



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
COUNCIL ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION
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Testimony in Support of Committee Bill 6503
AAC Conservation District Funding

Environment Committee Public Hearing
March 7, 2011
11AM

Raised Committee Bill 6503, AN ACT CONCERNING CONSERVATION DISTRICT FUNDING maintains current levels of assistance to municipalities by restoring fee-based funding to Connecticut's Five Conservation Districts and the State Council on Soil and Water Conservation (Environmental Review Teams need to be included).

Presently these entities are funded by a line item in the State Budget under Department of Environmental Protection's Conservation and Development section "Conservation Districts, Council and ERT Land Use Assistance" originally in the amount of \$800,000, but last year reduced to \$400,000. The Governor's Proposed Budget has started the process back to fee-based funding as the line item that these groups rely upon has been placed at \$0.

Connecticut's five Conservation Districts, the Council on Soil and Water Conservation (the Council) and the Environmental Review Teams (ERT) propose that they receive (and share) \$30 of the \$60 land use application fee collected pursuant to Section 22a-27j (that traditionally funded these entities).

3 Suggested Modifications to House Bill 6503 –

- 1. Environmental Review Teams need to be included in the language of this bill as one who would also receive funding through this fee-based mechanism, as they have traditionally been part of this conservation partnership and a recipient of this funding-mechanism;**
- 2. We are asking to receive only \$30 of the \$60 land-use fee, whereas, the language in this bill proposes designating the entire \$60 fee;**
- 3. HB 6503 refers to 8 county conservation districts - there are only 5 Conservation Districts (they were reduced from 8 county districts in 2002).**

History

The land use application fee, established pursuant to Public Act No. 92-235 and collected pursuant to Section 22a-27j, was passed by the legislature specifically to fund Conservation Districts, the Council and the ERT after these entities lost state funding.

In 2009, the land use application fee was swept into the General Fund (as were the majority of other "off-line" fees) in an attempt to balance the State Budget. As a result Conservation Districts, the Council and

ERT fought to secure a line item in the budget. A line item of \$800,000 was created to off-set the loss of fee-based funds they had traditionally received. In 2010, the \$800,000 line item was decreased by a rescission by the Governor, and further by the Deficit Mitigation Plan. Finally in the FY'11 budget adjustments, the line item was reduced to \$400,000.

Why Restore the Fee to Fund Conservation Districts, the Council and ERT ?

Public Act No. 92-235 was passed by the legislature to place the burden of funding technical services on the users; the land-use applicants looking to make changes to the landscape at the municipal level. In this way, an active development cycle produces more funds to provide more technical services to municipalities; the fee would produce funding that is essentially consumption-based.

Legislative Finding and Policy of the State

Pursuant to C.G.S. 22a-326, "The General Assembly finds that soil erosion on land being developed is a serious problem in Connecticut, that sediment is a source of pollution, that rapid changes in land use from agricultural and rural to nonagricultural and urban and the construction of residential, industrial and commercial development and land-disturbing activities associated with development have accelerated soil erosion and sediment deposition resulting in water pollution and damage to residential, agricultural, industrial and recreational land uses, to fish and wildlife and to other resources. It is, therefore, declared to be the policy of the state to strengthen and extend its erosion and sediment control activities and programs and to establish and implement, through the Council on Soil and Water Conservation, soil and water conservation districts, the municipalities and the Commissioner of Environmental Protection, a state-wide coordinated erosion and sediment control program which shall reduce the danger from storm water runoff, minimize nonpoint sediment pollution from land being developed and conserve and protect the land, water, air and other environmental resources of the state."

Municipal Impact

Municipalities are frequently called upon to make complex decisions about land use, development or conservation that can dramatically affect Connecticut's natural resources, landscape and quality of life. Many municipalities lack high-level technical expertise from in-house staff due to budgetary constraints. The mission of the Conservation Districts, the Council and ERT (per state statute) is to provide objective technical assistance to municipalities seeking to make well-informed decisions about land use. These services are provided at no cost or very low cost to municipalities.

The Conservation Districts, the Council, and the ERT have the support of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and numerous other partners to reinstate fee-based funding as their primary funding source.

We urge you to pass HB 6503 and include our proposed modifications. *Thank you.*

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