

FROM: Elizabeth Gibbs, Middletown
RE: SUPPORT - House Bill 7127 Article 6 Question 5 with Comments
DATE: February 25, 2026
TO: Rep. Marvin Abney, CHair, RI House Finance Committee

Dear Marvin,

I'm writing to ask for your support of H 7127 Article 6 Question 5. There is a critical need for \$10 Million in additional conservation funding in the FY 2027 Green Economy Bond.

As a lifelong resident of Middletown, I've seen significant changes on Aquidneck Island, as I know you have during the many years you've lived in Newport. Much open space and agricultural land has been converted to residential and commercial use; according to the build-out analysis conducted in 2019 by Sasaki Associates, all of the island's unprotected farmland, woodland and other open space could be developed by 2050 if the rate of development continues at its current pace.

As you know, we have thriving community farms on the island, as well as throughout the state. A healthful local food system, as well as the employment and economic contribution of agriculture is vital to the wellbeing of Rhode Island. The farm sector provides over 2,500 jobs and contributes \$250 Million in direct revenue to the state.

Rhode Islanders from all walks of life benefit from natural spaces—from small urban parks to large DEM properties, contact with nature promotes mental and physical health. As an example, Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown, on whose board I serve, remained open for trail use during the 2020 pandemic lockdown. People still tell us today what a lifesaver that was, to be able to get outside amidst the fear and anxiety that permeated those days.

Across the state, municipalities and local land trusts are working hard to preserve land that protects watersheds, buffers climate change and improves quality of life for residents. They often can't do it alone—state support primes partnerships that can make these projects happen. For example, every \$1.00 spent on farmland conservation in the state is matched by \$1.70 in federal and philanthropic funding.

Concerns about much-needed housing are often pitted against open space preservation. But a recent poll conducted by FM3 Consulting and The Nature Conservancy found that 85% of respondents don't believe that land conservation and affordable housing are in direct conflict or competition. We are truly a state that can find creative solutions to the problems we face.

Thank you for your time and for your support for this critical funding.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Gibbs