



1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut

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PRESERVING, CONSERVING AND GROWING SMART

Testimony to the Finance Revenue and Bonding Committee on

An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements and Other Purposes

Senator Daily, Representative Staples, members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, good evening, my name is Heidi Green. I am the president of the statewide smart growth organization, 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut. 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut conducts research, education and advocacy on the interconnected web of policies that sustain robust cities, lively downtowns and walkable neighborhoods, provide transit and affordable housing options, and ensure a healthy natural environment for clean air, water, wildlife habitat, and a viable agricultural sector.

Moving toward smart, sustainable development in Connecticut requires significant changes in four major policy areas: 1) reducing our reliance on the regressive property tax; 2) increasing regional cooperation for economic development and land use; 3) modernizing our local zoning codes; and 4) investing strategically in the smart growth areas of transit, transit oriented development, brownfield remediation and reuse, affordable housing, and priority property preservation – preservation of lands and water resources, critical wildlife habitats, and the prime soils that support our agricultural economy.

1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut supports lines 171 to 175 of bill **833 An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements and Other Purposes**. We believe these two grants to municipalities – one to act regionally to purchase capital equipment, and the second to make essential capital improvements and consolidate service delivery – are sound, forward-thinking investments for the long-term benefit of our communities and our citizens.

If our cities and towns increase inter-municipal cooperation, they will reduce the cost to provide certain local services. This will bring down the expenses of property tax payers. We also believe cities and towns working together can better coordinate economic development priorities and programs and thus, begin to manage land use and natural resources on a more sustainable scale.

As you can imagine with a policy agenda as comprehensive as smart growth, 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut participates in many coalitions and working groups. Since the release of the Governor's budget the tenor of conversation in most of those meetings has been ripe with strategic discussions for saving specific investment programs, including – the Community Investment Act, the Historic Tax Credit, Brownfield Remediation and Redevelopment, funds to build or preserve existing affordable housing, etc.

Instead of listing all the valuable programs in the state and why they should be maintained, I'd like to call on you to keep in mind the bigger picture and the need, especially now, for the state to progressively increase revenues to sustain and build on its investments in growing smart and sustainably.

Investing in smart growth now will have immediate and long-term returns to the state. It will leverage federal Reinvestment and Recovery Act dollars immediately to create more jobs, and their accompanying multiplier impact for the state economy. In the longer term, smart investments will sustain prosperity in the state, help clean up our air and water, help reduce our dependence on foreign oil, reduce our food insecurity, and make Connecticut a desirable destination for new businesses and residents.

Investing in smart, sustainable development now will provide jobs and help us pull out of the economic downturn. There is a significant backlog of demand for state gap financing and subsidy that could translate into hundreds of jobs within a matter of weeks. There are good smart projects all over the state that have ground-to-a-halt waiting for capital – affordable housing projects, transit oriented development projects, brownfield projects, etc. If the state increased its level of investment in smart development at the same time we're expecting an infusion of federal funds to create or protect 41,000 jobs, Connecticut would be well on its way to economic recovery.

In the longer term, developing compact, mixed use areas near transit means that people can walk from home to work to school or errands. Developing more places like this will help our businesses by attracting younger workers (who have a documented preference for vital urban spaces), reduce the costs to business associated with providing free parking; reduce labor costs

by allowing employees to cut commutes and increase their productive hours at work, and would provide remediation and construction jobs.

It will benefit our citizens. Focusing development in existing areas leaves farmland available for agriculture, providing more locally-grown food. Building compact mixed use places with row houses, town homes, condominiums and rental apartments provides more housing choices to meet millennials and empty-nesters' demand for smaller units. This development increases elderly citizens' independence by allowing them to walk or take public transit instead of waiting for hours for the dial-a-ride to show up, or drive alone in their car. Smart growth reduces the social isolation we find in homebound suburban kids, and older citizens; and increases a sense of community identity and engagement. Smart, transit oriented development also allows people to afford more house, as the transportation cost to transit-using households is nearly half that of household who have to rely on the family automobile. (Housing and transportation are the two largest expenditures for Connecticut households.) Growing smarter and more sustainably will help Connecticut attract new residents, and with them, new skills, talents and jobs.

Finally, encouraging smart, sustainable development reduces green house gas emissions by providing transportation alternatives to the single passenger automobile; and densities that allow people to walk and bike. Higher densities encourage new development on a scale that allows for clean energy innovation, and protects our streams, rivers and aquifers by reducing run-off.

The benefits of changing how and where we develop are many and irrefutable. Some we will experience right away, the benefits of preventing further unsustainable development, we can only imagine. If we do not invest now, we will miss critical opportunities to capitalize on lower real estate values and the opportunity to fully leverage federal investments.

Changing how we develop in Connecticut won't be inexpensive. It requires that we coordinate our investments. (1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut recommends we make smart growth a filter for all state capital investments.) In many of our older industrial areas, we have sewer, water, and often transit infrastructure. We also have environmentally contaminated sites.

Currently, it's easier and carries lower sunk costs to develop greenfield properties. To put brownfields on a more equal footing.

Historic properties make Connecticut unique, add to our sense of place, and increase the value of neighboring properties. Considering life-cycle energy demand, reusing existing buildings is also the greenest development practice. But the per-unit costs to redevelop are higher than to develop new in many cases. The Governor's budget eliminates \$12,000,000 from an account that provides funds for historic renovations, open space and farmland and suspends the historic preservation tax credit.

In all but a handful of our cities and towns, housing costs are so high they limit the vitality and competitiveness of our communities. Developers report that land values and construction costs in the state, even with higher densities and mixed uses, often make it impossible to close the affordable housing equation without state subsidy. We need investments to increase our supply of affordable housing.

Along the Connecticut River Valley, we have some of the best farmland soils on the planet. Throughout the state there are aquifer areas, ridgelines, prominent landscape features, etc. that are in the interest of this and future generations to protect from development. We need the funds to preserve priority properties.

The Finance Revenue and Bonding Committee reflects the vision of the General Assembly, and sets investment priorities of the state's citizens. The people of Connecticut want the state to grow and prosper, sustainably. I urge you to budget adequate resources to the programs and investments that will advance smart, sustainable development. The economic downturn may last a year-or-more. If we raise and deploy state revenues to leverage federal reinvestment and recovery funds, it will ease more quickly. If we don't, our economy will rebound slowly. And in the meantime, we may lose the opportunity for smart growth for a generation or longer.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. Please think of 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut as a resource in the weeks ahead. I'm happy to field any questions you may have.

The Board and Staff of 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut, Heidi Green, President