

June 17, 2013

RE: A2586/S1534

Dear Assembly Budget Committee Members:

Hoboken is home to Stevens Institute of Technology, a superb engineering institution that we are very proud to have located in the City of Hoboken. The history of Hoboken is inextricably intertwined with the history of the Stevens family and the Stevens Institute of Technology.

It is, however, important to remember that cities like Hoboken that house great educational institutions are towns that have colleges within them, not college towns. While the interests of the university are certainly important to our City, they are not always consistent with the interests of the City and the vast majority of its residents.

The City of Hoboken has a cooperative relationship with Stevens Institute of Technology and has always given significant weight to its needs. However, when the interests of Stevens are not consistent with the needs of our community as a whole, it is the community as a whole that we as elected officials are responsible to serve.

The proposed legislation would exempt private colleges like Stevens from local zoning laws, not only with regard to their own campuses, but with respect to all property they own or later acquire an interest in.

It would allow them to build anything they wish, changing the character of our City in any way they choose. They would not be limited to classrooms and student housing. Instead, they could build large-scale residential and commercial projects to raise money for their private institutions. These decisions would be made by individuals with no public accountability whatsoever and whose sole fiduciary responsibility is to their institutions, not to the communities that will be transformed by their choices.

I do not believe that the current leadership of Stevens would abuse this authority if it were given to them, but that is not the point. All that matters is that they could. For government to hand over decision-making authority on important public issues to private entities based on the hope that they will act responsibly is completely and totally irresponsible.

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

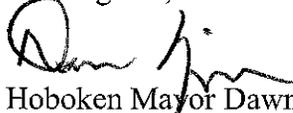
Some elected officials might prefer to avoid responsibility for making unpopular decisions by saying “I have no power to stop this, so it is not my fault.” As elected officials, legislating our own copout is the ultimate copout.

It is our job to make the right decisions for our entire communities and to explain to our residents as well as to the educational institutions like Stevens that it is our responsibility to support why we have made those decisions. We have no right as elected officials to delegate that decision-making to others, and that is what this legislation irresponsibly does.

I am extremely disappointed that this legislation has moved forward without coordination with the elected officials of the municipalities that are affected. Instead, there appears to have been coordination only with the educational institutions that have lobbied for this drastic and unprecedented delegation of government authority to their privately-held unaccountable institutions.

The potential for “unanticipated consequences” in this legislation is so blatantly obvious that a strong argument could be made that they are not unintended at all. I urge you to rethink this extraordinarily ill-advised piece of legislation and vote no.

Best regards,



Hoboken Mayor Dawn Zimmer

CC: The Honorable Janice S. Mironov, Mayor, East Windsor
The Honorable Robert H. Conley, Mayor, Madison Borough
The Honorable Ann Dassing, Mayor, Caldwell Borough
The Honorable Maria DiGiovanni, Mayor, Hackettstown
The Honorable Liz Lempert, Mayor, Princeton
The Honorable Mayor-Elect, Steven Fulop, Jersey City
The Honorable James S. Kownacki, Mayor, Lawrence Township (Mercer)
The Honorable Raymond J. McCarthy, Mayor, Bloomfield Township
The Honorable Alex Torpey, Village President, Township of South Orange Village
The Honorable Janet W. Tucci, Mayor, West Long Branch Borough

Legislation Sponsors

Assemblywoman Celeste M. Riley
Assemblyman Thomas P. Giblin,
Assemblyman Patrick J. Diegnan, Jr.
Assemblyman Gordon M. Johnson
Assemblyman Sean T. Kean
Assemblyman Declan J. O'Scanlon, Jr.
Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter
Assemblyman Robert D. Clifton
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Senator Paul A. Sarlo
Senator Robert W. Singer