



Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc.

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TESTIMONY TO THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING on Wednesday, February 15, 2017

The Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc. (CACIWC) is pleased to submit testimony in support of the following bill:
Proposed H.B. No. 6926 AN ACT PERMITTING MUNICIPALITIES TO IMPOSE A BUYER'S FEE ON THE CONVEYANCE OF REAL PROPERTY.

CACIWC has long supported efforts to permanently preserve important habitats in Connecticut, especially those lands of high conservation value. Our member conservation commissions endeavor to identify, index, and preserve critical habitats within their municipalities. Both forested and native grassland open space parcels have always ranked high among the various types of critical habitats that have been a focus of Connecticut conservation commission preservation efforts. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, many important parcels have become more fragmented over time. This trend has resulted in fewer large regional forest parcels and greenways, which decreases their value as sustaining habitats for various wildlife species. Many Connecticut year-round resident and migratory birds and other species are adversely impacted by the loss of both of these unique parcels.

These lost and fragmented habitat areas have not only contributed to declining populations of birds and other wildlife species, but the loss of these areas can adversely affect the quality of our critical streams, rivers, ponds, lakes and groundwater supplies. The need to protect all habitats that serve as important water recharge zones has been emphasized during the severe drought conditions that have been identified in Connecticut and throughout the region. Thus, the importance of maintaining these habitats in the face of regional droughts and global climate change should not be underestimated.

Efforts to preserve these lands also improve the natural beauty and character of our local municipalities. Preserved open space tracts enhance the property values of adjacent residential areas. These lands also provide opportunities for their residents to enjoy outdoor recreational opportunities within their own communities.

Protection of these important local habitats is a major goal of our member municipal conservation commissions and aided by the efforts of municipal inland wetlands commissions. Conservation commissions, in cooperation with local land trusts, have been increasingly challenged in seeking funding sources to preserve these critical habitats.

Our member conservation commissions are authorized under CGS Sec. 7-131a, et al., as amended, to "conduct research into the utilization and possible utilization of land areas of the municipality and may coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies for similar purposes." These commissions are further authorized to inventory natural resources, and formulate watershed management and drought management plans, keep and index of all open space area, and acquire land in the name of the municipality, and make recommendations regarding land use to local planning and zoning commissions and other agencies.

Many of our member commissions have previously relied on state open space grant programs for funding, but are seeing the size of these programs decrease in the face of increasing state budget deficits. Other sources of funding such as bonding or increasing property tax mill rates are facing increasing opposition in conjunction with other increasing challenges to municipal budgets. These funding challenges make it even more difficult to local conservation commissions to carry out their legislative mandates and support their local Plans of Conservation and Development.

By permitting municipalities a mechanism to impose a conveyance fee on certain real property sales, Proposed H.B. 6926 will provide an additional source of funding to support the purchase, preservation, and stewardship of these important habitats. CACIWC also supports the bill's mechanism to maintain the resulting funds in a separate local account. This will ensure that these funds are both protected from use in competing projects, while maintaining local control over the selection of parcels targeted for preservation efforts.

CACIWC has supported Audubon Connecticut's "Project Green Space" initiative and is also aware that a number of statewide organizations are also supporting efforts to provide additional funding for open space preservation. These joint efforts provide further evidence of the widespread recognition of the critical need to preserve these important habitats together with the increasing concern over decreasing sources of other funding.

CACIWC is pleased to also lend its support to the efforts of the CGA Planning and Development Committee to provide an additional funding mechanism with Proposed H.B. 6926 to help permanently preserve the varied and important land that make up our state. In doing so, you not only protect important habitats, but help preserve the character of local municipalities and the State of Connecticut.

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Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc.
(CACIWC)

CACIWC is a non-profit organization working to protect Connecticut's wetlands, watercourses, and other natural resources through support and education of the 2000+ volunteers and staff that carry out the responsibilities of Connecticut's Conservation Commissions and Inland Wetlands Commissions. CACIWC, representing its member commissions, works with municipalities and environmental groups to promote public support for the judicious management and conservation of Connecticut's natural resources. For additional information contact Alan J. Siniscalchi, President at board@caciwc.org or visit www.caciwc.org.