

Citizen Testimony Regarding

“An Act Concerning Municipal Applications for
Land Use Permits and Tax Abatements, SB 328”

March 11, 2016; 11:00am

Respectfully Submitted by,

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Dear Planning and Development Committee:

It is vital that pending legislation, *“An Act Concerning Municipal Applications for Land Use Permits and Tax Abatements, SB 328,”* sponsored by State Representative David Baram, be passed without reservation.

This legislation will require greater transparency of the nature of land use permits being sought within any of the State’s municipalities. However, kindly consider a bill that obligates municipalities to require applicants to disclose the real identity of the developer and the development project.

Much is being debated amount the lack of transparency among major economic development initiatives across the State and the role our elected officials have played, consequentially, in the furthering of such business goals. Undoubtedly, it is vital to support those economic development opportunities that provide a real pathway to robust employment and financial strength to the communities where these businesses plan to reside. Strong economic development helps to fortify the backbone of any thriving town or city as it bolsters the area’s vitality. To that end, it is also important that the residents of these communities are equally committed to the growth of the place they call home. This can realized when both residents and elected officials are on the same page. And the sharing of information between residents and elected officials is constant and timely. The controversy that has engulfed the Town of Bloomfield in recent months is evidence of the consequences of a breakdown in communication, a lack in transparency in the economic development process and the legal loopholes that enabled its Town Council to proceed with an economic development plan with almost no community engagement.

In an effort to strengthen S.B. 328, please consider the following language:

- Create an expanded email list of the dissemination of town council meeting agendas to include residents who request it.
- Require town/city elected leadership meeting agendas be shared with the chairs of town commissions and boards.
- Require all applications for tax abatements of \$4M or greater be advertised in the newspaper, local television, on the towns’/city’s official website, and related social media outlets and subject to a public hearing two weeks prior to town council vote on the application.

The passage of this legislation is an appropriate and responsible approach to achieving greater transparency with regard to conducting town/city business. Also, this legislation represents an important step towards building higher accountability from our elected officials and trust between our leaders and the residents who put their faith in them to protect the best interests of their community. Thank you.