



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Testimony Regarding, proposed House Bill No. 5267, *An Act Concerning the Use of Funds Under the Small Town Economic Assistance Program for Projects That Convert Farmland to Other Uses*, Before the Environment Committee, February 23rd, 2009.

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, members of the Environment Committee, my name is F. Philip Prelli, Commissioner of Agriculture. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the above referenced bill.

Within the last year, there have been two instances where state bond dollars granted under the Small Town Economic Assistance Program have been used to convert twenty-five or more acres of prime farmland to nonagricultural use. Current statute requires the following: CGS 3-20 (g) (1) (B) (State General Obligation Bond Procedure Act) and 22-6 (Powers and duties of commissioner of agriculture) requires, in situations where such conversion of 25 or more acres of prime farmland to nonagricultural will take place using state general obligation bond dollars, that a statement from the Commissioner of Agriculture be filed with the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management.

In these two instances, notification of projects came to the Department of Agriculture after the projects were well underway (sewer lines and roadways already installed). In other words, any comment by the Commissioner of Agriculture at this late juncture is virtually meaningless and counter to the state's policy on the preservation of prime soils for future agricultural purposes.

As a possible remedy and to avoid similar scenarios in the future, the Department of Agriculture contemplated the following remedy:

To require municipalities accepting STEAP grant funding to establish a local farmland preservation and open space committee and program; establish local funding mechanisms for said programs; inventory local farmland and open space resources; update their local plans of conservation and development to identify priority preservation areas; and provide committee training.

However, after discussions with OPM and the Department of Economic and Community Development, the agencies involved in vetting a project according to the requirements of existing statute have come up with an administrative review process which includes consultation with the Department of Agriculture, in order to avoid these situations from occurring in the future.

*Therefore, we do not believe this legislation is necessary.*