

House Republican Press Release

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Reps. Klarides, Cafero Announces Zeoli Appointment



HARTFORD- First Selectman James Zeoli of Orange Will Serve on New Farmland Preservation Board

Deputy House Republican Leader Themis Klarides (R-Derby) and House Republican Leader Lawrence F. Cafero, Jr. (R-Norwalk) announced that First Selectman James Zeoli of Orange has been named to serve as a member of a new state Farmland Preservation Advisory Board.

Rep. Cafero made the two-year appointment of Zeoli to the board on the recommendation of Rep. Klarides.

Zeoli, a farmer and graduate of the University of Connecticut school of Agriculture, will advise the state Department of Agriculture on its purchase of developments right program and other efforts to preserve Connecticut agricultural lands.

Rep. Klarides said, "It is a pleasure to announce that Jim Zeoli will be bringing his skills, talents and dedication to this state farmland preservation board. I know the state will benefit from his service on this council."

Rep. Cafero said, "As a farmer, civic leader and elected official, Jim Zeoli is able to bring real-life experience to this state advisory board. I hope that his service on this board will be of great value to our state and its citizens."

Reps. Klarides and Cafero noted the state legislature created the new farmland board this year in a continuing effort to slow the loss of farmland in Connecticut and to preserve 20 percent of the state's land area as open space.

"I am truly humbled by the Representatives that put their confidence in me to fill this appointment," said Zeoli. "Anyone who knows me understands that this is an area that is important to me. It is vital to Connecticut to preserve our farmland and keep it producing! What the state invests in the short run will benefit all of our residents in the long run. I will do my best as an active member of this board."

Jim Zeoli was educated in the Orange School System, Fairfield College Preparatory School and the University of Connecticut School of Agriculture. He was introduced to farming in his early years by Jim Ewen and after graduation from the University of Connecticut leased Meadowbrook farm from the Ewen family. He is experienced as a businessman, a volunteer, a problem solver, an innovator and a leader.

The state's purchase of development rights or Farmland Preservation Program is its primary farmland preservation tool. Farmers may apply to the program through the state Department of Agriculture, which evaluates applications according to criteria set in state regulation. Preserving farmland that contains a high percentage of prime farmland soils in established farm communities is the program's primary goal.

Once established, the new farmland advisory board must meet publicly with the state agriculture commissioner, Philip Prelli, and the staff of the development rights purchase program to review ongoing program activities.

The board also must evaluate the purchase of development rights transaction process, including (a) methods for streamlining the process and appropriate staffing and funding levels, for increased participation by municipalities and farmers, of planning for future acquisitions and identifying prime land for preservation and (b) outreach strategies that program staff must conduct to the state-wide farming community, targeted towards attracting more quality applications.

The 12-member advisory board consists of:

1. a University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension Service representative appointed by the governor;
2. a Connecticut Farm Bureau representative, who may be an owner and operator of a Connecticut farm, appointed by the governor;
3. five Connecticut farm owners and operators appointed by the governor, Senate president pro tempore, the House speaker, the Senate majority leader, and House majority leader;
4. a Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station representative appointed by the Senate minority leader;
5. a Connecticut Conference of Municipalities representative appointed by the House minority leader;
6. a representative of an organization whose mission includes farmland preservation, who may be an owner and operator of a Connecticut farm, appointed by the Senate president pro tempore;
7. a representative of an organization whose mission includes food security, appointed by the House speaker; and
8. a representative of a financial lending organization whose clients include Connecticut farm owners and operators, appointed by the governor.

The board members must select a chairperson from those members who own and operate Connecticut farms.

The members, other than the Farm Bureau representative and the five farm owners and operators (who are appointed for three years), are initially appointed to two-year terms. Once the initial terms expire, members are appointed for three years. Members serve without compensation.