



Senate

General Assembly

File No. 573

February Session, 2024

Senate Bill No. 373

Senate, April 22, 2024

The Committee on Appropriations reported through SEN. OSTEN of the 19th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the bill ought to pass.

AN ACT CONCERNING PARKS INCLUDED IN THE PASSPORT TO THE PARKS PROGRAM.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 23-15h of the general statutes is repealed and the
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2024*):

3 (a) There is established an account to be known as the Passport to the
4 Parks account which shall be a separate, nonlapsing account within the
5 General Fund. Moneys in such account shall be used (1) to provide
6 expenses of the Council on Environmental Quality, beginning with the
7 fiscal year ending June 30, 2019, [and] (2) for the care, maintenance,
8 operation and improvement of (A) state parks, [and] (B) state
9 campgrounds, (C) Batterson Park, and (D) Thames River Heritage Park,
10 (3) for the funding of soil and water conservation districts, and (4) for
11 the funding of environmental review teams, in accordance with
12 subsection (b) of this section. All funds collected from the Passport to
13 the Parks Fee established pursuant to section 14-49b shall be deposited
14 into the Passport to the Parks account. Such account shall contain all

15 moneys required by law to be deposited in such account. Such account
 16 may receive funds from private or public sources, including, but not
 17 limited to, any municipal government or the federal government. Such
 18 account shall contain subaccounts as required by section 23-15b.

19 (b) For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2018, and each fiscal year
 20 thereafter, the sum of one hundred thousand dollars shall be paid by the
 21 Department of Energy and Environmental Protection from the Passport
 22 to the Parks account to each of the following entities: (1) The Connecticut
 23 River Coastal Conservation District, (2) the Eastern Conservation
 24 District, (3) the North Central Conservation District, (4) the Northwest
 25 Conservation District, (5) the Southwest Conservation District, (6) the
 26 Connecticut Environmental Review Team, and (7) the Connecticut
 27 Council on Water and Soil Conservation.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	23-15h

APP *Joint Favorable*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 25 \$	FY 26 \$
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection	Passport to Parks - Cost	At least 474,500	At least 724,500

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 25 \$	FY 26 \$
Farmington; Groton; Hartford; New Britain; New London	Potential Savings	Less than 20,000 each	Less than 20,000 each

Explanation

The bill results in an annual cost to the Passport to Parks account, beginning in FY 25, to pay for the care, operation, and maintenance of Batterson Park and Thames River Heritage Park (TRHP). The cost to the account is expected to be at least \$474,500 in FY 25 and at least \$724,500 in FY 26 (and annually thereafter). Costs may vary depending on the scale of Batterson Park operations and which costs are covered for TRHP, as described below. The bill may also result in savings to the municipalities involved with these parks.

Batterson Park

The cost associated with Batterson Park's operation is anticipated to be at least \$250,000 in FY 25 and at least \$500,000 in FY 26 (and annually thereafter). The park is owned by Hartford while located in Farmington

and New Britain.¹

The magnitude of the cost depends on the extent of operations and maintenance performed at the park. The annual cost to operate Batterson Park is estimated to be at least \$500,000 but costs may be higher, depending on park activities, use, staffing levels, and decisions made by Hartford as the property owner. It is assumed that costs in FY 25 will be approximately half of the annual costs as park operations will ramp up over time. This estimate assumes a relatively passive-use park, similar to the state park model described in the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP's) January 2024 report on Batterson Park.²

Staffing including fringe benefits may cost an estimated \$350,000 per year for approximately four permanent staff (a supervisor, two maintainers, and an Environmental Conservation officer) and two seasonal staff, assuming these are not state employees except the officer.³ Utilities and routine dam maintenance add approximately \$150,000 annually. If Hartford decides to resolve property encroachment issues, then an additional \$800,000 per year in staffing and other costs may be required, according to DEEP's report.

These cost estimates do not include capital improvements that would be needed to reopen the park (approximately \$6.4 million to \$9.6 million depending on desired amenities), or major repairs to or replacement of the dam (an estimated \$600,000 annually for ten years). There is approximately \$9 million remaining of a \$10 million carryforward General Fund allocation to Hartford for Batterson Park, which could be used for some of this work.

¹ The park has been minimally used over the last several years, with annual expenses of approximately \$26,000 by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection associated with the state-owned boat launch, and \$15,000 by the town of Farmington.

² Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Batterson Park Study. January 15, 2024. https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/deep/public_notice_attachments/batterson-park/final-batterson-park-study-for-cga-1-15-24.pdf

³ The personnel and other expenses estimates assume that swimming will not be offered at the park. If swimming is offered, costs will be higher.

Thames River Heritage Park

The Passport to Parks cost associated with TRHP's operation is anticipated to range from approximately \$224,500 to \$450,000 annually, beginning in FY 25. The extent of the cost to the Passport to Parks account depends on which expenses are determined to be associated with the park's care, maintenance, and operation.

The park consists of numerous historic sites along the Thames River, connected by water taxis that are run by the park's foundation. The sites are in New London and Groton, which provide grants totaling approximately \$37,500 annually.

The park's expenses directly associated with the operation of the water taxis are expected to total \$224,500 in FY 25, including repairs, fuel, maintenance, the subcontractor who operates the water taxis, and insurance. The foundation's expenses in FY 25 are projected to total approximately \$450,000, including costs for the water taxis, staff, rent, utilities, advertising, and other expenses. The bill does not define which of these expenses will be covered by the Passport to Parks account. If all costs are covered, then: (1) the cost to the account will be approximately \$450,000 annually, and (2) New London, the Town of Groton, and the City of Groton will each have an estimated savings of \$12,500 annually.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation, decisions regarding Batterson Park amenities, and the determination of which TRHP expenses qualify for support from the Passport to Parks account.

OFA Bill Analysis

SB 373

AN ACT CONCERNING PARKS INCLUDED IN THE PASSPORT TO THE PARKS PROGRAM.

SUMMARY:

This bill provides funding for Batterson Park and Thames River Heritage Park from the Passport to the Parks account. Batterson Park is a municipal park owned by Hartford and located in Farmington and New Britain. Thames River Heritage Park consists of numerous historic sites along the Thames River. The park's foundation operates three water taxis to sites in New London and Groton.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

BACKGROUND

Passport to the Parks Account

The Passport to the Parks account is funded by a fee paid on motor vehicle registrations. The fee is currently \$15 for a triennial registration, \$10 for a biennial registration, and \$5 for an annual registration. The account revenues fund the operation and maintenance of state parks, soil and water conservation districts (along with a council), an environmental review team, and the Council on Environmental Quality.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable
Yea 36 Nay 16 (04/04/2024)