



TOWN OF OXFORD

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Date: March 10, 2010

Testimony of Herman Schuler, Economic Development Director for the Town of Oxford

re: Raised Bill No. 412 AN ACT CONCERNING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT EVALUATIONS FOR A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT LOCATED AT A STATE-OWNED AIRPORT

Senator Defronzo, Representative Guerrero, members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for Bill No. 412 which is being proposed to resolve a technical issue raised by the Office of Policy and Management with regard to a public/private partnership that used developer funding to complete a DOT sponsored and managed CEPA EIE covering construction of two new hangars and integrated office facilities that will add 300 new aviation services jobs at the Waterbury-Oxford Airport and a new 85,000sf flex space building to host new Oxford Businesses.

By way of background -

In December, 2007 the Oxford Conservation Commission & Inland Wetland Agency approved the site plan for a new privately funded 273,000 square foot hangar and administrative facility to be built on the Waterbury-Oxford Airport. The privately funded \$33 million dollar facility would be built by Claris Corporation for Keystone Aviation on a 10 acre parcel owned by CTDOT. When complete, the building will be deeded to the state in exchange for long term operating leases.

The project will employ 300 construction workers for 18 months during the construction phase and create 300 new aviation services jobs. In total, the project will generate approximately \$54 million in annual economic output going forward.

The project, which was discussed at a CEQ meeting in May 2009, has been stalled by interagency conflicts for over two years. In mid 2009, the environmental community opposed a town sponsored legislative proposal to exempt the project from CEPA requirements based on previous CTDOT practices governing privately funded airport development.

Senator Kane and I made a presentation to CEQ members explaining that the airport had been extensively studied in the preceding five years. We shared the previously completed and approved CEPA/NEPA documents and the Airport

Master Plan and FAR 150 noise studies plus the town sponsored CEPA EIE that covered adjacent town property and the surrounding road network.

CEQ, in conjunction with representatives from the environmental groups, agreed that the verified data from the previously completed studies could be used to accelerate completion of a new EIE, however, they emphasized that the resulting EIE would have to be socialized with the public as required by the CEPA process to gain their support.

In August of 2009, at the request of the Governor's Office, OPM directed CTDOT to complete a CEPA EIE by December 30, 2009. Under direct CTDOT supervision, and with the cooperation of the Town, Keystone Aviation and Claris Corporation, a draft CEPA EIE, was completed by BL Companies and distributed to town libraries and town clerk offices. A public hearing to gather public comment was scheduled for December 3rd at the Oxford High School.

On November 29th 2009, in response to an OPM concern over consultant selection, project funding and potential environment community opposition to the consultant selection process, DOT was directed to "postpone" the public hearing and award a redo of the project to a new consultant. This action will cost Connecticut taxpayers over \$100,000 dollars and delay the hangar project, and the associated economic benefits, an additional 9 to 11 months.

It is our belief that the draft CEPA EIE, prepared by a licensed engineering and environmental company that followed a statutory protocol and endorsed the product with their operating license and seal, completed an exemplary document that joins the Airport Master Plan Update, the FAA FAR 150 Noise Study and the five other CEPA EIE documents that provide a comprehensive record of the Oxford Airport environmental and economic conditions.

The current EIE draft was favorably reviewed and approved by CEQ, as documented in their November 18, 2009 minutes, and can be completed in six weeks by simply completing the public hearing, integrating public comments, completing the Record of Decision and submitting the final documents to OPM for approval.

We request that the Section 2 language be adopted to facilitate completing the existing EIE as approved by CEQ.

To facilitate public/private partners going forward, we respectfully request that the Section 1 language be adopted and the entire bill receive a Joint Favorable outcome.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Herman Schuler
Economic Development Director
Town of Oxford**