



Connecticut Chapter
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Martin Mador, Legislative Chair

Government Administrations and Election Committee

March 14, 2016

Testimony In Support of

SJR -36 Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of the State to Protect Certain Property Held or Controlled by the State for Conservation, Recreation, Open Space or Agricultural Purposes

I am Martin Mador, 130 Highland Ave., Hamden, CT 06518. I am the volunteer Legislative Chair for the Connecticut Chapter of the Sierra Club. I hold a Masters of Environmental Management degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

Many of us remember the contentious times five years ago when we tried, without success, to make the point that the 17 acres in Haddam just a few yards west of the Connecticut River, had significant open space value. The 2011 annual conveyance bill proposing transfer to a private developer (HB 1196) was sorely deficient in describing the property and its value. The bill failed to provide sufficient detail to help decide whether the transfer was in the public interest, which is the only criterion which matters. Though there was very strong local interest, the only hearing was in Hartford in a session crowded with not only a dozen other conveyances in the same bill, but many other bills.

Remarkably, since 1988, **never** has a conveyance bill which included DEEP or other open space properties either started in the Environment Committee or been sent there for a vote. So the committee best prepared to consider the value of a proposed transfer of open space land never had a chance to do so. Not once.

The public must have confidence that a proposed transfer has been thoroughly vetted, and is in the public interest. A conveyance bill or special act must contain everything necessary to do that. The bill must include a finding that the transfer is in the public interest, and must detail the reasons why.

The proposed constitutional amendment will certainly help protect these lands. It must be clear that it applies to all lands of open space or environmental value.

The public hearing should be a legislative process. An agency may have technical custody of a parcel, but have no interest whatsoever in its value, and lack the resources to properly conduct a hearing.

But we must have more, and we can do this immediately.

The Joint Rules currently only provide:

Any bill favorably reported by another committee that authorizes the conveyance of real property, or any interest therein, by the state, or any resolution favorably reported by another committee that proposes a constitutional amendment shall be referred to the committee on Government Administration and Elections.

We cannot have the protections we seek without a change to the Joint Rules. We must provide that a bill proposing conveyance of a property in the custody of DEEP, Dept. of Agriculture, or otherwise valued for open space or environmental significance, must originate in the Environment Committee. Such a conveyance bill may propose transfer of a single parcel. The bill must provide a full, complete, robust, comprehensive description of the parcel. A public hearing must be held in the district where the parcel is located.

These are protections we can implement immediately. They will complement a constitutional amendment to follow later.