

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5214

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING BATTERSON PARK.

Vote Date: 3/8/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/28/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee
Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, 121st Dist.
Rep. Kerry S. Wood, 29th Dist.
Rep. James Sanchez, 6th Dist.
Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Many individuals feel that Batterson Park, located in the localities of both New Britain and Farmington, has suffered from chronic underinvestment and political shunning due to its ownership by the externally situated city of Hartford. This bill seeks to remedy the problem by transferring ownership of the park to the state, with funding provided by the Passport to the Parks program. The intention is to allow for the park to undergo repairs and receive maintenance on a regular schedule, allowing for current and future visitors to enjoy a clean and safe outdoor recreation area.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie Dykes, Commissioner, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

DEEP appreciates the Committee raising the bill and offers additional information in the detailed study and assessment on Batterson Park. DEEP would like to draw attention to the [Batterson Park Study](#) in accordance with Public Act 23-204. DEEP have also provided information on Passport to the Parks program, which is identified as a source of funding. This account is projected to be insolvent as soon as fiscal year 2025 with or without the provisions currently included in this bill.

Jeffrey R. Beckman, Secretary, Office of Policy and Management

Secretary Beckman testified how the bill would create a precedent and significant liability by transferring responsibility and financial liability for municipal recreation and local park management to the state. OPM believes a policy shift to the state is not feasible. They note that money has already been provided to support the City of Hartford's Batterson Park and a significant amount remains. The secretary suggests that perhaps New Britain and Farmington could become more involved in the operation of the park.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Erin Stewart, Mayor, City of New Britain

The mayor acknowledges that thousands of New Britain residents enjoyed the use of Batterson Park, and the closure in 2015 left a void in their community, but regrets that previous attempts at rehabbing the abandoned park have been fruitless. The complexities surrounding municipal responsibilities between it being in both New Britain and Farmington whilst being owned by the city of Hartford have led to dissenting opinions and lack of consensus on how to best proceed. The mayor would like to see this park returned to its former glory.

John McNamara, Alderman Ward 4, New Britain Common Council

The Alderman supports the bills intent to address the problems documented in the Batterson Park Study. With an increasing demand for outdoor recreation, especially since the pandemic, it is the belief of the Alderman that this bill will help to facilitate the first state park in 15 years. Visitation to Connecticut State Parks increased an estimated 17 million in 2022. The Friends of the Park group represents a strong base of volunteerism to support a restoration for recreational use. The Alderman opposes a proposed circular path around the pond, as it would impact many homeowners who should be protected from encroachment on park land in their backyards.

Neil Connors, Alderman, City of New Britain

The Alderman believes preserving the park presents unique political and legal issues because of its location. There is little political consistency in Hartford to support an "out of town" park. The local neighbors and users lack municipal representation in Hartford, and it is an open question whether there is any legal duty to maintain it by Hartford. Therefore, the Alderman urges support for the bill.

Terri Eickel, Executive Director, Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

The network supports the bill providing needed investments in open space and parks and the outdoor activities it provides to urban communities.

Denise Savageau, President, Conserving Natural Resources

The testimony strongly supports the Passports to the Park programs that have become an important source of income for Connecticut's park system. The fund also functions as base funding for their organization, which has allowed for the leveraging of further federal dollars.

Seth Cerone

As a resident residing along Batterson Park, the testifier expressed concern with the return feeding ground for Bald Eagles. A full path around the lake would devastate their return and

cause unforeseen problems for those that live on Batterson. The testifier requests that the park be restored as a natural park, without further development on it which might harm the eagles and diminish the beauty.

Kristin Philipp

The testifier believes Batterson Park needs rehabilitation to make it usable to the public. They express the belief that a path would be detrimental to ecosystem and disruptive to the residents living along the water.

Amy Blaymore Patterson, Executive Director, CT Land Conservation Council

The testifier noted several benefits for the development of the park, including the access to nature for some of those living in high poverty areas, shade provided to protect against UV light, improved water and air quality, mitigation of the heat island effect, and protection from flooding.

Anonymous 1

The testifier provided a brief history of the park and expresses concern that if no steps are taken, the park will be sold to fund the city's pension fund. They draw attention to the benefits of a safe open green space, and how children at nearby Camp Courant could benefit from renewed space, possibly allowing the camp to hold up to an extra 300 children per year.

Anonymous 3

The testifier supports improving the water quality of the pond, making note of page 75 of the Batterson Park study and its assessment of water quality. They also express opposition to opening a pathway around the pond, as it may harm the wildlife.

The following also expressed support for the bill:

Stephen Burger; Mary LaSala; Maizie Ogren; Robert Weinstein

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Kathi Howell-Talmont

The testifier believes Batterson Park deserves to be refurbished, but the plans presented will not be sustainable. They note their belief swimming will not be possible without a tremendous influx of money to fix the pollution, a walkway around the pond cannot be properly maintained, and the safety of the homeowners on the pond cannot be guaranteed. They believe those making the decisions need to look at the irreversible consequences of these decisions and consider the quality of life for those who live on Batterson Pond.

Anonymous 2

The testifier expresses concern that the water will be polluted and that children might be in danger of falling into the pond. They suggest developing safety measures, whilst refraining from developing a path around the park such that the wildlife is protected and litter is reduced.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: 3/24/2024