

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 5608
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
February 15, 2023

Co-Chairs Lopes and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Hochadel and Palm, Ranking Members Harding and Callahan, and members of the Environment Committee:

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its ~130 land trusts. We advocate for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and work to ensure the long-term strength and viability of Connecticut's land conservation community.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in support of **House Bill No. 5608, An Act Concerning Certain Solar Photovoltaic Facilities Located on Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance or Core Forest Lands.**

As a coalition organization, CLCC works with Connecticut's robust land trust community as well as DEEP, municipalities, and other entities committed to land conservation and addressing climate change at every level. CLCC was a member of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) Forests Sub-Group and a member of the Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut's Future (PRFCT Future) Working Group.

The GC3 Phase 1 Report: Near-Term Actions (January 2021) (GC3 Report) underscores the overlapping impacts that climate change has on our most vulnerable communities, our environment, and our public health. Addressing these impacts and supporting the state's efforts to achieve its ambitious carbon neutrality goals requires a multi-faceted approach — from a reduction of energy use and shift to renewable energy to ramped-up investments in land conservation, and other natural climate solutions. Among the challenges in implementing the recommendations is ensuring that the pursuit of one strategy does not undermine the benefits of another.

Recognizing that forestland (particularly core forests) and healthy soils work both ways in mitigating climate change impacts — absorbing greenhouse gases and also preventing the release of significant levels of carbon emissions that would be caused by deforestation and conversion of open lands to active development (including for large scale solar infrastructure) —The GC3 Report recommends:

Evaluat[ing] approaches and best practices for siting of renewable and non-renewable energy infrastructure, to avoid loss of forests, farmland and other sensitive lands. As Connecticut deploys large-scale solar projects, it is important that this development does not supersede other climate change mitigation strategies, including the carbon sequestration and storage potential of natural and working lands. The state should encourage developers to site their projects on brownfields, rooftops, parking lots, and other developed spaces. (Recommendation 25, Page 37)

Consistent with these recommendations, CLCC contends that avoidance of loss of working and natural lands be the primary goal for the siting of large-scale solar projects. However, when such projects are permitted, it makes sense to require the developer to post a bond to cover all costs associated with decommissioning the facility. This requirement is not only a good measure of pre-qualification for the developer, but also ensures that landowners seeking to restore or remediate their agricultural or forested lands are not saddled with the burden of those costs.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments on this important effort to protect trees and forests held in trust for public use. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

