

Government Administration and Elections Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5522

AN ACT CONVEYING A PARCEL OF STATE LAND IN THE TOWN OF

Title: WOODSTOCK.

Vote Date: 4/10/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 4/9/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The legislation, as amended, aims to convey a parcel of State land in the Town of Woodstock to the YMCA of Metropolitan Hartford, Inc., for purposes of seasonal recreation and other purposes related to Camp Woodstock.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Jeffrey Beckham, Office of Policy and Management, Secretary:

OPM is opposed as currently drafted, stating any conveyance should require fair market value. Requests changes to the language in lines 6 and 7, striking "administrative costs of making such conveyance" and inserting "fair market value of the property, as determined by the average of the appraisals of two independent appraisers selected by the commissioner".

Katie Dykes, DEEP Commissioner:

DEEP strongly opposes the bill, as it is tasked with conserving the state's natural resources, conveying the land to a private entity would be counter to this mission and have detrimental impact on the natural resources of this particular parcel. The current language would allow the YMCA to cut trees, regrade the site and build camp infrastructure, effectively eliminating the natural resource value DEEP acquired the site to protect. Approval sets a concerning precedent, and only receiving administrative costs in return.

Jeff Gordon, State Senator:

Strongly supports approval in favor of Camp Woodstock, as it provides programs for outdoor education and recreation for kids to develop important skills.

Kurt Vail, State Representative:

Camp Woodstock engages over 1,300 youth in summer camp programs each year, and the 19.3 acres of State Forest in question would allow the Camp to provide enhanced outdoor learning and team building opportunities to children.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Andy Bauer:

Supports with confidence that the approval of this conveyance will see the land carefully used to further Camp Woodstock's mission. The American Camping Association recommends 1 acre of land per camper. Woodstock currently has 93 acres and accepts 300 kids.

Kimberly Cole, YMCA of Greater Hartford, Chief Operating Officer:

Camp Woodstock remains a pillar of the YMCA's commitment to fostering positive youth development. It is crucial the camp continues to find ways to increase capacity and enhance camp experiences for youth. Strongly urges the advancement of the proposal.

Mark Dale:

Supports, stating that giving children positive experiences in nature will bring them to care about the environment, and this conveyance will increase the impact that Camp Woodstock has on children, the forests, and Connecticut.

Jennifer Daly, YMCA:

Believes Camp Woodstock will be responsible and respectful stewards of the parcel, as its approval will further its positive influence on the development of our youth.

Carey Greene, Camp Woodstock Advisory Board:

Camp Woodstock serves kids from just about every town and city in Connecticut and is often used as a childcare option. The camp has educational partnerships with Ellis Technical High School where masonry and carpentry students come to practice and develop skills for their trades. It is more than a summer camp, and the conveyance is important for the sustainability of the camp and its continued success to the surrounding communities to which it is a valuable resource.

Brian Griffin:

Camp Woodstock is a mainstay of the YMCA's commitment to fostering positive youth development, and it is vitally important that Camp Woodstock continues to find ways to increase capacity and enhance camp experiences for youth around Connecticut.

Anthony Gronski:

Camp Woodstock has been building strong character in youth since 1922, providing positive human development and a safe space for kids. Having this land will ensure the Camp remains prepared to be there for the youth.

Melany Gronski:

Camp Woodstock remains a pillar of the YMCA's commitment to fostering positive youth development. It is crucial the camp continues to find ways to increase capacity and enhance camp experiences for youth. Strongly urges the advancement of the proposal.

Sophie Gronski:

Has been attending Camp Woodstock since age 6, and now serves as a Leader in Training. Camp Woodstock teaches valuable skills, such as dealing with adversity and problem-solving. With this land Camp Woodstock can widen their reach and continue to grant these opportunities to more kids.

Gerry Hanson:

Supports giving land back to the towns.

Heather LeBlanc:

The parcel of land will allow camp staff more physical space to put their creative ideas to work. The Board of Camp Woodstock is in full support of the proposal, and deeply cares about preserving the property and experience of next generations.

Robert Merritt, Lincoln Financial Group, AVP and Senior Counsel:

The land in the conveyance will significantly increase Camp Woodstock's physical size, which will help enable the Camp to greatly expand programming, only benefitting the youth the Camp serves.

Ellie Michael:

Camp Woodstock remains a pillar of the YMCA's commitment to fostering positive youth development. It is crucial the camp continues to find ways to increase capacity and enhance camp experiences for youth. Strongly urges the advancement of the proposal.

Katherine Thibault:

Supporting the conveyance will allow Camp Woodstock to maintain the beautiful natural surroundings and allow for more space for children to explore nature. Camp Woodstock will use the land to continue to provide programming, an investment in the future leaders that come each summer.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Andrew Bicking, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, Executive Director:

Offers opposition. The proposal would convey 19.3 acres of State Forest from DEEP to YMCA of Metropolitan Hartford to benefit Camp Woodstock. CFPA observes that this conveyance does not provide a significant public benefit, that the applicant proposes to cover only administrative costs whereas Fair Market Value is approx. \$277,996.53, and there will be risk of negative impact on contiguous state forest.

Kathy Czepiel, Save the Sound, Land Protection Manager:

The bill's seemingly harmless proposal for vague seasonal recreation and camp-related activities opens the door to the possibility of intensive development and major construction on

the parcel in question. While it includes a reversion clause, it would be difficult to enact due to the broad description of proposed activity.

Robert LaFrance, CT National Audubon Society, Director of Policy:

Aligns testimony with Connecticut Land Conservation Council, with concerns that the proposed property use is vague and overly broad. The lack of specificity regarding the property's end use limits the ability to evaluate the benefits and discern the circumstances triggering a right of reversion to the state. Has concerns over the omission regarding whether the NDDDB has identified the site as an area contains endangered or threatened species, etc. Urges consideration of DEEP's testimony.

Margaret Miner:

The proposed conveyance is inconsistent with the state's responsibility to preserve resources in the Public Trust and also inconsistent with related laws, policies, and norms. The bill offers no protection to public waters, which no one owns. The proposed us bocks access to almost the entire public without restrictions of any kind to guard against harmful use of the state water.

Amy Blaymore Paterson, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, Executive Director:

Concerned that the proposed property use is overly broad and that the lack of specificity regarding the property's end-use limits the ability to evaluate the benefits and discern circumstances triggering a right of reversion to the State. Also has concerns as to whether the site has been identified as containing endangered or threatened species by NDDDB and suggests a definitive response be given about this information.

Reported by: Lindsay de Brito

Date: 4/11/2024