



Legislative & Rules Committee – Board of Representatives

Phil Berns, Chair

Sean Boeger, Vice-Chair

Special Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes

Date: Monday, October 27, 2025
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Place: *This meeting was held remotely.*

The Legislative & Rules Committee met as indicated above. Present were Chair Berns, Vice Chair Boeger, and Committee member Reps. Cottrell, Fedeli, Matheny, Pierre-Louis, Sherwood, and Vandervoort.

Absent/excused were Rep. Blank.

Also present were:

- Ex-officio Reps. Camporeale, de la Cruz, Gilbride, Goldberg, Ley and Tomas.
- City staff members Dana Lee and Mike Toma, City attorneys; Carmen Hughes, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Gregory Stackpole, Tax Assessor
- Melanie Hollas, Chair, Parks & Recreation Commission; Nette Compton, President & CEO, Mill River Park Collaborative; Annie Hornish, Connecticut Director of State Affairs, Humane World for Animals
- Members of the public.

Chair Berns called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and opened the first public hearing for Item No. 1 (LR31.108) at 7:09 p.m.

Item No.	Description	Committee Action
1. LR31.108	ORDINANCE; <u>for public hearing and final adoption;</u> regarding Veterans Tax Exemption 09/04/2025 – Submitted by Mayor Simmons 09/30/2025 – Approved by Committee 8-0-0	APPROVED BY COMMITTEE VIA UNANIMOUS VOICE VOTE

We received testimony from Kieran Edmondson (written and read into the record), Stephen Fischer, Thomas Bouchard, Dave Adams and Seth Lapine. Most speakers supported the ordinance, but some expressed a desire to see an amendment to provide broader coverage and qualification guidelines for veterans with disabilities by using the current language in the Connecticut statute instead of the current draft ordinance language. Also brought out was more detail regarding the various veteran disability ratings and classifications from the VA (Veterans Administration). The public hearing was paused at 7:26 p.m. to allow speakers who were experiencing technical difficulties time to resolve them, and was eventually officially closed at 8:00 p.m.

Rep. Fedeli moved for approval and Rep. Vandervoort seconded. Discussion: Some Board members raised questions about timelines for passage of an amendment and levels of disability covered under the ordinance amendment. Tax Assessor Stackpole explained a proposed expansion of the existing veterans' tax exemption program to cover a larger group of veterans in relation to what the state statute permitting municipalities to do did and did not permit (how far back the proposed ordinance amendment could be applied retroactively and what types of veterans can receive the benefit). Others stated that due to the limited time left for the 31st Board any proposed amendments should be considered at a later time, and the focus should be on passing the proposed ordinance amendment as it is currently written as a way to give some relief now to at least most of Stamford's qualifying veterans and the next Board could make the changes to the future. Members were asked to submit any questions they may have to Mr. Stackpole so he can research any additional information needed.

The item was approved via unanimous voice vote (Chair Berns, Vice Chair Boeger and Reps. Cottrell, Fedeli, Matheny, Pierre-Louis, Sherwood, and Vandervoort approved).

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| <p>2. <u>LR31.106</u> ORDINANCE <u>for public hearing and final adoption;</u>
Amending Chapter 227 of the Stamford Code of Ordinances
to Establish a Comprehensive Tree Preservation and Urban
Forestry Program
08/06/2025 – Submitted by Reps. Sherwood, de la Cruz and
Strain
08/27/2025 – Proposed amendment approved by Committee
6-0-2
08/27/2025 – Approved as amended for public hearing by
Committee 8-0-0
09/02/2025 – Approved for publication via unanimous voice
vote
09/29/2025 – Public Hearing held & Amended by
Committee 7-1-0
09/29/2025 – Approved as amended for 2nd public hearing
8-0-0</p> | <p>APPROVED BY
COMMITTEE
VIA
UNANIMOUS
VOICE VOTE</p> |
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Chair Berns opened the first public hearing for Item No. 2 (LR31.106) at 8:03 p.m. We received oral testimony from Fern Galperin, Chris Donnelly, Diana Kolaj, Michael Moore, Dave Adams and both oral and written testimony from Anne Cheng, David Michel and Robin Stein (written and read into the record). Speakers supported the ordinance, emphasizing the importance and irreplaceable nature of legacy trees to the environment, the ecological and health benefits they provide for the city, and the real-life application and benefits of the proposed Urban Forester and Tree Warden roles based on his professional experience as an urban forestry professional. Some speakers stated they had some concern regarding the proposed Tree Commission's. The public hearing was closed at 8:29 p.m.

