

PHILIP B. SCOTT
GOVERNOR



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

June 12, 2023

The Honorable BetsyAnn Wrask
Clerk of the Vermont House of Representatives
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Ms. Wrask:

Today I'm allowing H.126, *An act relating to community resilience and biodiversity protection*, to become law without my signature.

I appreciate the General Assembly worked with my Administration to address the concerns I raised last year in my veto message regarding H.606, *An act relating to community resilience and biodiversity protection*. This bill changed in ways that attempt to better align with ongoing conservation work in Vermont.

Unfortunately, in the effort to achieve flexibility, this bill incorporates findings which muddy the purpose and uses definitions so broad and vague as to be virtually meaningless. Which led me to consider a veto because it could be read to mean anything to anybody.

Instead, I'm letting this bill go into law because this bill puts the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) in a stronger position to direct how state and federal conservation funding is targeted and prioritized in the future. ANR will oversee the efforts of the Vermont Housing Conservation Board (VHCB) as it works in partnership with ANR to develop inventories as well as strategy and implementation methods.

Importantly, ANR will be the clear lead in the effort to achieve our conservation goals with the understanding future growth is necessary and inevitable in Vermont.

This bill anticipates the need for housing and for the conservation plan to incorporate Smart Growth principles to ensure future conservation investment does not impede the buildout of areas the state has designated for growth. Balancing land protection and housing is core to the State's future and this bill will allow ANR to work closely with VHCB to ensure this critical balance in the planning process.

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Finally, ANR is positioned to interpret the bill's unusually unclear definitions, through rulemaking if necessary, to allow a mix of strategies to include permanent tools like land purchases and conservation easements, as well as other land protection mechanisms that help achieve the bill's goal of an ecologically functional and connected landscape such as the State's Current Use program and other innovative market-based conservation tools.

The bottom line is I'm allowing this bill to go into law because in this case, the Legislature has appropriately given this task to an Agency of the Executive Branch that will be accountable to Vermont's taxpayers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip B. Scott", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Philip B. Scott
Governor

PBS/kp