

To the Planning and Development Committee:

We are Bloomfield residents who know first hand the impact of a business, municipality, and second municipality (a.k.a the Metropolitan District Commission) deliberately keeping a project quiet. We are referring to the Niagara Bottling Plant project, the impetus for SB 328 (*AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL APPLICATIONS FOR LAND USE PERMITS AND TAX ABATEMENTS*).

Unfortunately, since mid-December when the Niagara project finally “went public,” we have once again been reminded that existing town regulations often do not protect citizens’ interests, but offer cover for projects in the name of “economic development.” By the time citizens found out about this project, Niagara had obtained all required approvals from the Planning & Zoning and Wetlands Commissions. Correction - Niagara had not obtained the required approvals; “Ed Lally and Associates,” an engineering firm, had. The tenants of the “center for manufacturing, storage, and distribution” were “to be determined.” No mention of a water bottling plant - even though an Oct. 29, 2015 e-mail from Bloomfield’s Town Manager to Town Council members notes that “the Town has received Niagara Bottling’s Inland Wetlands Permit application.”

Even some Commissioners were in the dark. Commissioner David Mann, who has served on Bloomfield’s Wetlands Commission for years, did not know Ed Lally’s application before Wetlands on November 16, 2015 was for Niagara. He found out at the January 11, 2016 Bloomfield Town Council meeting. Town Councilors had the audacity to scold upset residents at that meeting for “not paying attention” since everything was public. Mr. Mann stated from the audience that a Niagara application had not appeared in front of Wetlands. Imagine his shock when he learned it had been! Because of this subterfuge, he was not able to do his job and ask appropriate questions during the Wetlands hearing. The process may have been legal (we would argue that it was not), but it certainly was unethical and shameful.

Unfortunately, these kinds of shenanigans don’t occur only in Bloomfield.

Unfortunately many municipalities are so desperate for “economic development” - regardless of the ultimate cost to the public - that Town officials betray the public trust. Unfortunately, citizens need a state law to force greater transparency in the permitting and tax abatement processes.

As currently stated, SB 328 does NOTHING to remedy the current situation. There are too many “mays” rather than “shalls.” We support SB 328 but with the following changes:

Section 1. (a) First sentence: Substitute the word *shall* for the word *may*:

“.....a municipality *shall* by ordinance, require an applicant “

Section 1. (b) Substitute the word *shall* for the word *may* and specify what is meant by a reasonable time:

“An ordinance adopted pursuant to subsection (a) of this section *shall* require the applicant to update any change in the information specified in said subsection within [*X days or X weeks*] after such change.”

Statement of Purpose: Replace the word option in the Statement of Purpose with the word requirement.

“To provide a municipal requirement to require land use and tax abatement applicants to provide detailed disclosures regarding the nature of such applications.”

With these changes, we believe Connecticut citizens will be better informed.

Unfortunately we can't rely on the good will of our Town officials; we need requirements, not options.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kevin Gough & Paula Jones