

Planning and Development Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-323

Title: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MUNICIPAL TREE REMOVAL ACCOUNT.

Vote Date: 3/18/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/9/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep Josh Elliott, 88th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill addresses the need to establish an account to fund and regulate the removal of dead, dying and hazardous trees, tree branches, and limbs from municipal and state roads.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

James Beradino, COST: Addressed the volume of trees that must be removed, along with rising costs and the inability of small public works departments to find outside contractors to do the job are a challenge.

John Filchak, Executive Director, NECCOG: Stated hazardous trees are a major issue for small towns and one they can't presently address adequately. Mr. Filchak urged the committee to amend the bill to enable regional councils of government to be eligible entities for the tree removal account and the Department in the development of its regulations add a regional approach.

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest-Park Association: Mr. Hammerling supports this bill with changes: Mr. Hammerling suggested that this account be expanded beyond removals only to include additional needs for municipalities managing trees such as: maintenance tree care of existing tree canopy, prepping of sites where trees have been removed to allow for replanting, planting of diverse tree species compatible with

their planting locations, guidelines for plantings compatible with electric infrastructure and the need for local inventories of trees and planning for ongoing/future municipal tree care. Mr. Hammerling suggested that it would make more sense if this bill was linked to HB 5116 which would require utilities to set aside funds to grant to municipalities for tree planting in communities where tree removals had recently taken place.

Donna Hamzy Carroccia, Advocacy Manager for CCM: Indicated the Planning and Development Committee should look at HB 5116. Providing municipalities to replenish the tree canopy lost because of dead, dying and hazardous tree removal in the state would complement these efforts and preserve the health and character of our beautiful state.

Tracy Hanson, First Selectman, Town of Voluntown: Indicated they have an ongoing list of hazardous trees and a budget line of \$15,000.00 established in FY 19 and have been maintaining that amount ever since and it hasn't been enough. There are trees on private and state- owned property that are a hazard to the road. CT DEEP has a lot of road frontage wooded property in Voluntown (and in Sterling) with hazard trees that are located over the municipal road right of way. Private landowners also have trees over the municipal right of way.

Chris Donnelly, CT Licensed Arborist: Mr. Donnelly stated he supports this bill, however he is concerned with the name given to this fund – Municipal Tree Removal Account. Equal consideration should be given to the tree maintenance and site preparation that are both essential to long-term health and survival of the tree.

Diane Hoffman, Hamden Resident: Ms. Hoffman indicated she supports this bill with changes: She feels it is important that this bill require funds be also designated for tree planting, roadside forest planning and planting in all other natural locations when trees are removed in the municipality ensuring that there is no net loss of tree in the municipality.

Ralph Jones, Hamden Resident: Mr. Jones stated the value of trees and tree cover provide communities in terms of health, resilience and sustainability are well documented. He urged serious consideration the expansion of SB 323 suggested by the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, Eric Hammerling.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Francis Pickerling, Executive Director, West COG: Mr. Pickerling indicated the COG's meet regularly with municipal staff responsible for tree maintenance and removal and are a natural fit for the application, review and management of smaller municipal grants. Mr. Pickerling appreciates the efforts by the state to mitigate these new expenses for local government however, grants made under the proposed program may be a size that does not lend itself to efficient administration at state level. Further, providing funds to plant replacement trees would prevent this program for unintentionally functioning as a one-way ratchet that reduces tree cover.

Reported by: Maureen O'Reilly

Date: March 17, 2022