



Burrillville Land Trust

Protecting our open space and rural character

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Burrillville Land Trust

2000

25

2025

**Celebrating 25 years of dedicated volunteer service
to all in Burrillville, Rhode Island and beyond.**

May 5, 2025

Chair Stephen M. Casey

House Committee on Housing & Municipal Government

Rhode Island State House

Providence, RI 02903

House Bill 6283 has nothing to do with the private, all volunteer, community based,
501(c)3 Burrillville Land Trust

Dear Chair Casey and Members of the Committee,

House Bill 6283 has nothing to do with the all volunteer, independent, community based 501(c)3, private land trust in Burrillville. But the legislation, if enacted, will lead to confusion, a continued dis-crediting and demeaning of the existing private land trust.

I want to make that painfully obvious upfront statement first so you don't think that the private land trust is making this request to change our name to something else.

While the Burrillville Land Trust remains neutral as to the Town's urge to reinstate their own land trust, it should be noted that this proposed legislation is not because of the Town's new-found interest in preserving land. Over the past nearly two years, the town council chair and town manager have systematically attempted to discredit and diminish the 25 years of accomplishments of the private land trust. The Council chair and town manager have spent tax-payer funds to place disinformation and misinformation in ads in the local shoppers' guide, the Bargain Buyer, in Town Council meeting, town wide notices on their email server list, and in social media they have disparaged the BLT. They attempted to do away with the land trust's tax exempt status, and have used the town's solicitor funded by tax-payer funds to add the Burrillville Land Trust in a SLAPP law suit.

While the land trust remains neutral in a town's ability to do what they want with land preservation, the wide public distrust that the chair and town manager have already exhibited against an existing private land preservation organization does not bode well for the municipal land trust they seek to re-create.

We ask that what seems to be an innocuous piece of legislation be held for further study.

The Burrillville Land Trust (BLT) is marking its 25th anniversary as an all volunteer, community based, 501(c)3 private land trust in Burrillville. Our board members are those that come to us with a passion and love of the natural world. Our mission is to preserve and protect the rural character of the Town of Burrillville through education, advocacy and acquisition. The Burrillville Land Trust is recognized as a model land trust by other land trusts, by RIDEM, The Nature Conservancy, The Rhode Island Foundation, The Rhode Island Audubon Society, The Land Trust Alliance, recognized by regional and national environmental groups and education and advocacy groups, as a leader in forest and agriculture conservation. Our programs include the first in our state natural dye workshop, recognized internationally as the first in New England American Chestnut Tree give-a-way program. We have conducted Blue Bird and Rain Barrel workshops, free seed programs and a host of other workshops on conservation easements and land protection. Since 2000, the Burrillville Land Trust has conducted over 500 scheduled walks, tours, hikes, bird/wildlife, snowshoeing, research studies, Geocache, and more, on our properties. We started the Burrillville Farmers' Market and two other markets all over the state.

We conducted forty-seven "Learn the Facts" workshops all over the tri-state area when a fracked gas power plant company threatened to destroy vital and necessary ecosystems in the northwestern part of Rhode Island.

Over these 25 years the Burrillville Land Trust has brought in close to \$1 million dollars in funds for acquisition, goods and volunteer services for Burrillville and the people that live here. We have worked with and collaborated with local, state, regional and national organizations making sure to give credit for an acquisition or event to every organization involved. We have given our time to make this happen all free to the town residents. Those funds included foundation grants and fundraiser events that paid for acquiring land that will forever be protected. The state through RIDEM, the environmental groups such as Audubon, The Nature Conservancy and foundations such as the Rhode Island Foundation, the Bafflin Foundation, the Champlin Foundation, the Levy Foundation, the GrassRoots Foundation, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and more, all recognize the strengths and importance of the Burrillville Land Trust. That is why these and other foundations keep giving us the funds we need to do our work.

There are 55 land trusts in Rhode Island. 19 municipal land trusts and 36 private land trusts. Our hope is that the Town of Burrillville moves to incentivize protection of open

space in other ways besides the state mandated Farm, Forest and Open Space Act and forego their quest to re-visit their own land conservancy by doing the following:

1. Instituting a one time tax deduction for those who place their land in a conservation easement. This act would go a long way to preserving the rural character of our town. Many who live here don't mind paying a little extra to preserve our sense of place in our town;
2. The Burrillville Conservation Commission, with direction from the Town and Town planner could move to focus on one aspect of preservation: securing acquifers, or converting old rail lines to bicycling trails, or improving parking area for hiking, or putting together a historical walking or mobile trail system for visitors, for example;
3. The Town could also bolster their state mandated Conservation Commission by giving them the authority to accept responsibility and manage town owned land. The fact that they have not done so to date is testimony to who the town council wants to control how land will be utilized; and,
4. The town can put into place conservation easements on town owned land. The CEs would be held by a third party and would protect the biodiversity, the hunting and fishing, and all the natural resources that we love, forever.

I'm happy to discuss this further and provide additional testimony during the House hearing.



Paul A. Roselli
Burrillville Land Trust, president

The Burrillville Land Trust is an all volunteer, non-profit, USA IRS classified 501(c)(3) public charity, RI registered non-profit corporation, and private land trust in the Town of Burrillville. The land trust owns 230+ acres and has conservation easements on two properties totaling 36 acres. The Burrillville Land Trust recognizes the people who stewarded and lived on these lands long ago. The mission of the Burrillville Land Trust is to preserve and protect the rural character of the Town of Burrillville through education, advocacy and acquisition. The Land Trust operates independently of town government. All the land trust properties are managed by volunteers who love the forests, the hills, lakes, ponds and streams and all species that live on these lands. All of our fund raising efforts are strictly for acquisition, stewardship, education, and the work of the land trust.