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Bulldozing the "Park" City

Congressman Chris Shays, a certified "green" Republican says there is more than enough open space in the Park City. What is required, he argues, is new corporate office development--even if it means chewing up some of Bridgeport's unique natural resources.

Those surprising comments came as Shays provided video testimony on the \$56 million Seaview Avenue Corridor project that envisions a new four-lane highway for trucks and expected commuters to the proposed Lake Success Business Park. Over the next decade, a high-end corporate park is slated for development on the old **Remington Arms** property. DuPont is currently cleaning up old munitions that were dumped there.

Some Bridgeport residents are not eager for a new business park, however. The site has more than 400 acres of virgin **woods** that provide homes to deer, ducks and countless other wildlife. A small band of activists aided by the Connecticut Audubon Society has urged the city to try to save the 422-acre former dumpsite as a nature preserve. Instead, Bridgeport's political and economic elite has forged ahead with plans for the new corporate park; the city has the cooperation of DuPont, the owner of **Remington Woods**.

Shays, who has butted heads with the coal industry over strip mining, told a public hearing at Harding High School, "We have open spaces. What we don't have is enough economic development."

The Seaview Avenue project has been on the drawing board for over a decade as a means of connecting the old industrial zones on Bridgeport's east side to I-95. Beside the Lake Success concept, city planners hope that a new highway will lead to new industrial development along the corridor's two-mile strip.

Today, much of the east side looks like an industrial ghost town as evidenced by General Electric's empty Boston Avenue complex.

"If you look at Bridgeport, we don't have any other options. We are landlocked. Bridgeport needs an economic engine," says Sen. Ernie Newton.

So far, the city of Bridgeport has only \$3 million to craft a design for the new superhighway over the next two years. Any construction is at least five years away if federal funding can be secured.

"Bridgeport just tries to get ahead by trashing its treasures," laments Susan Harris of Friends of **Remington Woods**. Harris says the proposed highway might entice GE into redeveloping its Boston Avenue site which might then lead to 50,000 cars clogging the streets of Bridgeport's east side.

"Education cannot be paid for without economic development dollars," countered Kathy Sargent of the Bridgeport Chamber of Commerce. "We need to continue to create an environment that is friendly to business."

State Sen. Bill Finch, who leads the Bridgeport Economic Development Corporation, cites Lake Success as "an example of smart growth."

Only 20 percent of the Lake Success Park will be cleared for new buildings and high-tech manufacturing. Plans call for an acre-wide buffer along the perimeter and another buffer surrounding existing wetlands.

"We know that this will mean real jobs," said Finch. "We're going to push this through; it will protect the environment."