

Smart Growth ENews



1000 FRIENDS OF CONNECTICUT

Volume 3, Issue 3

March 2008

Smart Growth & the Legislature 2008

The General Assembly's Planning and Development Committee recently finished its review of committee bills.

Planning and Development is the legislative committee that has "cognizance of all matters relating to local governments, housing, urban renewal, fire, sewer and metropolitan districts, home rule and planning and zoning; regional planning and development activities and the State Plan of Conservation and Development". In short, it's the committee where smart land use, intergovernmental and fiscal policies should originate. It is also the committee that is

the first line of defense from development policies that poorly use our natural resources, infrastructure and state funds.

So, how has the committee's work to date in 2008 advanced smart growth? Frankly, the committee, chaired by Senator Eric Coleman and Representative Art Feltman, could have done a whole lot better.

It unanimously approved substitute bill number 39, An Act Concerning Responsible Growth. [Continued on page 3.](#)

Citizen Activist Summit on the Property Tax and Smart Growth

We've got challenges. Our economy is unstable. We face the unpredictable threat of global climate change. Business as usual just isn't working anymore and it won't. It's time to move property tax reform to the front burner so we can make real improvements in how Connecticut grows – now and into the future.

Our towns and cities depend so heavily on local property taxes to pay for education and other government services, that:

- ◇ Towns compete with each other for new developments, even when they aren't sustainable;
- ◇ Nutmeggers spend increasingly more time stuck in traffic;
- ◇ Farmland and green spaces are disappearing;
- ◇ Cities are filled with vacant lots;

- ◇ There is dramatic inequity in the quality of life our cities and towns offer;
- ◇ Many of us can't find attainable housing, including young adults who are leaving the state in unprecedented numbers.

Property tax reform will restore prosperity to a robust Connecticut. It will:

- ◇ Promote smart, sustainable and responsible growth;
- ◇ Meet the fiscal needs of our hometowns and the state;
- ◇ Encourage individuals and businesses to invest in Connecticut.

The first step is to recruit state and local leaders who understand and share our vision.

April 5th, 1000 Friends of Connecticut is hosting a Citizen

Activist Summit on the Property Tax and Smart Growth.

We will bring together leaders from across the state to coordinate advocacy for smarter, more sustainable, more responsible growth, and for the meaningful property tax reform that will drive it.

1000 Friends Citizen Activist Summit on the Property Tax and Smart Growth. April 5th, 11 to 4 in Bridgeport.

To register and for transit and driving directions, please email info@1000friends-ct.org or call 860/523-0003 and with your name, email address, phone number, mailing address, and any organizational affiliation. A light lunch will be provided. The event is free, though donations are always welcome.

See you on the 5th!

Inside this issue:

CITIZEN ACTIVIST SUMMIT	1
P & D AND RESPONSIBLE GROWTH	2
PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK	2
DOOR KNOCKERS WANTED	3
EVENTS	4
EVENTS	5
P & D AND RESPONSIBLE GROWTH	6

Make a tax-deductible donation to 1000 Friends at www.1000friends-ct.org/support. Thank you!

Public Health, the Climate, and Smart Growth

National Public Health Week is April 7 to 13.

This year, the American Public Health Association calls on the public health community to make the connection between the way we lead our lives, our impact on the planet, and the planet's impact on our health. Their goal is to highlight the links so Americans can make better choices and lead lifestyles that are healthy for them, their families, their communities and the climate.

Where and how we grow is key to a healthier Connecticut. Where we build our homes, our schools, our workplaces, and our shops and entertaining dictates how many of our errands are walking errands and how much of the time we have to drive.

Traffic idling in congestion dirties our air contributing to allergies, asthma, and other respiratory challenges.

The roads, parking lots, and surfaces compacted in development wash contaminants into our rivers and streams and reduce the amount of water seeping into the ground to regenerate our aquifers. The shrinking supply of clean water in the state is a serious health threat.

Eating locally-grown food reduces the risk of food contamination in transport. In order to have locally-grown food, we must have viable farms, but Connecticut is losing farmland faster than any other state.

Walking and biking are two popular forms of exercise that can double as transportation. Unfortunately, most of us live in places without bike routes or sidewalks. If we do it at all, we drive to the gym to walk and bike, in place. Most don't as our heart disease, obesity and diabetes rates show.

Growing smarter is good for us!

[Read More at www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org)

Brownfield Bills

The Commerce Committee of the General Assembly advanced two bills that would expedite cleaning up contaminated properties in the state.

Bill number 5586 would create a \$75 million fund to remediate environmentally contaminated properties.

