



Rockingham Planning Commission

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April 7, 2004

Michael O'Neil, Chairman
Executive Departments and Administration
New Hampshire House of Representatives
Room 100, State House
Concord, NH 03301

RE: SB 534 – relative to the reorganization of certain functions and duties of state agencies

Dear Representative O'Neil and Members of the ED&A Committee:

I am not able to attend the hearing for this Bill scheduled for this morning but wanted to pass along comments we have concerning two provisions of the bill – the reassignment of the NH Coastal Program and New Hampshire Estuaries Program to the Department of Environmental Services.

Section 35 of the Bill would move all aspects of the Coastal and Estuaries Program from the Office of Energy and Planning to the Department of Environmental Services. Although we find nothing inherently wrong with this change, we are concerned about possible impact this shift may have on the existing program priorities and the support they presently provide to communities and regional planning commissions, including ours, in the Seacoast area. As a resident of Hampton, you are no doubt aware that the eighteen communities within the Coastal Program rely on it heavily to augment local funding for a variety of planning, growth management and water quality based efforts. For example, over the past two years, all but two of our coastal communities have received Coastal Zone funds through our technical assistance program to fund planning and natural resource protection projects. Similarly, the New Hampshire Estuaries program supports a variety of collaborative efforts in the Seacoast area helping communities and state agencies work together to improve the water quality and ecological health of the Great Bay.

It can be anticipated that NHDES may have different priorities and concepts regarding the implementation of these programs – including, no doubt, some improvements in them. We are not opposed to change when it will mean improved efficiency or create other benefits. But we do want you to understand that these programs are highly valued and important to Seacoast communities as they are today. If the move will mean an eventual change in program polices such that local support and focus of these programs is diminished, then it will prove detrimental to the Seacoast region. For the Estuaries Program in particular, it is required under National Estuaries Program rules, that program policy remains the prerogative of the Estuaries Management Committee.

We hope that if this bill moves forward there can be expression of support for the existing programs and the continuation of their support for local planning and conservation efforts. I thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Cliff Sinnott
Executive Director

cc: RPC Commissioners; Coastal Community Planning Boards; Conservation Commissions
Mary Ann Manoogian, Director, NHOEP
Michael P. Nolin, Commissioner, NHDES

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