Government is too expensive. One major cause is the heavy burden of regulation required to protect the public against lousy ideas.

Take the Ponde Place development being proposed for the northwest corner of rural Mansfield -- a place without ponds.

There, Keystone Cos., a limited liability corporation from Avon, has spent the last eight years fighting local opposition to build a 600-bed apartment complex in a town with a glut of off-campus housing. There, co-owners Karl Krapek and Anthony Giorgio were wheeling and dealing with University of Connecticut officials for hook-ups to university water and sewer before they bought the property. There, the company and its consultants have infuriated town citizens with a groundwater-drilling program perceived as disingenuous if not duplicitous. There, an out-of-town corporation chose to name its high-density housing complex after the town's original historic name (Ponde Place), a decision I interpret as identity theft with inaccurate alliteration.

This complex was a bad idea when first proposed in 2004. It became a worse idea in 2005 when UConn pumped the Fenton River dry and thereafter placed itself on water conservation alerts. No longer could the university guarantee an estimated 45,000 gallons per day to a private corporation, even one whose boss is a major donor to the UConn Foundation. The bad-to-worse idea became a terrible idea when massive groundwater withdrawals would be needed from a fractured bedrock aquifer just west of UConn's former toxic chemical waste pits and landfill. Nearby residents and local health officials are rightly concerned that the toxic groundwater plume would be drawn into neighboring drinking water wells, prompting state Sen. Don Williams and Rep. Greg Haddad to sign a letter of support for their cause.

To understand the financial burden this terrible idea has created, here's the chain of communication for three memos on a single day, Nov. 21, 2011. Stripped of their official-speak and mind-numbing technical content, they document the breadth of state offices and employees mandated by law to carefully respond to a private company working against the public interest. The cover memo is to Kimberley Santopietro, executive secretary Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, from Lori Mathieu, chief of the Public Health and the Drinking Water sections of the Department of Public Health, copied to Mark Lewis of the Remediation Division of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, Denise Ruzicka of that agency's Water Resources Division, Robert Miller, Director of the Eastern Highlands Health District, and Keith Nadeau of the Connecticut Water Company, a heavily regulated private water utility.

A second memo sent to Keystone's Anthony Giorgio by Lori Mathieu informs him that their application is incomplete, based on the content of a third memo sent to her and Eric McPhee, supervising environmental analyst in the Public Health section of the DPH by Patricia Bisacky, an environmental analyst within DPH. Patricia's memo is a careful point-by-point review of a lengthy application prepared by Keystone Companies and its consultants, F.A. Hesketh & Associates, Inc., and GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc.

Whew! All this costly analysis to assign a grade of incomplete. What now? Another round?

Not listed in the chain of communication are two local heroes, Alison Hilding and Beverly Sims. Though the facts of this particular case are restricted to Mansfield, their story is shared with countless others across the nation. Instead of resigning themselves to fate, citizen homeowners take the plunge on behalf of everyone. They volunteer months and years of unpaid personal time to slog
through boring reports, educate themselves on technical issues, devote family time to public meetings and rally others to the cause. For years I've been watching their tireless efforts from the sidelines.

I hope that Keystone shelves its plans, considers selling this terrain to a land trust or to Mansfield for open space or, better yet, donates it to compensate for the tax revenue needed to review a project that should have been declared dead on arrival many years ago.