

# FIRST SELECTMAN COLUMN

02/16/2023 ISSUE DATE

Currently, the Connecticut General Assembly session in Hartford is occurring and will be ongoing until June. There are new proposed House and Senate bills galore, but only a few will see the light of day. Similar to two years ago, the most significant proposed bills for Sherman and other smaller Connecticut towns involve zoning and housing. There are many well-meaning state legislators who are proposing housing and zoning bills that make a great deal of sense to them, but could dramatically change life here in Sherman. Here are a couple that concern me:

## **House Bill 6593: An Act Concerning Housing Authority Jurisdiction.**

The Bill would allow for any housing authority to adopt an "expanded area of operation" outside of their own municipality without first requiring the express consent and municipal governing body approval of the other municipality where the authority wants to expand its operations. Meaning, any outside housing authority can operate in any other town outside of their own. This is a total attack on local municipal rights (and local zoning authority) by not requiring the permission of the other municipality.

## **Senate Bill 915: An Act Concerning the Granting of Variances by Zoning Boards of Appeals**

This bill threatens to override local Planning and Zoning Commission under very vague state mandated thresholds of "for the greater good."

There are several other proposed bills (it's difficult to keep up) in a moving target of ideas mostly centered on the idea that the state knows better than the Town when it comes to housing and zoning. In my opinion it's difficult and not at all practical to expect smaller Connecticut municipalities, especially those without city water and sewage, to solve the state's perceived need for more affordable housing. While some may disagree with me, I say let us Towns decide on our own terms as to how we can best deal with housing issues.

On a related subject, the Sherman Planning and Zoning Commission has put together a final draft of the Plan of Conservation and Development document. This is something that the State requires we do every ten years. The document is not jurisdictional, but rather, serves as a guide as to the direction of the Town's future. The document is fueled largely by the survey that was sent out last year on the topic of Town planning. I have read the final draft a few times now and with the exception of a couple of small things, I think it's terrific. Kudos to those who worked on it. (I'll name and thank them after it is approved and accepted.) The document will be posted on the Town website and anyone can comment. The comment period is ongoing until April 6. That's the date of the "public hearing" where you can also comment in person on it. I have already sent in my remarks and observations.

I'd like to take this time to thank all of the individuals who volunteer to serve on our land use commission/boards -- Planning and Zoning, Inland/Wetlands, and Zoning Board of Appeals. These are profoundly important board/commissions, and the contribution that these great people who serve on them make for Sherman is tremendously significant. Land use regulations and the Town planning decisions that go along with them are, historically, critically important and have shaped Sherman into the amazing place that it is. Enjoy this gorgeous spring-like weather!



DON LOWE

TOWN OF SHERMAN