

Please support SB 181

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM FOR THE PRESERVATION OF OPEN SPACE

What does this bill do? The proposed legislation would ALLOW BUT NOT REQUIRE the city of New London and the towns of Bethany, Bolton, and Lyme THROUGH THEIR OWN LOCAL PUBLIC INPUT/DECISION-MAKING PROCESS to establish a fund to acquire, preserve, and maintain open space (including water resources) and farmland at the municipal level by including a conveyance fee of up to 1% paid by buyers of real property.

Are other municipalities interested in being added to the bill? Yes. The governing bodies from Bloomfield, Bozrah, Colchester, Coventry, and North Stonington, respectively, have voted unanimously to be added to the pilot program proposed by SB 181.

If enacted, would this legislation require all towns in the state to establish the program? No. This legislation establishes a pilot program to authorize certain municipalities to decide, through their local public approval processes, whether or not to take advantage of this funding mechanism.

Why are these towns seeking this option? These municipalities need a sustainable source of funding for local conservation and stewardship efforts that would not impact the municipal mill rate or require additional bonding.

What can the funds be used for? This added source of funding would enable communities to fulfill match requirements for state or federal grant programs, cover the costly expenses associated with acquiring land (appraisals, surveys, environmental assessments, etc.), better maintain the town's open space properties, farmland and water resources, including addressing invasive species on land and water, and re-pay open space bonds.

Some real estate agents fear that a conveyance fee will deter homebuyers or suppress real estate values. These claims are speculative and are contrary to the experience in other states, which shows the opposite. Real estate agents in other states that were initially opposed to the concept have become proponents for the program. Any opponents would have an opportunity to raise concerns through the public participation process in any of the towns that seek to adopt the program.

Would this make housing less affordable? The fee is limited to a maximum of 1% and does not apply to the first \$150,000 of the sale price. Repaid over 20 or 30 years in a mortgage, that extra cost is minimal.

May a municipality impose less than the 1% fee? Yes. The proposed legislation indicates that the conveyance can be "up to 1%." Therefore, a municipality may adopt a lower percentage fee.

Have other states enabled similar legislation? Nearby states (MA, NY, RI, PA, WV) have allowed some municipalities to enact a buyer's conveyance fee, with the income dedicated to conserving and caring for local natural areas. These programs have proven remarkably successful, resulting in the protection of thousands of acres of open space, forests, meadows and farms.

SB 181 is about local control and community choice!

Please give these municipalities the opportunity to let their residents decide whether this program is the right option for their community.

For more information, please contact Connecticut Land Conservation Council Executive Director, Amy Blaymore Paterson at abpaterson@ctconservation.org or at 860-614-8537.