Bill No.: SB-237
Title: AN ACT DESIGNATING ROCKY TOP AND YORK HILL AS PROTECTED TRAPROCK RIDGES.
Vote Date: 3/18/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 2/4/2019
File No.: 564

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Sen. Martin M. Looney, 11th Dist.
Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.
Rep. Mary M. Mushinsky, 85th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

In an effort to recognize municipalities’ authority over the preservation and conservation of traprock ridgelines in their towns, and to allow such municipalities to regulate the development in those areas, the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 95-237. This Public Act allows towns to regulate the development near crests of certain traprock ridgelines.

In 2017, Mountain View Estates LLC applied to develop 288 luxury apartments on an area of Hamden CT known as “Rocky Top.” In response to neighborhood outcry of the development, Mountain View Estates LLC donated the land to the Hamden Land Conversation Trust.

Proponents of the bill recognize York Hill, a portion of which is Rocky Top, as a traprock ridge deserving of protection from potential future development. The bill would include York Hill to the list of traprock ridges defined in section 8-1aa of the general statutes.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 237
Testimony shared with the committee clarified that “Rocky Top/York Hill,” located in Hamden CT is one location formally recognized as York Hill. The original draft of the bill listed “Rocky
Top” and York Hill as separate locations. Substitute language removes “Rocky Top” from the list of traprock ridges in the bill.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council: Towns and land trusts seek to protect traprock ridge environments because they recognize these areas as valuable resources offering “unique plant and wildlife habitats, opportunities for recreation and education, and beautiful vistas.”

Patrick Comins, Executive Director, Connecticut Audobon Society: Traprock ridges are a valuable resource, and conserving this area would “contribute to an important network of traprock ridges in the region including Sleeping Giant State Park, West Rock Ridge and East Rock Park.”

Christina Crowder: Shared personal testimony with involvement in an effort to prevent Rocky Top from development by a landowner to create a gravel pit in an area adjacent to a low-density neighborhood in Hamden, Connecticut.

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA): Although supportive of bill, the technical name of the area the bill seeks to protect is “York Hill.” According to the U.S. Geological Survey’s Geographic Names Information System, Rocky Top is officially a variant of York Hill.

Julie Hulten: Rocky Top and York Hill are valuable areas to Hamden and the town should be able to protect them and prevent them from being developed in the future.

Roberta Mack, Board Member, Hamden Land Conservation Trust: The bill recognizes Rocky Top and York Hill as two different features; however, the U.S. Geological Survey recognizes the area as York Hill with the variant Rocky Top. The bill should list the area as York Hill/Rocky Top. Protecting York Hill/Rocky Top would also protect a historically significant portion of the Quinnipiac Blue Blazed Trail.

Timothy S. Mack, Inland Wetlands Commissioner, Town of Hamden: Over the past ten years, York Hill/Rocky Trop has had two plans submitted for development. The second plan in 2016 resulted in the donation of 18 acres to the Hamden land Conservation Trust. Although a certain portion of York Hill/Rocky Top is currently protection, this bill would allow for the protection of the entire York Hill area.

Mike Miller, President, Sleeping Giant Park Association: Although some progress has been made in protecting the traprock ridge that encompasses York Hill and Rocky Top, these two areas should be afforded the same consideration as other traprock ridges in Connecticut.
When in season, the York Hill and Rocky Top areas provide beautiful vistas of the vast arrays of treetops.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Salvatore G. Filardi, Vice President of Facilities and Capital Planning, Quinnipiac University: Quinnipiac University has developed campuses on both Mount Carmel and on York Hill. The University has a long history of employing responsible development practices; however, this bill may have the unintended consequence of barring any further development by Quinnipiac University on York Hill. The University recommends the bill be amended to exempt Quinnipiac University from the provisions of the bill.

Reported by:  Spencer Kinyon / Ussawin R. Bumpen    Date: 4/5/2019