

Environment Committee
Public Hearing
Friday March 1, 2012
Testimony in Support of Proposed Bill HB -6539
An Act Concerning the Former Sunrise Resort Property

Dear Chairs and Committee Members:

Thank you bringing this bill before a Public Hearing. As a resident of East Haddam Connecticut and former East Haddam Economic Development Commissioner (EHEDC) I not only support proposed bill HB-6539 but urge this committee and the State of Connecticut to take action immediately on the former Sunrise Resort property.

As you are aware this property was purchased by the State of Connecticut in 2009 under the leadership of Governor Jodi Rell. Per her words: " This acquisition is important because it not only enlarges state owned land in the amount of 443 acres it will also protects over 4,700 feet of additional frontage along the Salmon River."

Since Rell's statement in 2009 there have been supplementary documented remarks from many branches of Connecticut government in regard to the reasons why we must protect the Sunrise Resort parcel, why we purchased the Sunrise Resort parcel and the general importance of open space in the State of Connecticut. In addition to all the words spoken the State of Connecticut has invested enormous tax dollars in evaluating the property,(including over \$33,000.00 to Fuss and O'Neil for a feasibility study) written multiple reports for plans of action and invested countless man hours and resources from many state departments/consultants and agencies justifying the above statements. Yet, the words, plan of actions and monies expended have not resulted in any constructive undertaking to protect this valuable property.

In fact the actions of the State of Connecticut have been in direct contradiction to any and all plans of conservation and development that have been developed, implemented and put into law by the State of Connecticut.

The former Sunrise Resort in its fifth year of ownership and management by the State of Connecticut is a perfect example of blight as described in the State of Connecticut OLR Research Report 2003-R-0771. Sunrise property is an attractive nuisance, attracts criminal activity, the property contains multiple documented fire hazards, and is in a complete state of dilapidation.

The above conditions have not only been well documented by the press and media it has been personally seen by high level officials of the State of Connecticut. I personally walked the property with First Selectman Walter, Susan Frechette, deputy commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection and Robert Klee, chief of the staff to DEEP in 2011. During this tour it was seen by myself and state officials the criminal activity that had taken place such as doors broken in, windows smashed and even restaurant chairs placed on the roof of buildings. After walking the property it was clearly stated "this must be a priority". Two years have passed since that tour and the conditions have worsened, the neglect has increased and the hazards are too many to count. It should be noted this is only one of four walkthroughs that I personally took with officials from the State of Connecticut. Dates and comments

from all walkthroughs are available for public viewing on the East Haddam.org website in minutes from the EHEDC.

As a member of the EHEDC I along with other commissioners and town officials provided monthly updates regarding all communications to and from state officials and progress reports. These updates along with an extensive number of letters are also available on the Town of East Haddam website under minutes from EHEDC.

Many of the testimonies submitted will only reference the land. As a resident of East Haddam and former employee of the resort (both under the ownership of Johnson Family and Frank Davis) I believe we would be remiss if we did not mention the historical nature of this site. Tens of thousands of high school class days were spent at this location, hundreds of summer jobs were produced by this site and the history of Connecticut resorts began and ended an era at this site.

The State of Connecticut was fortunate in purchasing the Sunrise parcel. Many developers offered sums greater than the agreed purchase price to the sellers (The Johnson Family). Yet the Johnson family sold the property to the State of Connecticut in an effort to protect the site. I along with many others applauded this venture. Only those directly involved in the negotiation can say what the intent of the purchase was however anyone with responsible sense would be able to surmise it was never the intent of the seller to see his property deteriorate to a complete state of disarray. I personally am very disappointed by the lack of respect the State of Connecticut has shown to the sellers, and the lack of respect the State of Connecticut has exemplified to all tax payers.

In the past few years the State of Connecticut has been under the microscope of public scrutiny in how it protects its open space. The Haddam site and Sunrise Resort locations are leading examples. Failure to act on bill HB-6539 will only further alienate public trust and jeopardize future ventures of protecting open space.

It is imperative that this committee passes bill HB-6539. It is a matter of integrity, respect and validation. The State of Connecticut needs to demonstrate integrity of its control and management of assets. The State of Connecticut must exhibit respect for the tax payers and those who have sold or would consider selling property to the State of Connecticut. And last but not least the State of Connecticut needs to validate that action follows the words of state officials.

Sincerely,

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