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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
<b>H.B. 5254:</b> AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM AUTHORIZING MUNICIPALITIES TO IMPOSE A BUYER'S CONVEYANCE FEE ON REAL PROPERTY TO FUND THE PURCHASE AND STEWARDSHIP OF OPEN SPACE.	Support
<b>S.B. 237:</b> AN ACT DESIGNATING ROCKY TOP AND YORK HILL AS PROTECTED TRAPROCK RIDGES.	Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For nearly 125 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, forestry, and land conservation issues.

**CFPA strongly supports H.B. 5254** as a critical way to allow (but not require) towns to generate funds locally to (1) protect local open space, forest, and farmland; (2) remediate contaminated brownfields; or (3) conduct other environmental priorities such as removal of invasives, trail maintenance, or protecting water resources.

Without this bill, a municipality has few options to raise funds locally to protect open space -- increase the mill rate; authorize municipal bonding; or hold a bake sale. Increasing the mill rate incurs political backlash and is typically not dedicated to one purpose, authorizing municipal bonding typically has a long lead time that can limit a town's ability to respond quickly when lands are available, and bake sales are rarely adequate to the task. With the passage of H.B. 5254, a municipality would have another tool to raise funding by collecting a one-time fee from a new buyers of real estate in that municipality. In a sense, the new home buyer is investing both in their property, and in the maintenance of the quality of life that attracted them to that municipality in the first place.

It's important to note that this bill is flexible enough for each town to utilize it in a way that works best locally. The conveyance fee is "up to 1%" so it could be set at a lower rate; the floor of \$150,000 exempted from the conveyance fee could be raised to a higher level based upon the local real estate market; and there is flexibility in how dedicated funding could be for acquiring land, remediating it, or maintaining existing properties.

**CFPA also supports S.B. 237** which would add Rocky Top and York Hill to the list of traprock ridges eligible for protection under the Ridgeline Protection Act of 1995. This bill enables Hamden to pass local ordinances to regulate development activities within the ridgeline setback area defined in the statute, but does not mandate it. One technical point is that, according to the U.S. Geological Service's Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), Rocky Top and York Hill are the same place with Rocky Top officially being a variant of York Hill. So the bill should probably incorporate York Hill/Rocky Top as one entry on the traprock ridge list rather than two.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony, and I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.