Councilman, Matthew P. Catalano- Chairman Pro Tem Stratford Town Council
02/28/12

3486 Main Street
Stratford CT. 06614

In support of House Bill #5266
Bonding for the American Shakespeare Festival Theater

Good Morning Mr./Madam Chair, Ladies and Gentleman of the Committee:

It's a great honor to be here today and give testimony on behalf of the Town of Stratford in support of House Bill #5266.

The conditions for the American Shakespeare Theater changed greatly in 2005 when the Town of Stratford took title to this National icon. I'm proud to announce to you here today that great progress is being made in the revitalization of this venue which was once the second largest tourist attraction in the state and investment at this time is not only necessary but prudent. I've had Senator Kelly's office forward the membership a report that is considered to be the benchmark study on the Economic Impact of Arts in America. I hope you take the time to peruse it. Last done in 2007, the numbers are still consistent today.

"Mayor's understand the connection between the arts industry and city revenues. Besides providing thousands of jobs, the arts generate billions of dollars in government and business revenues and play an important role in the revitalization of our nations cities"- This was Douglas Palmer's, then Mayor of Trenton NJ and President of the United States Conference of Mayor's comment on this study. The study illustrates that Not for Profit Arts represent 160 billion dollars in the national economy each year and 5.7 million jobs. In fact jobs supported by Not for Profit Arts are second only to elementary school teachers as the largest segment in America's workforce. Not for Profit Arts generates 30 billion dollars each year to local, state and federal governments. Supported by approximately 4 billion in expense by these three levels of government, that equals a 7 to 1 return on investment. Again exemplifying the key lesson of the study; "Communities that invest in the arts reap the additional benefits of jobs, economic growth and quality of life that positions those communities to compete in a 21st century economy.

I'm not here asking you to invest alone. To date we have invested $600,000.00 in a new roof on the theater. We have currently started renovations on the John C. Benjamin House aka "the White House" at the entrance to the property. We have retained the services of Arts Consulting Group of NYC along with Cosler Theater Designs to help us with refitting the theater into something that will be an asset to the region and be able to function in the current market place. It is a reasoned and logical approach. This combined with the town's move, utilizing state grant money to create Transit Centered Development, the theater stands to be a central cog in Stratford's economic revival in an area that has been depressed since the theater closed. We've attracted a micro brewery to invest in a brown field property in the neighborhood and a once vacant car dealer is being transformed into high end apartments to attract young professionals to take advantage of our new transit centered development zone.

I respectfully ask that the committee seriously consider moving this bill forward so we can get back to being the home for Shakespeare in America and a destination that helps feed the town and region as a whole.