State of Connecticut

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MEMBER
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
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Transportation Committee
February 23, 2015

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 6327 AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF STREAMLINING THE PLANNING AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS BETWEEN TOWNS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrera; Vice Chairmen Senator Leone, Representative Arce; Ranking Members Senator Boucher, Representative O'Dea, and esteemed members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Gayle Mulligan and I proudly represent the 55th, serving the wonderful towns of Andover, Bolton, Hebron and Marlborough.

I thank you for bringing this concept to public hearing and appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 6327. I would like to commend the Governor in his efforts to bring about needed change in the way the Department of Transportation functions. Our municipalities and small businesses certainly appreciate the enhancements made, having put into place a master plan of agreement to short track projects and begin to streamline the process. However, we cannot stop there. Additional work needs to be done and focus put on communication within the different agencies of the DOT and with other departments such as DEEP. The time it takes from start to finish of a project is far too lengthy and cumbersome. Extensive amounts of paperwork need to be consolidated. I would ask that you consider looking into having DOT continue to work on focus enhancing their efforts, to encourage progress and make it easier on our towns and businesses to get projects completed quickly and improve DOT's efficiency.

The Town of Hebron embarked on a long-range Conceptual Master Plan for a 130 acre mixed-use development. In a small town, this type of project is seen as a long term – 30+ year build out. Regardless of the fact that the project was planned to be built out in phases, DOT required a $2 million bond for all anticipated off-site improvements from the local developer. This bonding requirement economically crippled the developer and slowed down any progress. The town had to unapproved the Master Plan to reduce the bonding requirements on the developer; unfortunately, this did not instill confidence in potential developers to commit to the project. Additionally, DOT

determined from their traffic study that the intersection with current traffic flows required a traffic light and it was determined that no business could open their doors until the light was erected. We had to jump through hoops to install a signal light at the intersection of the parcel, the issued played out over a couple years with the town ultimately stepping up to get the light installed, through STEAP funding. However, 6 years later, the "Village Green" is still a "road to nowhere" as referred to by the community. The weight of the tax burden continues to lie on the backs of the residents and without additional business the burden continues to grow.

Another area DOT should take a look at it their Design Standards. Again in Hebron, integrating Route 66 into the community and thereby making Hebron Center more walk-able and bike-able as well as function as a Main Street is a key issue which has driven our planning efforts. We have struggles in the past in design improvements through the Town Center but have run up against DOT highway standards that do not recognize that portions of the road run through a town center.

The State should consider adopting context sensitive design standards, similar to other states, for our Town Centers that have state roads running through them. We now know that many of the past practices that resulted in the decimation of our traditional town and city centers were due to highway projects. These design standards would allow for lower speeds through Town centers, on street parking, encouragement of pedestrian crossings, and traffic calming measures. These initiatives would help bring back our Main Street from a pedestrian safety standpoint but also from an economic development standpoint. All roads in CT cannot be treated the same nor should they have the same requirements as there are so many factors to take into account such as small rural towns vs cities vs interstates, etc.

While DOT has taken strides in recent years to talk about these concepts, more needs to be done to make these types of standards the norm. There are various innovative approaches and new guidelines that illustrate ways to integrate state roads with town centers such as the Massachusetts DOT's "*Project Development and Design Guide*", the Institute of Transportation Engineers and the Congress for the New Urbanism's "*Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach*" and the City of New Haven's "*Complete Streets Manual*", which provide excellent guidance on planning strategies and engineering measures that can better integrate state highways with the town centers that they serve.

Thank you for your consideration

Kind Regards

Gayle Mulligan

Gayle Mulligan
State Representative – 55th District