

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Miller: Land Use Board Members with Potential Conflicts Should Have To Disclose Them



Will Re-introduce Measure Requiring Certain Land Use Board Members to File Disclosure Statements with Town Attorneys

Developers, building contractors and real estate brokers who serve on local land use boards and could face accusations of conflict of interest when considering some applications that come before them should be required to file statements with municipal attorneys identifying their business partners as well as local properties owned by themselves, their associates, and their family members, state Representative Lawrence G. Miller said today.

Representative Miller, R-122nd District, offered an amendment to the ethics bill that passed during the June 11th special legislative session that would have required that land use board members whose professions could leave them open to conflict of interest charges file the information with their municipal government attorneys. The information would not be subject to disclosure under the state's Freedom of Information Act but could be produced if the commissioner who filed the document agreed to make it public. The majority Democrats in the state House of Representatives blocked consideration of the measure on a procedural technicality.

Representative Miller today vowed to re-introduce the proposal during the 2009 legislative session.

“Land values in Connecticut are among the highest in the country. The phenomenon is especially common in Fairfield County municipalities, where a zone change that allows land uses that were prohibited under earlier zoning regulations can result in property values increasing dramatically – sometimes even tripling and quadrupling,” Representative Miller said. “If the membership of a land use board in a Fairfield County town includes developers, building contractors or real estate brokers, it is not uncommon for accusations of conflict of interest to be leveled against such members regarding pending applications involving controversial projects.”

“Those kinds of charges were made against a land use board member in Stratford a few years ago – even though he recused himself from consideration of the project. Although I'm sure there was no conflict or impropriety involved, any suspicions raised about his motives could have been dispelled had my proposal been on the books at the time. The commissioner who was subjected to the allegations simply could have asked Stratford's town attorney to produce the information that had been filed by the board member and

that would have put an end to the acrimony – assuming no relative or business associate of the commissioner stood to gain if the application was approved.”

“If the extremely partisan liberal Democrats who control the state House and Senate had allowed my proposal to be brought to the floor, and it had received the full debate it deserved, many of their members might have crossed party lines to support my amendment and it might have taken effect later this year,” Representative Miller said. “It is common sense legislation that citizens and land use board members across our state would welcome. It would make it easier for local land use boards to focus discussion of controversial land use proposals coming before them on the pros and cons of the project – rather than letting unfounded allegations and angry accusations dominate the decision-making process.”