Bill number 5589 would create a \$32.5 million loan program within Department of Economic and Community Development to clean up brownfields.

Smart Growth & the Legislature 2008

The approved language establishes responsible growth principles: "use of land and resources to enhance the long-term quality of life for citizens of the state and future generations by (A) protecting open space, farmlands and historic sites, (B) cleaning up and reusing brownfields, (C) encouraging growth and real estate development in areas served by existing infrastructure, (D) promoting development of housing, including affordable housing, in proximity to existing highways and sewers, (E) revitalizing cities, (F) preserving the unique charm of the state, (G) developing pedestrian and other nonmotorized transportation, and (H) building livable, economically strong communities while protecting our natural resources".

Though better than we have currently, this particular set of principles falls short in a couple of areas. First, to be effective the principles must coordinate state bond allocations, state appropriations, and state regulations. The bill is not prescriptive about when and how the principles will be applied. It says only that a Responsible Growth Cabinet will advise the Governor on the application of the principles.

The principles are too muddy and open to interpretation. We need to be good stewards of

green spaces, farms and historic places and we need to put brownfields into productive reuse. But we can't stop there. To restore prosperity to our cities, we need to create more choice in housing types and we need to encourage job creation in areas served by transit. To reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and make our air breathable, we need to strengthen and create neighborhoods where we can walk from home to work to the grocery store without having to pop in-and-out of the car all the time. The Planning and Development Committee failed to consider the more meaningful definition of "responsible growth" that was unanimously approved by the Responsible Growth Task Force.

It also overlooked the accompanying set of principles established by the task force upon which the state can build a measurable framework to gauge our progress toward responsible growth.

In this same bill, the committee approved language that would codify a Responsible Growth Cabinet of agency commissioners and executive directors. The cabinet would meet with developers of large projects receiving more than \$500,000 in state funds. The cabinet would provide comments and recommendations on consistency between the

[Continued on page 6.](#)

5 Things you can do Today to Grow Connecticut Smart!

1. Host a party.
2. Send a candidate a post card.
3. Write a letter to the newspaper, the Governor or your representatives.
4. Post on a blog.
5. Become a Friend at www.1000friends-ct.org

Volunteer

It's spring, a great time for a stroll. Join us in your neighborhood a few hours a month.

We'll knock on doors building the grassroots network for smart growth!

Want to know more?

Ask Steve:

swbeck@1000friends-ct.org

Smart Growth and a New Kind of Politics

Publically financed elections are in place for the 2008 legislative races.

House candidates need to raise 150 small donations from their districts to qualify for public financing. Senate candidates need to raise 300 small donations from their districts to qualify. A list of participating candidates is available at the site of the State Elections Enforcement Commission:

www.ct.gov/seec/cwp/view.asp?a=2861&Q=401806&PM=1

Is the candidate who wants your \$5-to-\$100 gift going to be a smart growth champion?

Ask for their pledge. Pledge forms are online at www.1000friends-ct.org.

Let's make 2008 the Year of the Smart Growth Champion!!

CCBA Dinner

**Central Connecticut Bicycle Alliance
2008 Annual Dinner and Awards**

Keynote: Representative Thomas Kehoe

April 9th; 6 to 9 PM

Adam's Mill Restaurant, 165 Adams Street, Manchester

Buffet Dinner, Cash Bar

\$45 per person

Information at: ccba@wecyclect.org

Growing Connecticut Smart requires a vision for our future, and the investments, policies and programs to reinforce that vision.

Our vision is robust cities with compact, walkable, transit-accessible communities, viable agricultural lands, and a healthy natural environment.

Oil & Water Adapting to Scarcity

Regional Plan Association's 18th Annual Regional Assembly

April 18th, Waldorf Astoria, New York City

8 to 2:30 PM

Examine climate change and two critical resources.

How do we effectively adapt to the finite nature of water and oil while maintaining the region's economic competitiveness?

Individual tickets: \$185, for more information, call: 212/253-2727 ex. 324

Connecticut Convention Center

**100 Columbus Boulevard,
Hartford**

**Connecticut's Premier Showcase
of Eco-Friendly products and
services to help create a greener
future.**

**Connecticut Living
Green Expo**

March 28 to 30.

Big Boxes Small Towns

The Canton Economic Development Agency presents a forum on the impact of big box stores on small communities

April 15th; 5:30 PM

Community Center, 40 Dyer Ave., Canton

Featuring: Ron Van Winkle, Economist and Director of Community Services, West Hartford & Phil Langdon, Senior Editor, New Urban News

RSVP to: araftery@intrex.net

PILOTS and Planning and Development

The Planning and Development Committee voted favorably for a number of bills that would obligate the state to reimburse municipalities for certain property tax exempt properties.

