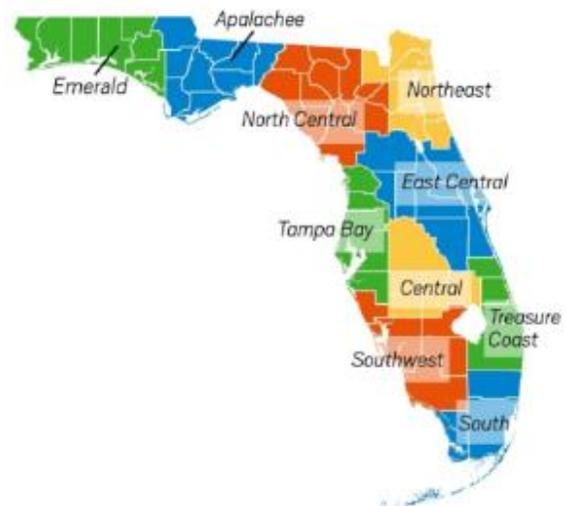




## 1000 Friends of Florida Opposes Senate Bill 62 Which Dismantles Florida's Regional Planning Councils

As an organization that has championed intergovernmental cooperation and regional solutions from its founding in 1986, 1000 Friends of Florida strongly opposes Senate Bill 62. This legislation would needlessly dismantle Florida's 10 Regional Planning Councils, otherwise known as RPCs.

As noted in the name, RPCs address critical regional planning issues and promote stronger intergovernmental coordination between county and municipal governments within each jurisdiction. RPCs do not have regulatory authority and serve as de facto planning staff for smaller cities and rural counties in the region that do not have the resources to hire their own staff. An elected official representing each participating local government serves on the RPC board to ensure it focuses on local priorities.



RPCs do not receive state general revenue, but rather secure millions of dollars each year from federal and other funding sources along with modest dues from member governments. They address regional priorities related to economic development, disaster preparedness, community planning and other issues. Currently, RPCs are working on such urgent priorities as COVID-19 relief, resiliency, habitat protection, transportation, affordable housing, hurricane evacuation, disaster relief, and eliminating racial equity gaps. RPCs provide local governments a forum to identify and accomplish mutual goals, avoid duplicative efforts, and resolve conflicts.

1000 Friends urges legislators to **VOTE NO ON SB 62** because it:

- Deprives local governments of technical planning assistance that is especially important to smaller cities and rural counties without the budget or staff to undertake essential planning
- Does not result in any savings in General Revenue and leaves in limbo millions of dollars of grants already secured by RPCs to address economic recovery related to COVID-19 and disaster recovery, provide transit and address affordable housing, undertake critical habitat protection, address sea level rise, and more
- Reverts Florida to an uneven patchwork of intergovernmental agreements to address critical regional needs
- Eliminates an important forum for local governments to work cooperatively to address regional issues and resolve intergovernmental conflict without resorting to litigation

## IMPACTS OF LOSS OF RPCs ON FLORIDA'S COMMUNITIES

**What would Florida lose if RPCs are eliminated?** Eliminating them would do nothing to balance the state budget. However, Florida would lose millions of dollars in federal funds awarded to RPCs for economic development and other priorities. In some cases, federal grants are only awarded to regional agencies, thus eliminating a possible source of funding for local governments.

The many benefits provided by RPCs are especially critical now, with governments throughout Florida confronting the ongoing public health threat and economic toll from the COVID-19 pandemic. With Florida's population continuing to expand despite the pandemic, RPCs are also vital to help avoid the environmental damage that comes from poorly managed growth.

**Here are some examples:**

**Impacts on the Economic Recovery from COVID-19.** The South Florida RPC received a \$6 million business loan program to mitigate COVID-19 economic dislocation. The RPC received the funding to administer the entire loan program and was awarded the funding in part because it was a regional planning council. The U.S. Economic Development Administration does not award grants to non-regional organizations.

