



TOWN OF CANTERBURY

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TESTIMONY ON ASPECTS OF HB-5507

AN ACT CONCERNING THE APPOINTMENT OF ZONING ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS, BUILDING OFFICIALS AND FIRE MARSHALS.

Members of the Planning and Development Committee,

This testimony is in opposition to the part of this bill related to Section 8-3 of the general statutes, related to the management of Zoning Enforcement Officials. I have no comment on the other portions.

As the Land Use Director in Canterbury, I wear many hats including Town Planner and Zoning, Wetlands and Aquifer Protection Official. I am a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and a Certified Zoning Enforcement Official with the CT Association of Zoning Enforcement Officials. I have nearly ten years of experience in these roles.

The Zoning Commission is the body that manages the zoning regulations in a Town. They, with input from the Planning Commission, regulate activities within their jurisdictions for the betterment of the community. They have the authority to write the regulations and are "on the front lines" of their enforcement. Public hearings and public participation sessions are a regular part of their meetings where feedback from the community on how well the regulations are working is received, along with complaints. As such, there is no other body as involved with the zoning matters, than the Zoning Commission. It is this day to day experience that makes them best suited to manage their zoning enforcement official. This is the way it is set up in the Statutes and the way it should stay.

These are my three main reasons for my opinion on this matter:

1. A Chief Executive Officer does not understand the zoning regulations or the current issues related to development as well as the zoning commission does, in most cases.
2. A CEO is a singular person, elected every two years in most cases. A zoning commission is a large bi-partisan body of between 5-9 persons, plus alternates, that are elected in most cases every 6 years. This isolates their decisions from political influences as much as possible
3. Many ZEOs, myself included, wear many hats and changing the person responsible for appointment will cause some issues.

Related to number 2, above, I have real concerns about CEO's inflicting their personal or political viewpoints onto the ZEO. This personally happened to me in a past position several years ago. I sent a letter of violation to an individual with a clear violation of the zoning regulations. That person went and spoke with the CEO of the Town at that time, and that CEO then came into my office ordered me to "drop it". Although the CEO technically did not have the authority to do so, receiving such an order does cause one to pause. If that person had the authority to hire and fire myself, it would have been much worst.

Furthermore, this order was given in private with no public participation. If the Commission wants to speak with me about enforcement priorities, it would do so in the light of a public meeting with public input possible. As a ZEO, I am constantly trying to do my job the most fair way that I can, treating everyone the same and not taking placing politics into my decision making process. This proposed change places these difficult choices into the political realm. It is for this reason, above the others, that I respectfully disagree with this provision.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Steven Sadlowski