

## **HB1196 – Sec 14**

### **Haddam Land Swap – the Saga Continues**

Let me preface this testimony by saying that one of the developers has referred to my "tireless zeal" as having these 17 acres "literally in her back yard." That is so, but does not change the facts, and I would be against this swap whether I lived there or not.

I am outraged that open space land, paid for with my tax dollars can be traded to private developers for their own personal gain. This sets a dangerous precedent and makes all State of CT owned open space vulnerable to developers. The DEP's mission is "conserving, protecting and improving the natural resources and environment of the state." It should not be asked to promote economic development.

This is the third year that this land swap has been introduced.

In 2009, the conveyance bill containing the land swap was vetoed by Gov Rell and the legislature chose not to override that veto.

In 2010, it was decided to have public comment on the land swap. After such, the land swap was removed from the conveyance bill. That is where it should have ended.

So here we are to debate it once again.

There are certain inequities that need to be addressed:

**FACT:** CT taxpayers paid \$1,350,000 for these 17 acres overlooking the CT River.

The developers paid \$428,000 for their 87 acres (a difference of \$922,000. A great deal for the developers!

**FACT:** An addition of 87 acres to the State Forest (which already has 16,000 acres) represents a .5% gain to the state forest.

Trading away these 17 acres represents a 100% loss within the CT River Gateway.

The 17 acres were purchased by the State of CT with the intention that it remain open space. The deed reads in part, "hereinafter described premises, being located on the Connecticut River, a prime natural feature of the Connecticut landscape, has high priority recreation, fishery, and conservation value, and is consistent with the state comprehensive plan for outdoor recreation and the

state plan of conservation and development **and should be retained in its natural scenic or open condition as park or public open space.**" The finding was made 8 years ago under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program. We should be able to count on land acquired as open space remaining in that state, it is our land.

I would also add that these 17 acres are part of the Clark Creek Wildlife Management Area which abuts Eagle Landing State Park. It is a perfect compliment to the large parking lot that makes up Eagle Landing State Park. These 17 acres offer a great deal of biodiversity that Eagle Landing State Park does not have. The developers have often referred to it as a "sandpit". This conjures up a picture of a big empty pit full of sand. It is not. Most of the Tylerville area is made of Connecticut River bottom from millions of years ago – our soil is sandy. The lower portion of the swap area is made up of primarily shrubs, grasses and wildflowers. The upper portion consists of a meadow and a large stand of mature maple trees. It has also been suggested by the developers that these 17 acres include invasive species – that may be so but if that were the criteria for land not to be valuable for conservation, then most of the Ct River shoreline would be eligible for trade.

The developers are currently proposing to build a hotel or inn – this keeps changing (in the past we have heard plans for a train station, a theater and numerous retail shops) and I suppose if the land is exchanged, the developers can do whatever they want once they are the owners – perhaps even to sell it to someone else and make a nice profit for themselves. I am not against development per se, but this property was purchased with the intent to preserve it as open space. How sad to think that land that is sold to the DEP for preservation may not remain so.

Do we really need more development along the river? I will never understand why humans have this need to develop every square inch of this planet. We need to leave this land for future generations. Once it is gone it is gone forever. I would hope you will do the right thing and remove section 14 from HB1196

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