



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Testimony Regarding, Raised House Bill No. 6464, *An Act Concerning Coordinated Preservation and Development*, Before the Planning and Development Committee, March 2, 2009.

Senator Coleman, Representative Sharkey and members of the Planning and Development Committee, my name is F. Philip Prelli, Commissioner of Agriculture. **I am here to testify in opposition to Raised House Bill 6464, An Act Concerning Coordinated Preservation and Development.**

Let me begin by saying that I certainly support the concept of coordination among state agencies in furtherance of shared goals in public policy. It would be a terrible waste of precious tax dollars if state agencies did not act in unison when advancing programs for the public good. My concern arises from the thought that too much coordination can actually become a chokehold on moving any concept forward. That is not to say that a mechanism could not be devised that would allow all points of view to be considered when public policy is being proposed. Let me please elaborate.

With respect to H.B. 6464, in the area of Farmland Preservation, The Agriculture Department already notifies the Office of Policy and Management, the Department of Economic and Community Development, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Transportation when we are appraising a farm for consideration in the Farmland Preservation Program. In addition the department consults the OPM Plan of Conservation and Development to assure compliance. Presently, offers to purchase the development rights to farms are submitted to The State Property Review Board for review and approval. There is considerable oversight and reflection on decisions with respect to the program, as there should be.

As it stands right now, the Commissioner negotiates with the farmer regarding the per acre purchase price of the development rights of the farmer's land. There are strict guidelines that I consider when determining what the appropriate offer should be as well as scoring guidelines to determine if the property meets the standards to be purchased. It becomes difficult to negotiate when all offers need prior approval. Will the laudable goal of "smart growth" cancel out the also laudable goal of farmland preservation, in an urban area? What if the circumstance is of an otherwise good, qualified farm?

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board was recently established. May I respectfully suggest that the goal of "smart growth" be added to the criterion that they use when setting policy considerations for our Farmland Preservation Program.

Let me close by reiterating that the Agriculture Department shares in the belief that farmland preservation and "smart growth" go hand in hand, and it is our desire to see an effective, streamlined mechanism to achieve this critically important goal. Thank you for your time.

165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106
Phone: 860-713-2503 Fax: 860-713-2516
An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer