

**TESTIMONY**  
**OF**  
**THE HONORABLE MAYOR JOHN A. HARKINS**  
**IN SUPPORT OF**  
**H.R. No. 5368**  
**AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE POINT STRATFORD INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT WITHIN THE TOWN OF STRATFORD**

**PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Friday, March 7, 2014

Chairwomen Osten, Chairwoman Rojas, Vice Chairman Cassano, Vice Chairman Fox, Ranking Members, and Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee,

As Mayor of the Town of Stratford, I am honored to offer my testimony in support of H.B No. 5368: *An Act Establishing the Point Stratford Infrastructure Improvement District within the Town of Stratford*. This bill would allow for the creation of an infrastructure improvement district, known as the Point Stratford Infrastructure Improvement District (herein referred to as the "District"), to help facilitate the construction of public infrastructure improvements, and allow for the District to issue bonds in an effort to help finance a successful redevelopment of the current Stratford Army Engine Plant (SAEP) brownfield site.

The Stratford Army Engine Plant has a storied history in the Town of Stratford. Built in the 1920s, the building was originally called the Sikorsky Aero Engineering Corporation. Following nearly a decade of airplane production for the Navy, Marine Corps, and private companies, the facility underwent improvements and was renamed the Vaught-Sikorsky Aircraft Division in 1939. The facility was further expanded in the early 1940s, as the plant continued to manufacture planes—including the Corsair speed fighter used during World War II. In 1951, The Air Force purchased the plant, and in the ensuing decades the plant underwent repairs and expanded to produce engines for aircraft, helicopters, hydrofoils, tanks, and hovercraft. In 1976, the Air Force transferred the property to the Army, and it was renamed the Stratford Army Engine Plant. The plant was closed in 1998 as a result of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, and a 1995 BRAC Commission's recommendation.

At the height of the Stratford Army Engine Plant's production, thousands of people were working in the facilities and contributing to the Town of Stratford and the State of Connecticut's economies. The government-owned, contractor-operated facility that once gave so much to the region, has for the past two decades been a decommissioned army tank engine site—a brownfield with vacant buildings, but a site with so much to offer. The redevelopment of this property, however, will once again bring the 77-acre waterfront to life, and turn it into a vibrant, mixed-use community that will generate revenue for the town, provide a boost to the town, regional, and state economies, and give the residents of Stratford and the

region an enjoyable destination to visit; one that is steeped in rich history and has a stunning view that overlooks the mouth of the Housatonic River.

After a competitive bidding process, Point Stratford Renewal (PSR) was selected in October 2013 by the Army to acquire and redevelop the property. The developer's proposed plan would utilize the 4,500 feet of shoreline and 3,100 feet of frontage along Main Street to create a vibrant, transit-oriental community that would enrich both the town and the entire southwestern region of Connecticut. The redevelopment project will inject the local economy with economic activity and bring long term, quality jobs to the region. Furthermore, the reuse of this site will give a boost to the municipal tax revenue and greatly contribute to our economy and revitalization of the area.

The reuse and redevelopment of the SAEP site will bring Stratford's community to the riverfront for the first time in nearly a century. The project will include up to 1,500 units of housing and apartments, and up to 500,000 square feet of retail outlets, office, hotel space, and greenway—to name a few of the redeveloped site's uses. The developer is committed to environmental remediation of the land, as well as incorporating green technologies, thereby improving the ecologically sensitive riverfront environment. Additionally, the revitalized Stratford Point will serve as a transportation hub, and connect Lordship, downtown Stratford, Metro North and the surrounding region, while providing a prime waterfront destination for visitors from across the state and the country.

The SAEP redevelopment project is critical to the future of Stratford, and it will have a huge impact on our community. While a purchase and sale agreement has been reached between the Army and PSR, many steps remain until the project will be completed. To reach the full potential of the site, the development project will need to be implemented and funded. H.B. No. 5368 provides the essential financing needed to bring this project to fruition. The Act establishes the District for the enumerated purposes listed in the Connecticut General Statutes, Chapter 105, §7-326, including to extinguish fires, light streets, plan, layout, acquire, construct, maintain, and finance roads, sidewalks, crosswalks, drainage systems, sewers and sewage treatment facilities, environmental remediation, and other infrastructure improvements, among other purposes, as listed in § 1(b)(2) of the Act.

In order to finance the aforementioned infrastructure improvements for the development of the site and to carry out other purposes so enumerated to the District, the Act authorizes the District to levy taxes and issue bonds, notes or other obligations. These bonds are not considered debt of the State of Connecticut or the Town of Stratford, and are either backed by the full faith and credit of the District or by District fees, revenues or benefit assessments. Additionally, prior to the issuance of any bond, the District must enter into an interlocal agreement with the Town of Stratford and approved by the town council. Any bonds issued by the district will be paid for by property taxes from the project collected through the District's power to assess, levy and collect taxes and benefit assessments upon the land and buildings that are located solely within the District.

I would like to thank Representatives Hoydick, Miller, and Backer for sponsoring this bill. I would also like to thank Chairwomen Osten and Rojas, as well as the members of the Joint Committee on Planning and Development for raising this bill for a public hearing, and providing me the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of this proposal. I strongly urge the consideration of H.B. No. 5368, and I respectfully request that the Committee act favorably so that the District, Town of Stratford, and State of Connecticut may begin benefitting from the Point Stratford redevelopment project.