

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Proposed House Bill No. 6926
Planning and Development Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
Connecticut Land Conservation Council
February 15, 2017

Co-Chairs Cassano, Lemar, and Logan, and Members of the Planning and Development Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in strong support of **Proposed House Bill No. 6926 (HB 6926), An Act Permitting Municipalities to Impose a Buyer's Fee on the Conveyance of Real Property**. We thank the Planning and Development Committee and Representatives Linda A. Orange, Kevin Ryan, and Joseph P. Gresko, for raising this bill in support of a municipal option to establish a local source of funding for open space acquisition and stewardship. We would also like to acknowledge and thank Representative Mary Mushinsky and Senator Toni Boucher for proposing bills with a similar purpose.

As the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 137+/- land trusts, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) advocates for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and works to ensure the long-term strength and viability of the land conservation community in Connecticut. Pursuing the enactment of a bill to enable a local funding option for land conservation is an annual policy priority for CLCC.

The problem: Most cities and towns across Connecticut do not have a permanent, reliable source of funding to use in their land conservation efforts. CLCC is contacted on a regular basis by land trusts and the municipalities with which they partner, seeking advice on funding sources to use for their land conservation projects. In most cases, the need for funding arises from a match requirement from state or federal grant programs; or to cover expenses for the due diligence associated with land transactions (appraisals, surveys, environmental assessments); or, after the deal has closed, the municipality's need to implement land management planning, invasive species control or other stewardship-related work on the land.

The solution: HB6926 would enable, but not require, towns and cities to establish their own dedicated source of conservation and stewardship funding by adopting a local option to impose a conveyance fee of up to 1% on the purchase of residential real estate, if they so choose.

The benefits of a local option: HB6926 does not impose a mandate upon municipalities to establish the program; rather, if enacted, this legislation would merely allow communities to decide on a town-by-town basis, through the public approval process, whether they choose to take advantage of this mechanism for raising much needed revenue to acquire, preserve and protect open space, parks and farmland. These funds could be used to match available state and federal grants and to leverage additional funds for open space.

Since the funds are collected and expended locally, there is no adverse fiscal impact on the state budget. Indeed, in light of the current budget crisis -- impacting both state and local economies -- there perhaps has never been a better time to allow towns and cities the option to pursue alternative funding mechanisms to help them achieve their land conservation and community planning goals.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have and/or provide additional information about the wonderful conservation work undertaken every day by our state's land trust community.

