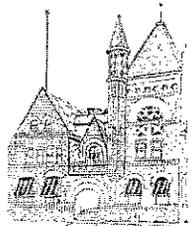




DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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CITY HALL 1896-196

John M. Picard
Mayor

Eileen Buckheit
Commissioner

**TESTIMONY OF Eileen Buckheit
Commissioner of Planning and Development
CITY OF WEST HAVEN
Before the
COMMERCE COMMITTEE
March 8, 2011**

**RAISED BILL NO. 6526
AN ACT CONCERNING BROWNFIELD REMEDIATION AND DEVELOPMENT AS AN
ECONOMIC DRIVER**

Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger and members of the Commerce Committee. On behalf of the City of West Haven, I would like to express my support for Section 17 of Raised Bill 6526 which will greatly increase the development potential for our brownfield sites in West Haven, and the entire State, but with critical deletions to subsection 17(b) of the Bill, removing restrictions on the number and types of brownfields that can take advantage of the program..

As an economic development professional that has been involved in the investigation, cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields for fifteen years, I have seen the frustration, both from the public and private sectors, when dealing with complicated issues of liability, and timelines that never end. Any movement toward the reduction of this uncertainty and increasing the final closeouts of these sites will be invaluable to municipalities already reeling from the Great Recession.

The City of West Haven is fortunate to have an approved Municipal Development Plan (MDP), located on prime real estate – waterfront. Unfortunately, the majority of the land in the MDP is industrial property and former oil terminals. The City has struggled, with the assistance of the Connecticut DEP and federal EPA, to redevelop this site for years. We are gaining ground, and will be able to move toward a cleanup and redevelopment plan for the city-owned portion in the near future. However, these steps have all been very difficult and expensive to execute. RB 6526 will help to expedite orphan sites such as these and help us to place them back in private hands, and on our tax rolls.

Another site in West Haven is a former Ford car dealership, which has been contaminated by years of industrial uses, and auto body repair. We have a potential developer for the site who wishes to build mixed use housing and commercial at the site. As stated earlier, these prospective deals take years longer than clean sites, and are filled with uncertainty and intimidating bureaucracies and potential delays. Although no one has walked away from the table, the City is aware that due to these issues, these deals can fall apart at any time. An Act Concerning Brownfield Remediation and Development as an Economic Driver can expedite the cleanup and remove much of the liability questions with the “notice of Completion of Remedy and No Further Action Letter”, and the delays and uncertainty involved with the Transfer Act.

Lastly, the City of West Haven strongly supports the removal of fees charged to municipalities for this and other environmental clean up programs. Since West Haven is largely performing any brownfields activities through grant funding due to tight municipal budgets, such fees can only encourage municipalities to ignore these abandoned sites, any many times the public sector is their only hope for redevelopment.