

Gidget Loomis
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RE: Bill # H7123
Article 5 Question 3 – Green Economy Bond

Viewpoint: Support the Green Economy Bond, but increase in funding for land conservation in the bond.

February 16, 2022

Dear Chairman Abney and House Committee on Finance,

I am writing to advocate for more funding for land conservation in the Green Economy Bond. As a small state with a dense population, our limited open spaces, forests, and farms are under attack from development and installation of massive solar fields. It's still a special place, with the beautiful Bay, historic sites, and many places attracting tourists. We need to maintain our state, both for our present and future residents, as well as visitors.

As the Land Conservation chair of the Land Conservancy of North Kingstown, I personally have had the privilege of exploring some of our town's private properties, for possible conservation. We have seen the use of trails and open spaces increase substantially in the last several years. LCNK works cooperatively with our town government and outside agencies to conserve of these special places. At least 7 large working farms are protected, so that families can keep producing healthy fresh crops for our citizens. This has been made possible through bond funding, such as the Green Economy Bond, which is critical for local conservation efforts.

Specifically, I would like to see:

- (1) funding added to support the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC) responsible for the Farmland Preservation Program. Adding \$3M to the bond to support ALPC is critical to preserving important farms in our state and strengthening local food systems. Leaving this program unfunded also leaves federal funding on the table (USDA NRCS Agricultural Land Easement Program).
- (2) \$5M for the State Land Acquisition Program. While there is \$3MM listed for the State Land Acquisition Program ("Open Space"), the governor has included farmland in this designation, adding competition to the funding. Even though \$3MM is identified for Forest Restoration as a separate item, that funding goes to management of state lands, not to conserve additional forests. By increasing the amount of funds designated for the State Land Acquisition Program, both open space and farmland conservation can be supported.
- (3) the amount for the Local Land Acquisition Matching Grant Program raised from \$2M to \$3M. Local open space grants provide 50% matching funds to municipalities, land trusts, and local conservation land organizations, such as the Land Conservancy of NK, which is critical for preserving valuable open space throughout the state.

Thank you for your time to listen to my concerns. I urge the committee to expand funding for important conservation of forests, open spaces, watersheds, recreation lands, and farmland.

Sincerely,

Gidget Loomis