**Impacts on Transportation.** RPCs are regularly asked to engage in regional transportation planning disputes. Should RPCs be dismantled, the only alternative for these disputes to be resolved will be in court, which will be a lengthy and expensive option. As an example, the Central Florida RPC manages a fleet of vehicles and administers over \$3 million annually in rural transit funds and provides mobility coordination for six rural counties.

**Impacts on Affordable Housing.** RPCs help some small counties in Florida administer their State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) programs, which provide funds to local governments to create partnerships that produce and preserve affordable homeownership and multifamily housing. The program is intended to serve very low, low, and moderate income families. If SB 62 becomes law, some small counties will not get the help they need to effectively utilize state funds to expand affordable housing.

**Impacts on Resilience.** Since the early 2000s, RPCs have been leading coalitions of municipal and county governments to develop strategic, regional approaches to increase resiliency. More than half of the RPCs are actively engaged, including securing federal funding for infrastructure improvements, providing guidance to local governments to address state Peril of Flood requirements, and addressing issues such as sunny-day flooding and seawall improvements. As an example, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (TBRPC) undertook sea level rise and storm surge modelling that benefits 29 municipalities, and recently was awarded a \$500,000 grant from JPMorgan Chase to study methods to make affordable housing more resilient.

**Impacts on Brownfields Oversight.** An amendment to SB 62 would make counties, rather than RPCs, responsible for local hazardous waste management assessments. As an example, the Treasure Coast

RPC was awarded a \$1.7 million EDA grant from the EPA to oversee Brownfields assessments and redevelopment. Those funds would have to be returned if RPCs are dismantled.

**Impacts on the Wekiva River Protection Area.** The amendment to SB 62 seeks to shift the oversight of the Wekiva River Protection Area from the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council to the St. Johns River Water Management District, which lost many of its key technical staff under the previous administration.

**Impacts on Disaster Relief.** RPCs have emergency preparedness teams that work with first responders and emergency management staff from State, County and municipal governments to ensure that communities are prepared and inter-agency workflows are fine-tuned during hazard events. Their teams are highly trained with backgrounds in military, fire, emergency medical service, law enforcement, geospatial hazard analysis, training exercises and emergency management. Recognizing the unique value that RPCs bring to emergency preparedness, Governor DeSantis recently awarded \$2 million in grants to three RPCs as part of an effort “to develop or enhance state, regional, or local plans which will enable the state of Florida to withstand future disasters.”

## **BACKGROUND ON FLORIDA’S RPCs**

**What do RPCs do?** Created 50 years ago to replace an unworkable bureaucratic patchwork of intergovernmental agreements, Florida’s quasi-governmental 10 RPCs promote coordination between local governments to address regional issues. Under state statute, RPCs focus on multi-county issues related to economic development, emergency preparedness, community planning and other priorities. RPCs are not regulatory but instead provide assistance where they are directed by their member governments and appointees. Additionally, RPCs provide critical planning and other expertise, especially to small cities and rural counties that have neither the funding nor staff to undertake these critical functions.

**Why were RPCs created?** RPCs were created by state legislation in 1980 to address problems that “often transcend the boundaries of individual units of local general-purpose government.” SB 62 would eliminate this workable model of intergovernmental coordination and revert to the previous patchwork of intergovernmental agreements, creating a bureaucratic nightmare and accomplishing nothing.

**How are RPCs governed?** RPCs are an exercise in self-governance. An RPC’s governing board includes a representative of each county within its jurisdiction, and municipalities have the option to participate. The governor also appoints members to the governing board, including non-voting representatives of appropriate state agencies.

**How are RPCs funded?** RPCs do not receive any general appropriation from the state budget. They are funded primarily by federal grants, state and local contracts, and local dues. SB 62 would not result in savings in general revenue. In fact, SB 62 would require local governments to revert to a pre-1980 patchwork of interlocal agreements, risking the loss of already secured and potential funding and services while the transition was undertaken. It is likely that some poorer rural counties, which often benefit most from RPCs, would not have the resources to undertake this process in a timely manner.