



Environment Committee - Public Hearing of March 8, 2021

SUPPORT: House Bill No. 6441 (Gov.'s Bill) - An Act Concerning Climate Change Adaptation

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the National Audubon Society through its affiliate state office, Audubon Connecticut. The National Audubon Society protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow, throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation. Our conservation network extends statewide and includes more than 31,000 members, five Connecticut chapters, and many partners along the [Atlantic Flyway](#).

Through land stewardship, science, education and advocacy, we work across the state to preserve habitat and protect bird species that are of state, national, and global concern; and we identify and support Important Bird Areas (IBAs), a hallmark of Audubon's efforts worldwide. It begins with birds, but our mission connects people to a much wider range of issues, such as preventing air and water pollution, reducing pesticide use, promoting land conservation and reducing the impact of global climate change on birds, wildlife, and people.

The strength we derive as part of the National Audubon Society enables us to contribute to a broader conservation strategy—one that recognizes the need to conserve wildlife on a wide geographic scope. See the link below for more information about Audubon nature sanctuaries and centers that are part of a broad network of critical habitats for a host of birds and other wildlife species as well as peaceful respites for people. Our centers serve as community hubs for education, conservation, and engagement with nature.

<https://ct.audubon.org/about-us/centers-sancturies-and-chapters>

House Bill No. 6441 (Governor's Bill) - An Act Concerning Climate Change Adaptation:

House Bill No. 6441 offers a range of climate adaptation solutions to help our cities and towns. We **SUPPORT this package of solutions** that will allow a municipality to: i) establish a stormwater utility; ii) establish a municipal a buyers conveyance fee; and iii) expand a flood and erosion control board into a flood prevention, climate resilience and erosion control board. We also support the expansion of the authority of the Connecticut Green Bank to establish and manage an Environmental Infrastructure Fund.

The Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) included a number of working groups. One of those was the FINANCING AND FUNDING ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE working group. That working group made recommendations to the GC3, who in turn made recommendations to the Governor.¹

Recommendation 56 is on point for this bill – especially Recommendation 56 (d):

d. Support state authorization allowing municipalities *to adopt a buyer's real estate conveyance fee to fund resilience and other community environmental projects*. The authorizing legislation would allow, not require, municipalities to adopt a small and limited buyer's convenience fee (up to 1% of the value of any real estate transaction valued at \$150,000 or greater) on the transfer of real estate. *This dedicated fee could be used by municipalities to fund municipal land conservation, stewardship, climate mitigation, resilience and adaptation strategies, and other community environmental projects*. The legislation would be structured to ensure that the program does not undermine the development of affordable housing in the participating municipalities.

Recommendation 56 (d) is also known as the "Municipal Option" and enabling legislation for this recommendation is included in Section 3 of House Bill House No. 6441 (Governor's Bill) beginning at Line 98.

We especially support the Municipal Option as voluntary program would authorize a local buyer's conveyance fee to give municipalities a new tool to generate their own revenue for land stewardship, climate adaptation, resilience, and other community environmental projects, such as urban forestry and tree planting.

Another recommendation of the GC3 is 56 (e):

e. Evaluate the creation of a state-level climate change and coastal resiliency reserve fund that would be managed by the Treasurer of the State of Connecticut. The coastal resiliency reserve fund *would allow the Office of the Treasury to manage municipal coastal resilience fund investments authorized by PA 19-77 on behalf of the municipalities*.

Senate Bill No. 971 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE TREASURER AND CLIMATE CHANGE AND COASTAL RESILIENCY RESERVE FUNDS implement Recommendation 56 (e) – This bill was referred to the Planning and Development Committee and a public hearing on the bill was held on March 5, 2021.

Should both of these bills pass this Session municipalities would be able to enjoy BOTH an expanded CLIMATE CHANGE AND COASTAL RESILIENCY RESERVE FUND that the State Treasurer

¹ https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3_Phase1_Report_Jan2021.pdf

could manage, AND a mechanism that could generate money for that fund: the Municipal Option.

The Municipal Option Works for People:

Experience in other states shows that people and businesses are attracted to communities that have cleaner air and water, recreation options, local food sources, and protected natural beauty. The buyer's real estate conveyance fee is a local investment which helps to sustain the community's natural assets, mitigate the natural and economic impacts of climate change, avoid the hidden costs of development, and even increase local property values (Gies, Conservation: An Investment that Pays, 2009).

Providing funding for stewardship expands local employment, since much of the work of adaptation is hands-on, from building infrastructure to planting native species, to removing and controlling invasives, to preserving niche farming on protected agricultural land.

Audubon Connecticut has been working on the Municipal Option for some time with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) and we have compiled a joint Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about it. (<https://ct.audubon.org/news/all-about-connecticuts-new-act-concerning-climate-change-adaptation>)

In addition, CLCC has compiled data about the success of the Municipal Option in other states. To learn more about the Municipal Option in other states, see the links below:

- [News Clip -New Paltz Votes to Preserve Open Space](#)
- [News Clip- A Decade of Success for Warwick](#)
- [Case Study- Jefferson County, West Virginia](#)
- [Case Study- New Shoreham, Rhode Island](#)
- [Case Study- Warwick, New York](#)
- [Study on Real Estate Transfer Taxes \(RETTs\)](#)

In closing, we enthusiastically SUPPORT House Bill No. 6441 (Governor's Bill) - An Act Concerning Climate Change Adaptation. This bill offers a range of climate adaptation solutions to help our cities and towns. We SUPPORT this package of solutions as it will allow a municipality to: i) establish a stormwater utility; ii) establish a municipal a buyers conveyance fee; and iii) expand a flood and erosion control board into a flood prevention, climate resilience and erosion control board. We also support the expansion of the authority of the Connecticut Green Bank to establish and manage an Environmental Infrastructure Fund.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. Should you have any questions, please contact Robert LaFrance, Director of Policy, Audubon Connecticut, National Audubon Society at 203.668.6685 or at Robert.LaFrance@Audubon.org.