

Public Policy Update for MLTC September 2017

State Public Policy

Personnel:

- State Representative Smitty Pignatelli (4th Berkshire district) was appointed as the chairman of the Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Environment. He replaced State Representative Gailanne Cariddi who passed away unexpectedly.
- State Representative Jeffrey Sánchez (Boston) was appointed as Chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means.
- Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs saw the departure of Ned Bartlett, Undersecretary for Energy and Environment. Katie Theoharides was appointed to a newly created position of Assistant Secretary for Climate

The Joint Committee on Revenue reported An Act Relative to Land Conservation Incentives H.3855 to the House Committee on Ways and Means. (Unfortunately, the Legislature ultimately decided not to include the measure as an outside section in the State Operating Budget.) The bill would:

- Raise the annual cap of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' (EEA) Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC) Program from \$2 million to \$5 million per year over a period of three year -- \$3 million in 2019, \$4 million in 2020, and \$5 million in 2021 (a combined total of credits for individuals and corporations).
- Amend the definition of "public or private conservation agency" which may receive donations of land subject to a conservation tax credit to include realty trusts organized for conservation purposes pursuant to Chapter 203 (please note that more than a third of land trusts in Massachusetts are organized as realty trusts).
- Provide a ten-year sunset.

The Trust for Public Land expects to complete in the late fall a feasibility study to **research new sources of revenue for land conservation** in partnership with The Trustees, Mass Audubon, TNC, MLTC, and AMC.

Legislative public hearings on land-related legislation:

- The Revenue Committee approved Community Preservation Act legislation that would increase the recording fees as a long-term solution (for the last three years the Legislature approved providing surplus revenue). The Legislature ultimately did not include these changes to CPA in the State Operating Budget
- No Net Loss (aka Public Lands Preservation Act) has had a public hearing and remains before the Environment Committee.

Climate Change Adaptation

In September 2016 Governor Baker issued Executive Order 569. More recently EEA established the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program (MVP) through and awarded over \$1 million in funding to 70 communities to undergo a stakeholder-based planning process called **Community Resilience Building (CRB)**. Through CRB, *in each community* a core team performs a climate change vulnerability assessment and designs an adaptation/resiliency plan with the help of a larger advisory team over the course of two workshops led by trained service providers. *Communities that develop plans through CRB receive favorable consideration for state conservation funding.* TNC has created a fact sheet that describes opportunities for land trusts to engage in the local CRB process.

The Executive Offices of Energy and Environmental Affairs and Public Safety and Security convened the first stakeholder meeting in July to lead the development and implementation of a ***statewide integrated and comprehensive climate adaptation plan***. EEA plans to hold stakeholder sessions to hear public input.

The Adaptation Coalition is advocating to codify and strengthen the Baker Administration's approach to climate change by enacting into law the ***Comprehensive Adaptation Management Plan***

Federal Public Policy

Federal Budget: Congress is expected to approve a Continuing Resolution that stabilizes funding for the through December 2017.

Farm Bill: House Agriculture Chairman Conaway (R-TX) has publicly stated he wants to finish the 2018 Farm Bill before the 2014 Farm Bill expires in September of 2018. The 2018 Farm Bill will be crafted under extremely challenging budgetary constraints. As with any major piece of legislation, funding (in total, additional above baseline, by program) will be a major issue during the 2018 Farm Bill debate and will drive the politics behind the bill. The ability of the Agriculture Committees to secure additional spending in 2018 is doubtful.

Conservation Funding Study: Harvard Forest plans to release a study, *Wildlands and Woodlands, Farmlands and Communities*, on September 19 that will report on the amount and rate of annual forest conversion in New England and federal and state land conservation funding.