TESTIMONY OF
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ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING – MARCH 1, 2010

SB-206 –AN ACT CONCERNING LOCAL LAND USE AGENCIES & THE SITING OF TELECOMMUNCATIONS TOWERS

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of SB-206, which restores to Connecticut's towns and cities some decision-making authority over the siting of telecommunications towers.

SB-206 gives local officials – the people elected and/or appointed by their communities to make decisions affecting land use – the authority to weigh in on siting decisions, something that does not exist today. This authority is increasingly important as wireless technology becomes more pervasive and requires more and more towers, particularly in small and rural towns that have fewer structures on which to place antennas.

Under current law, towns have no say in where such towers will be located. Many people live in small towns because they enjoy the rural settings and pastoral views. As towns grow, local leaders are relied upon to ensure that this rural character is retained in the wake of economic development and residential construction growth. Local leaders work with their communities to balance development and preservation of open space and farmland. In fact, many towns have spent considerable funds to purchase land to protect it as open space for future generations to enjoy. Our Land Trusts and special funds set up for land acquisition emphasize this desire to keep the rural character and preserve its natural resources. It is reiterated in our Plan of Conservation & Development.

Recognizing this, the state has also invested significant funds in grant programs to assist towns and other organizations in purchasing open space and farmland to help protect Connecticut's natural resources from over-development. These programs have been enormously successful in preserving land and in helping towns retain that small town charm.

Unfortunately, these efforts are undermined under the current law. An increasing number of towns are faced with decisions of the Siting Council to place telecommunications towers in areas that do not make sense for the community and its citizens. These decisions do not take into account the environmental, ecological, aesthetic, social and political effects of having significantly more telecommunications facilities sited in their communities. Not to mention the negative impact on property values in a residential neighborhood and town.

We are about to embark on that process with AT&T wireless. The company is preparing to submit an application for a tower (Roxbury's second cell tower) which will be placed in one of the most densely populated areas of our community and in someone's backyard. The Town of Roxbury has been put on notice by AT&T that it would like to see seven (7) more towers within our county. There will be more if other companies decide to add to their tower sites. Our borders encompass 27 square miles. We already have one tower which is home to 3 carriers (including AT&T) and the coverage, while not perfect, has minimal dead zones.

The Town and its leadership are not opposed to having cell towers, we invited our present tower owned by Sprint/Nextel to build one back in 1997, a very proactive move back then. It was a service to our constituents and a tremendous compliment to our Emergency Services. As an EMT myself, I know the value of cell phone service. But I also know the value of home rule and protecting assets, such as homes, lifestyle and the land and environment. We should have a say in what goes on within our borders especially when it takes our land use boards and throws them out the window. At least give us some power regarding their siting through our land-use boards and commissions. These dedicated volunteers apply the same criteria to all who come before them, including the town itself. But a plethora of cell towers get a free pass. It's not right.

The proposed AT&T tower could accomplish the same outcome if it would spend their $18-19 billion capital nationwide investment by not building these monstrosities that no one wants and spend it on upgrading their systems to 3G technology as their competitors have. There is another way but that's for another time.

I am familiar with the Federal Telecommunications Act and understand its jurisdiction, and I believe SB-206 before this Committee is not in conflict with the federal law because the Act specifically does not limit the ability of municipalities to make decisions regarding the placement, construction, or modification of personal wireless service facilities. Other states do allow local governments to make siting decisions concerning telecommunications. I'm hopeful your actions will allow Connecticut to follow suit.

I therefore urge your support for SB-206, which recognizes that towns should have the authority to make decisions, through their land use boards, regarding the siting of telecommunications towers, which is consistent with current state policy which grants authority to towns to make land use decisions that affect their citizens.

Thank you for your time.