

House Republican Press Release

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Committees.....or Caramoor ??



By State Representative John J. Ryan

Despite the most humid conditions possible following steady afternoon showers, it was an exciting early evening at Caramoor on Sunday, for a sold-out all-Mozart concert. Robert Abbado was especially workmanlike in command of the fine forces of the Orchestra of St. Luke's, but the evening's solo performers, Gil Shaham, and Paul Neubauer were in exceptional form. Shaham, long a NYC-area favorite, gave a poised but enthusiastic rendering of the Mozart 2nd Violin Concerto, but when teamed with veteran violist Neubauer in the evening's finale, the well-loved Senoia Concerto ante in E-flat major, put on an energetic and enthusiastic show worthy of Perlman and Zukerman.

And....what's that?? (The worthy editor is reminding me that this week's column is supposedly about the matters taken up by the Planning & Development Committee this session, and what transpired with those bills....Oh well, back to "government"!)

Now that the General Assembly has entered its "almost hibernating" mode, we thought this might be a good time to devote several columns to looking at the legislative world from several different angles, one being the committee process. We will take a brief look at what the legislative committees do, how they work, and in passing, note how some of the major topics this year were treated in committee, and let's commence with the Planning & Development Committee, of which I have been a member for more than a decade, and this year's 2 big issues, eminent domain, and affordable housing.

First, some refresher course background. As a regular column reader, you know that bills become law through a lengthy process; there is a bill filing deadline every year, every proposed bill from a legislator that makes the filing deadline goes into a hopper, and gets referred to the appropriate committee of cognizance [meaning the committee that deals with the particular topic] and after each committee begins meeting, it chooses to "raise" the bills the committee wants to take up and schedule for public hearings [we won't even get into "committee bills" vs. individual legislator bills]. There are more than two dozen legislative committees, nearly every legislator has several, hopefully there might be some connection to your "real-world experience" and a committee assignment (as a former Corporation Counsel for the City of Norwalk, and an attorney with real estate and zoning law experience, I am glad to serve on this committee !) and note that you can look up each committee and its members, agendas and minutes on-line at www.cga.ct.gov!

You also know, regular reader, that we have a bi-cameral committee process [meaning that members from both the Senate and House serve on committees, as opposed to completely separate processes, as in Congress], and that each committee has a definite calendar by which it must move its business along through the various stages, and then finally close up shop on the infamous JF deadline. As an astute observer, you can guess that the most important business gets done as the deadline approaches and with the 2 "big topics" this year in P&D; that was again the case.

A big issue, what we should do on the eminent domain topic in the aftermath of the *Kelo* case has been a topic in this space before, and you might be familiar with my viewpoint that the General Assembly was remiss in not acting last year. So in this year's session, our P&D Committee took up the issue from the start, worked off drafts of previous legislation unacted upon in the past, held public hearings, garnered a great deal of comment and input, and as I reported in this column on March 30, we unanimously voted to the floor what we thought was a comprehensive, tough and fair bill, SB 1054 (you can look up the bill at the CGA website, and see the detailed summary by OLR of this extensive bill by clicking on 'Bill analysis for File Copy 387'). The good news is that [unlike prior years] this major bill was actually called for a vote in the Senate; the bad news is that it was amended, into a less hard-hitting version than myself and most Republicans would have wished [you can look at OLR's summary of the final version as it became law as PA 07-207 at OLR's "Major Act Summary".] So an eminent domain bill has finally been passed, but I wish the version that P&D had labored over was the final result!

And our other big topic, affordable housing? Unfortunately, I have predicted in the past [all too correctly] that nothing will be done, despite campaign rhetoric, to repeal the horrific provision in our laws, 8-30g, the 'zoning law override' for affordable housing projects. This year, it was emphasized by many that we needed to use a "new approach" to this topic, namely a "carrot approach" to incentivize the creation of affordable housing, rather than the "stick approach" of that mean, old 8-30g ! So P&D was flooded with pro-housing development incentive plans [e.g. towns should do affordable housing because we will give you perks and flexibility to do it!] and therefore we had a batch of bills after many long hearings, the best of publicized being the Governor's "Responsible Growth" Bill, # 7090, the "1000 Friends" bill SB 1215, the "Home Connecticut" bill HB 1057. (Since space does not permit us to even quickly outline these complex bills, you've got it; you can look each one up on line if you wish!). Acting with unusual flexibility, our P&D committee voted out each of these bills [and others!] on the theory that it's affordable housing potential solutions you want; we'll give you menu of them to choose from!

So experienced reader, are you going to guess that not one of these bills as P&D voted was called for a vote in either the House or Senate? You've got it, more nothing. But in the interests of over-informing you, a very watered-down version (task forces and studies) the Governor's Responsible Growth bill did get passed as PA 07-239 and some parts of Home Connecticut (with minimal funding) made into an implementer bill. I do

not suggest that you will see units going up soon! Next column, a look at a different committee!

As always please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative Office Building, and Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at John.Ryan@housegop.ct.gov or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.