structure for funding an adequate education to meet the state's responsibilities as defined by the constitution, statutes, and the common law with revenue sources that are predictable, stable, and sustainable.

NHMA supports:

- A revenue structure that is not disruptive to the long-term economic health of the state;
- A revenue structure that is efficient in its administration;
- A revenue structure that is fair to citizens with lower to moderate incomes.

NHMA opposes:

- Retroactive changes to the adequate education funding distribution formula after the notice of grant amounts has been provided to local governments.

Infrastructure, Development, and Land Use

Energy, Environment, and Sustainability

NHMA supports preservation and enhancement of municipal energy, climate, and sustainability planning for communities, protection of the natural environment, and implementation of clean and renewable energy, while recognizing the need for municipalities to manage their resources and the natural environment without undue cost.

NHMA supports:

- Legislation that broadens municipalities' ability to install and use renewable energy sources, including higher caps or elimination of caps on net energy metering;
- Legislation that provides financial and other assistance to municipalities for conservation techniques and installation and maintenance of renewable energy sources;
- Legislation that allows municipalities to adopt local environmental regulations that are no less stringent than those implemented by the state;
- Legislation that enables municipalities to enact measures that promote local energy and land use systems that are both economically and environmentally sustainable;
- Legislation that protects and preserves local natural resources and public infrastructure, builds community resilience, and fosters adaptation to climate change and mitigates its risks;
- Policies that support customer and community choice in energy supply and use competitive market-based mechanisms to promote innovation, cost effectiveness, and sustainability; and

- Legislation that provides state or federal assistance to municipalities to mitigate environmental inequity impacts faced by their residents, and drive early local engagement in decision processes.

NHMA opposes:

- Legislation that overrides local determinations of appropriate energy sources and regulations.

Water Resources Protection, Control, and Management

NHMA supports measures enabling municipalities to protect, control, and manage efficiently and safely water and its resources, treatment, and movement, with a focus on management and infrastructure. NHMA believes any new mandates that impose additional costs on municipalities must be funded by the state or federal government.

NHMA supports:

- Legislation that provides state or federal investment in maintaining and making improvements to the state's critical water infrastructure, including, but not limited to, public drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems, and dams;
- Legislation that encourages regional and innovative solutions to drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, and groundwater issues;
- Regulation of emerging contaminants at feasibly achievable levels when supported by relevant scientific and technical standards that are broadly accepted by peer review and cost-benefit analyses, when coupled with appropriate state or federal funding.

NHMA opposes:

- Enactment of stricter drinking water, wastewater, or stormwater regulations for municipalities unless any costs of compliance are funded by the state or federal government.

Solid Waste Management

NHMA recognizes the need for cost-efficient solid waste disposal mechanisms that allow municipalities to protect, control, and manage efficiently and safely solid waste. NHMA believes any new mandates that impose additional costs on municipalities must be funded by the state or federal government.

NHMA supports:

- Programs that support municipal, regional, and state efforts to handle solid waste disposal through reduction, reuse, recycling, resource recovery, composting, and other measures, while maintaining local control;

- Comprehensive state programs to deal with existing and emerging contaminants at no additional cost to municipalities.

NHMA opposes:

- Increased tipping fees to pay for solid waste programs unless they are fully reimbursed by the state.

Housing

NHMA recognizes the need for diverse and affordable housing in New Hampshire and the responsibility of each municipality to afford reasonable opportunities for the development of diverse and affordable housing. NHMA believes municipalities should have discretion in how to satisfy this responsibility and supports legislation that enables municipalities to find innovative ways to ensure an adequate supply of housing.

NHMA supports:

- Legislation that allows municipalities to require the inclusion of affordable and diverse housing opportunities as part of new housing developments;
- Financial and other incentives to municipalities to encourage development of diverse and affordable housing;
- Statewide efforts to provide housing for those recovering from substance misuse, subject to reasonable municipal regulation;
- Policies that encourage documentation and financial traceability of cash and bartered rental transactions;
- Legislation and policies that encourage creative and flexible approaches to meeting housing needs of current and future demographics in different regions.

NHMA opposes:

- Legislation and policies that allow for or encourage housing practices that exclude people from and decrease the availability of quality, affordable housing;
- Legislation that erodes local control over land use decisions.

Land Use

NHMA supports the long-standing authority of municipalities to regulate land use matters with minimal interference from the state.

NHMA supports:

- Legislation authorizing municipalities to regulate short-term rentals of residential properties, including licensing requirements and health and safety protections;
- Legislation enabling municipalities at their discretion to adopt more recent editions of national/international building and fire codes than the current state-adopted editions.

NHMA opposes:

- Legislation that limits municipal control in implementing statewide priorities in zoning and land use regulation;
- New state mandates requiring municipalities to allow specific types of housing;
- All other statewide land use mandates.

Information Technology, Communications, and Cybersecurity

NHMA supports initiatives to make the most current information and communication technology accessible to New Hampshire communities, so long as local authority over land use regulation and safety issues is not compromised.

NHMA supports:

- Legislation that increases the ability of municipalities, especially those in rural and remote areas, to facilitate and advance access to reliable broadband technology to the premises in their communities;
- Legislation that provides flexibility for municipalities in accessing poles and pole attachments, including legislation that directs the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission to adopt the FCC rule on access to poles called “One-Touch-Make-Ready” in order to facilitate bringing high-speed fiber optic cable to service all New Hampshire communities, homes, and businesses by internet service providers (ISPs) in an expedient and cost-effective manner;
- Legislation that provides state and federal investment, including grants, for installation of high-speed fiber optic broadband technology to serve all New Hampshire communities, homes, and businesses;
- Legislation that requires or encourages and incentivizes providers to disclose information to local government relative to access and broadband connections provided in the municipality to help municipalities better understand and address the needs of their community;
- State investment in cybersecurity assistance to municipalities to protect data and infrastructure.

NHMA opposes:

- Legislation that limits municipalities’ ability to prevent or regulate deployment of technologies that would impede vehicular or pedestrian passage on roadways or sidewalks;
- Statewide mandates on cybersecurity practices unless any associated costs are funded by the state or federal government.

Transportation

NHMA supports state policies that ensure access to convenient, efficient, reliable, and safe multi-modal transportation in New Hampshire as cost effectively as possible.

NHMA supports:

- Appropriate funding for state and local modes of transportation, including but not limited to roads, culverts, and bridges;
- Continued state and federal investment in public transit projects designed to reduce traffic on New Hampshire's roads.

NHMA opposes:

- Any action or inaction by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation that results in the downshifting of road, bridge, culvert, or drainage maintenance responsibilities from the state to municipalities.

Economic Development, Recovery, and Vitality

NHMA supports allowing municipalities to implement measures to foster economic development which allows for the preservation and creation of jobs and vitality within our communities.

NHMA supports:

- Legislation that allows for local adoption of more options and more flexibility to provide incentives for economic recovery and development;
- Expansion and more flexibility of state tax credit and exemption programs to foster economic recovery, development, and vitality.

NHMA opposes:

- Legislation that makes it more burdensome to implement economic recovery, development, and vitality measures.