



Joan McDonald
Commissioner



State of Connecticut
Department of Economic and
Community Development

***TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE
March 6, 2009***

*Joan McDonald, Commissioner
Department of Economic and Community Development*

**SB 1037 AN ACT CONCERNING EXPEDITED APPROVAL OF TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

**HB 6586 AN ACT CONCERNING EXPEDITED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PERMIT
APPLICATION TEAMS**

The Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) offers the following comments and concerns with regard to ***SB 1037 AN ACT CONCERNING EXPEDITED APPROVAL OF TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS*** and ***HB 6586 AN ACT CONCERNING EXPEDITED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPLICATION TEAMS***.

We all know that timing can be critical to moving economic development projects through the state and local permitting process. Back in March of 2008 the Office of Responsible Development (ORD) was established within DECD to address the many issues that developers and businesses encounter when planning an economic development project in the state.

ORD's mission is to provide technical assistance to businesses, developers and communities when appropriate.

While SB 1037 may be well intentioned, we would raise the following concerns:

Sections 4 through 6 of the bill establish a State Board of Examiners of Economic Development Engineering Professionals and a process for licensure. By establishing this licensure board DECD would be assuming the role of a regulatory agency which is not part of its current mission. This has not typically been the role of DECD.

Sections 4 through 6 would have subsequent costs associated with licensing and regulating the Engineering professionals. Like most regulatory agencies, DECD would require staff to process applications and provide support to the board. A hearing office staff, which would need to include investigators and attorneys, would also be needed to process complaints and make recommendations to the board. These are presently not resources available within the agency.

Additionally, this licensure process seems to be duplicative of the existing licensure requirements for professional engineers, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Consumer Protection.

HB 6586 creates expedited permit teams. Again while well intentioned, we raise the following concerns regarding the bill as presently written.

DECD currently works with federal, state, and local entities in order to create and retain jobs and businesses in the state. However, each company DECD works with is unique. Many times a company's plans must remain private until the company is ready to announce them. Having other agencies and towns brought into the negotiations too prematurely could actually hinder negotiations, rather than facilitate them.

Convening public hearings as Sec. (2)(d) requires would allow local residents to discuss a potential project that could be detrimental to a possible deal. Additionally, towns might not have the staffing resources available to comply with an expedited permitting process. Executing an MOU and having dedicated staff to work on permits to be ready in 90 days is going to be difficult for many towns, especially the more rural communities.

DECD understands the intent of subdivision (1) of Section 2, which requires an expedited action review team for any company that is going to create a minimum of 10 jobs. However, DECD simply doesn't have the staffing resources to comply with this requirement.

Furthermore, the activities that would be required of these teams should be evaluated as they may be duplicative of functions of OPM's Office of Responsible Growth and the Interagency Steering Council. The mission of the Responsible Growth Interagency Steering Council is to coordinate state policy related to development and capital planning, which is precisely the intent of this bill. Similar to this bill, the Office of Responsible Growth's Interagency Steering Committee is comprised of OPM, DECD, DEP, DOT and other State Agencies which have a role in supporting and expediting development projects that foster responsible growth in Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the department's comments.