

VLCT TESTIMONY



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To: Members of the House Ways and Means Committee
From: Karen Horn, Director, Public Policy and Advocacy
Date: April 25, 2018
Re: S.260, Clean Water Authority

Thank you for the opportunity to testify again on S.260.

Along with diverse private, municipal, and environmental groups, we support legislation this year to establish a Clean Water Authority that is funded in an amount sufficient to hire an executive director who will work with a board to develop the framework for implementation. The board and an executive director would be charged with putting in place the mechanisms to ensure the authority:

- is accountable for and protects fees that are assessed by the legislature and that the authority collects
- works with all sectors bearing responsibility for reducing stormwater and phosphorus discharges
- combines and simplifies grant and loan regulations
- makes cost effective investments based on a priority system that finances projects across all sectors and that achieve the most significant improvements in water quality first and
- realizes clean water achievements in compliance with TMDLs and state legislation.

We know that the committee has decided against endorsing the concept of an authority. We understand that a per parcel fee or tiered impervious surface fee is under consideration now. There are models for determining appropriate payments based on use of a parcel and size of impervious surface that have been implemented in Burlington, South Burlington, Williston, and Colchester. I am sending a copy of Williston's Stormwater Fee Manual to the committee with this testimony.

John Adams of the Vermont Center for Geographic Information, testified on April 17 that they would have statewide parcel data available by the end of 2019. They have done tremendous work to date, and we believe their projection.

One of the other questions that has arisen is if a per parcel or impervious surface fee is assessed, and there is no authority in place, how should that fee be collected? I need to be clear. Municipalities are not prepared to collect a new separate parcel based fee.

We do not find that it is either a simple or inexpensive matter to add this obligation to local governments. Certainly it would be less expensive for the *state* if municipalities were required to collect such a fee. It would not be inexpensive for municipalities. Municipalities send out property tax bills to those properties that are subject to the property tax. Approximately 10,800 are not, and new bills would need to be generated for those exempt properties. Would separate bills from the property tax bill or bills need to be generated for all parcels? Would people understand what they were paying if their bill had an education property tax, a municipal property tax and a parcel fee (which is not a "tax")? What happens in the event of delinquencies or partial payments? These are just a few of the questions that would need to be resolved before any such system was implemented.

I am also forwarding to the committee the memo we sent last August relating to the cost of administering a per parcel fee based on current experience.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.