
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 896 (File 173, as amended by Senate "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING TREE REMOVAL ON PROPERTIES UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) commissioner to report annually, beginning by January 1, 2024, to the Environment Committee on the department's hazardous tree removal activities in state parks during the prior year. It specifies the information that DEEP must include in the annual report.

Separately, the bill makes it a state goal to increase the total percentage of environmental justice communities (see BACKGROUND) that are covered by tree canopy, by January 1, 2040, by 5% of the total area of those communities that have a current tree canopy cover of less than 40%. It does so to ensure state residents equitably enjoy open space and tree cover benefits.

*Senate Amendment "A" (1) adds the tree canopy provision; (2) narrows the scope of DEEP's annual tree report to hazardous tree removals in state parks, rather than all tree removals in state parks and forests; and (3) eliminates certain required elements from the annual report.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage, except the tree canopy provision takes effect October 1, 2023.

ANNUAL HAZARDOUS TREE REMOVAL REPORT

Under the bill, DEEP's annual report must include the following information:

1. each state park where a hazardous tree removal project occurred in the prior calendar year;

2. the total acreage for each project;
3. an explanation of whether the projects consisted of removing fallen trees or cutting down trees;
4. the reasons for each project;
5. the total cost for each project and the funding sources;
6. a description of any removed hazardous tree or group of hazardous trees with unique characteristics, including age, caliper, species, canopy, or aesthetics; and
7. a description of any planned or anticipated hazardous tree removal project in any state park for the next calendar year.

BACKGROUND

Related Bill

sSB 979 (File 244), favorably reported by the Environment and Judiciary committees, contains a similar tree canopy provision.

Environmental Justice Communities

By law, an “environmental justice community” is (1) any U.S. census block group, as determined by the most recent census, for which at least 30% of the population consists of low-income people who are not institutionalized and have an income below 200% of the federal poverty level or (2) a distressed municipality (CGS § 22a-20a).

The Department of Economic and Community Development annually designates distressed municipalities based on high unemployment and poverty, aging housing stock, and low or declining rates of job, population, and per capita income growth (CGS § 32-9p). The current (2022) distressed municipalities are Ansonia, Bridgeport, Bristol, Chaplin, Derby, East Hartford, East Haven, Griswold, Groton, Hartford, Meriden, Montville, New Britain, New London, North Stonington, Norwich, Plainfield, Putnam, Sprague, Sterling, Torrington, Waterbury, West Haven, Winchester, and Windham.

Towns with current designated census blocks (that are not also

distressed municipalities) are Bethel, Bloomfield, Branford, Brooklyn, Canaan, Clinton, Columbia, Coventry, Cromwell, Danbury, East Haddam, East Lyme, East Windsor, Ellington, Enfield, Essex, Fairfield, Farmington, Glastonbury, Greenwich, Haddam, Hamden, Killingly, Ledyard, Lisbon, Manchester, Mansfield, Middletown, Milford, Naugatuck, New Fairfield, New Haven, New Milford, Newington, North Canaan, Norwalk, Plainville, Portland, Preston, Ridgefield, Rocky Hill, Sharon, Shelton, Simsbury, Southington, Stafford, Stamford, Stonington, Stratford, Thomaston, Thompson, Vernon, Wallingford, Waterford, Watertown, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Willington, Windsor Locks, and Windsor.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 0 (03/03/2023)