STATE OF CONNECTICUT
COUNCIL ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION
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The Council's mission is to advise and assist the Commissioner of Environmental Protection on local issues concerning conserving and protecting the land, water and other natural resources of the State in order to preserve and enhance quality of life for present and future generations.

JOINT TESTIMONY OF THE
Council on Soil and Water Conservation and
Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts

Environment Committee Public Hearing
February 18, 2009

Opposition to
Section 5 of Governor's Bill Number 6371, LCO 3044 – An Act Concerning Funding for the Department of Environmental Protection

The Council on Soil and Water Conservation (Council) and the Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts (Conservation Districts) *oppose Section 5 of Governor's Bill 6371*, An Act Concerning Funding for the Department of Environmental Protection.

While we appreciate the overwhelming task before you of seeking to resolve Connecticut's budget deficit, ***we oppose section 5 of Governor's Bill 6371 which proposes to divert the land use application fee through the General Fund.*** From the general fund the dollars will become part of a multi-million dollar "general" line item in DEP's budget to have a tiny portion be disseminated back to Connecticut's five Conservation Districts and Council (and Environmental Review Teams). While this is well intended, the Conservation Districts and Council do not feel this is a secure process for maintaining the viability of a primary funding source for their programs on a long-term basis.

The Governor's budget address called for assisting "cities and towns through regionalism, a much discussed concept that must finally be put into action". Connecticut's five Conservation Districts have provided such assistance for over 50 years. Connecticut's Conservation Districts are locally lead, natural resource based organizations with programs that are implemented by staff at the direction of a volunteer local Board of Directors.

Connecticut's Conservation Districts provide timely, value added, unbiased technical and educational services on land use issues to decision makers and land users. Connecticut's Conservation Districts provide land use solutions on very small budgets, by working creatively and fiscally responsibly with a network of conservation entities through a partnership that leverages partners and scores of committed volunteers to protect our natural resources, our water supplies and our soils at the local level.

We urge you to delete Section 5 of Governor's Bill 6371 (over for more information).

Conservation Districts Services provided to Connecticut municipalities include:

- Comprehensive review of development projects;
- Erosion control and stormwater plan review;
- Workshops on natural resource topics;
- Soils and geographic information, including GIS;
- Pond inspections and trouble-shooting;
- Natural resource surveys and inventories;
- Wetland boundary verification;
- Native landscaping, buffer and streambank restoration assistance;
- Channel restoration and design guidance;
- Soil sampling;
- Funding assistance to municipalities and land owners for special projects; and
- Facilitating connections to other natural resources professionals.

Conservation Districts were created following the soil and water problems resulting from the dust bowl. CT Conservation Districts are part of a 50-years' old, nationwide, 3,000 Conservation District system.

History/Original Creation of the Municipal Land Use Application Fee

Funding to the Conservation Districts and Council were line itemed based until 1992. The fee was originally created to replace funds that were eliminated to these organizations in the 1993 State Budget. The creation of this funding source was and is now a primary source of funding.

History/Changes to the Fee

The fee has been increased two times since 1992. The first increase was in 2003 to $20. This increase occurred along with other DEP fees that were uniformly increased across the board. In 2004 legislation was passed increasing the fee to $30, earmarking the additional $10 solely for a flood plain management grant program within DEP. The additional $10 was earmarked to fund a full-time staff person at DEP, needed to administer the program, with the remainder to be used for grants to municipalities, regional planning agencies, council of elected officials or council of governments; ERT, Council and Districts do not receive any portion of the money earmarked for the flood plain management program.

We urge you to delete section 5 of Governor's Bill 6371 and maintain the present funding process of the land use fee going through DEP's Environmental Quality/conservation fund directly to Connecticut's Conservation Districts and Council.

Please contact Suellen Kozey McCuin, Council Executive Director at 860-767-9594 or by email at ct.cswc@att.net

Thank you.