The bills essentially pit the lobbying efforts of towns with affordable housing against towns with prisons, against towns or cities with a tax exempt share of their grand list bigger than 25 percent.

Instead, the state should fully fund all of its payment in lieu of taxes obligations!

These PILOTS bills are waiting for the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee's action.

Join the Campaign to Grow Connecticut Smart

Please contact me, I want to:

- ◇ Write to the Governor and my legislators.
- ◇ Organize a meeting with my local land use board members.
- ◇ Attend a meeting with leaders in my area.
- ◇ Write a letter to the editor.
- ◇ Testify at a public hearing.
- ◇ Take part in a Lobby Day.
- ◇ Involve my organization.
- ◇ Make a \$_____ pledge of support.
- ◇ Volunteer with 1000 FRIENDS.

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Send to: 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut
PO Box 1988
Hartford, CT 06144-1988
860/523-0003
info@1000friends-ct.org

SMART GROWTH & The LEGISLATURE 2008

Continued from page 3

Proposed development and responsible growth principles. The bill states that the actions of the cabinet aren't subject to appeal. They're strictly informative. They are not decisive. It sounds like the committee wants to require the state's top administrators to chat with developers about projects with potentially substantial impacts. Instead, the cabinet should work with developers, regional and municipal officials and stakeholders to break down barriers standing in the way of smart development and to mitigate or redirect potentially detrimental aspects of proposed projects that aren't smart.

The bill has tremendously confusing language saying planning and zoning should be consistent, that subdivision regulations and the local plans should be consistent, and that inland wetland decisions and local plans should be consistent. It goes on to say consistency is desirable unless the legislative body (Board of Selectmen/Town Meeting, etc.) approves inconsistency.

It also says determinations of consistency made by planning and zoning commissions or planning commissions can't be appealed. What is the intention here? If a zoning variance is proposed to support a development that is inconsistent with the adopted plan of the municipality, the region and the state, would the planning commission (generally an appointed body, not an elected one) have more authority than town meeting voters? By the same token, would the process by which Blue Back Square was approved in successive referenda be invalid?

Doesn't the following make more sense?

Developments that comply with zoning should be expeditiously permitted. Zoning should be consistent with local plans. Local plans should be consistent with regional plans. Regional plans should be consistent with the state plan. State spending and regulations should be consistent with the state plan. And the state plan should be consistent with the smart growth definition and principles adopted by the Responsible Growth Task Force. The state should provide data and mapping capability so that all plans are built on the most detailed and accurate information. And the state should provide model ordinances so that the best thinking in land use is available to even the smallest or least well-off municipalities. If, and when, variances are required, the process for granting or questioning them should be transparent and democratic.

The bill initially required projects using state funds to allocate two percent of the project budget to advancing nonmotorized or pedestrian transportation. The language approved by the committee is less specific and now says project applicants will allocate an "amount sufficient for developing pedestrian or nonmotorized transportation improvements". The Secretary of OPM may waive the requirement.

A section of the bill to fund the regional incentive grant program was stripped. 1000 Friends of Connecticut supports a \$15 million annual allocation to encourage municipalities to work together.

New Partners' Workshops Online

The Local Government Commission released the powerpoint presentations of its 7th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference.

The Conference, held in Washington, DC in early February, featured 300 speakers. The presentations are available at www.smartgrowth.org/newpartners/NPSG2008.asp.

Audio files can be ordered at www.hungrymindrecordings.com.

The 8th Annual Conference will be January 22–24, 2009 in Albuquerque, NM.



1 0 0 0 F R I E N D S O F C O N N E C T I C U T

PO Box 1988
484 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06144-1988

Phone: 860 523 0003
E-mail:
info@1000friends-ct.org

We can rebalance our state/local tax structure to encourage development and sustainable land use!

We can link jobs, housing and transit and stop destructive sprawl!

We can reward cities and towns for working together and end the counter-productive competition for grand list growth!

We can, with **your help!** Join the Campaign to Grow Connecticut Smart.

<http://www.1000friends-ct.org/events/2007conference/JoinCampaign.pdf>

Save Saturday, April 5th!

1000 FRIENDS is
hosting its Inaugural
Citizen Activist
Summit on Smart
Growth and the
Property Tax

We're on the Web!
www.1000friends-ct.org

11 to 4 PM
April 5, 2008

Call for details:
860 523 0003