

Charles L. Toal
19 Ward Ave.
Groton, CT 06340

February 14, 2017

Re: In Support of H.B. No. 6926

Dear Chairman Lemar, Cassano, Logan and Members of the Planning & Development Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 6926, An Act Permitting Municipalities to Impose a Buyer's Fee on the Conveyance of Real Property. This bill will positively impact the preservation and protection of open space across our State.

House Bill 6926 is a local option fee that would create a municipal fund for the purchase and stewardship of open space in local communities across the state. The legislation is another tool in the toolbox for cities and towns in Connecticut to invest in their community. The enabling legislation would require a city or town to enact a local ordinance to opt-in to the buyer's fee in that community, up to 1% on the purchase of a home (the first \$150,000 of the purchase cost would be exempt from the fee.)

I am a founding director of the Colchester Land Trust and serve on its board. We are currently in an \$850,000 campaign to preserve 200 acres of farmland and open space that is critical to our community. It protects our aquifer, farmland, two watersheds and will provide a community forest for education. The town will benefit for generations for this effort. But..... We are funding this without town or state support, so the task of raising \$850,000 is daunting without a dependable resource of funding. The willingness is there, but our selectmen are faced with road repairs, buying fire equipment and repairing the school roof. There is little left to acquire land to protect our water resources, farms, wildlife and recreation areas.

In a time of State budget constraints and the inability for the State to meet its open space and stewardship goals, this proposal is an essential tool that would allow local communities to harness a dedicated and replenishing revenue stream to protect and steward open space.

As you know, protecting open space is difficult with limited funding from state and federal sources. As a secondary consequence to reduced state and local funding, we see the award of significant private grants becoming very competitive. Open space and parks preserve the character of Connecticut cities and towns. Once open space is lost, it is gone forever. Enacting House Bill 6926 will help to maintain and enhance sustainable communities and increase local investments.

Please empower and enable communities across Connecticut to fund local conservation efforts and preserve the natural beauty and character of our rural, urban and suburban landscape. The land is an important resource that defines that character of our community and will be there for generations. Please support House Bill 6926.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Charles Toal
Board member
Colchester Land Trust
860-961-0255
ctoal@colchesterlandtrust.org

