



Rivers Alliance

of Connecticut

3041W

TO: The Planning and Development Committee
RE: Bill 304: AN ACT CONCERNING STATE SURPLUS PROPERTIES
DATE: March 5, 2010

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Dear Sen. Coleman, Rep. Sharkey, and Members of the Committee:

Rivers Alliance is the statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect and enhance Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship.

Rivers Alliance was among the dozen environmental groups that worked for statutory revisions to provide for more notice and transparency when state lands are to be transferred. The coalition was called the CEPA Work Group (for the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act). Repeatedly the question arose as to whether public notice or any kind of critical review was really needed for the transfer of small parcels.

I am confident that, as land-use specialists, you will recognize that some very small parcels hold the key to large developments. The most famous recent example is the state transfer of a fraction of an acre controlling access to the Griswold Airport in Madison. The transfer opened the way for intense private development of this ecologically sensitive property, which is adjacent to Hammonasset State Park. Many years and millions of dollars later, the public has finally, this year, regained use of this property for conservation and recreation. All this litigation, cost, and controversy could have been avoided by an appropriate review of the proposed one-acre transfer.

Bill 304 would extend the list of exemptions from the land-transfer notice requirement to include transfers of small parcels by the Department of Economic and Community Development. Rivers Alliance urges you not to extend the exemptions. Alternatively, we ask that you require all exempt agencies to prepare a memorandum for their own files and for the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection on the purpose and probable impact of the transfer on water and other public trust resources on and adjacent to the property in question. Increases in road frontage and access are probably key elements. With the resources of Google Earth and other data bases, the research can be done in the office, if the agency is not already familiar with the relevant details.

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For some legislative background, the exemption for the Department of Transportation was negotiated in the process of writing the bill, and the exemption for the Department of Education was inserted when the bill was before the Senate in order to accommodate a particular project.

I am not sure that we are proposing here the best possible solution. But I am confident that this Committee will understand the problem, and may have some better wording to suggest. The idea is to avoid doing harm without adding any inconvenience.

Thank you for consideration.

Sincerely,


Margaret Miner, Executive Director