After the public hearing Rep. Sherwood moved to approve Rep. Boeger seconded. Attorney Lee was available to answer questions regarding the language about the Tree Commission in the proposed ordinance. Discussion: Some Board members supported the proposed ordinance; many for many of the same reasons as were heard during the public hearing, such as the importance of the trees for air quality and flood prevention were discussed. Other Board members stated some constituents expressed concerns about government over-reach and telling people what they can and can't do on their property. They also expressed concerns about the fine structure in general. There was discussion about the merits of some amendments but approving the ordinance as written as a starting point prevailed. Additional discussion described other municipalities (both in Connecticut and nationally) with similar legislation's tree regulations, how this proposed ordinance would tie into the city's Land Use goals, and how such legislation could assist the city with qualifying for additional grant funding for trees.

The item committee unanimously approved by voice vote (Chair Berns, Vice Chair Boeger and Reps. Cottrell, Fedeli, Matheny, Pierre-Louis, Sherwood, and Vandervoort voting).

Under a suspension of the Rules (Late Submissions):

A motion to suspend the rules was made, seconded, and was approved via unanimous voice vote (Chair Berns, Vice Chair Boeger and Reps. Cottrell, Fedeli, Matheny, Pierre-Louis, Sherwood, and Vandervoort approved).

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| 3. <u>LR31.072</u> ORDINANCE ; <u>for final adoption</u> ; Regulating the Sale of Dogs and Cats in Pet Stores
02/07/24 – Submitted by Reps. Sherwood and Camporeale
02/27/24 – Held by Committee
04/30/24 – Held by Committee
05/13/24 – Moved to Pending
02/24/25 – Approved for Publication by Committee 8-0-0
03/25/25 – Public Hearing held & Recommitted to Steering 9-0-0
04/14/25 – Moved To Pending | APPROVED BY
COMMITTEE
6-1-1 |
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Rep. Boeger moved for approval of Item No. 3 (LR31.072) and (Rep. Vandervoort seconded. Ms. Hornish, President of the Humane World for Animals (formerly known as the Humane Society and herein after "HWA") read a prepared statement of the organization's support on the proposed ordinance. The statement explained why this proposed ordinance is so important to pass, as it would help stop the puppy mill to pet shop pipeline by banning such sales, why the organization feels it is important to pass such a law in Connecticut now [particularly as New York City's recently passed such restrictions pushing unethical puppy mills and pet shops to redirect sales into neighboring states and cities, including Stamford], and how it would be in the best interest of the city of Stamford to also have such legislation. The organization's attorney's

position is that Connecticut municipalities already have the power to pass such bans that this proposed ordinance is legally sound because it is properly derived from municipal police powers granted under Connecticut general statute 7-148, specifically the legislative intent section. Eight other states and over 500 other municipalities across the nation already have such laws prohibiting the sale of dogs, cats and sometimes rabbits, in pet shops on the books. The statement ended with the organization's support of the proposed ordinance and a pledge of their organization's attorneys standing ready to assist the city by providing them with legal support in defense of the ordinance if challenged.

Attorney Toma reported and committee members discussed the recent failure of a proposed state bill to expressly allow municipalities the power to do this effectively disagreeing with HWA's attorneys. He further reported that the city's legal opinion is that the state currently does not grant municipalities the power to regulate pet stores in this manner – that the state implicitly precludes the proposed ordinance on this issue.

At about this point in the meeting Chair Berns asked Vice Chair Boeger to take over chairing the meeting as he felt he could be helpful and contribute more freely to this discussion if he were not also chairing this part of the meeting. Vice Chair Boeger thereafter chaired the rest of the discussion on this matter and relinquished the chair immediately after the concluding vote on it.

Asked what the law department thought the odds of success in litigation challenging the ordinance, Attorney Toma said 20%. He also mentioned one or more conversations with an attorney at the state Department of Agriculture who had all but assured him they would immediately litigate to oppose this ordinance were it to pass (several representatives pointed out that this would be extremely unpopular politically and that someone higher up would no doubt quickly put a stop to what would effectively be the state litigating to permit puppy mills and unethical pet stores to operate in Stamford).

Questions were raised as to what level of legal assistance HWA could provide as well as whether such support (or that of a volunteer law firm offering to take on the defense *pro bono*) would be legally/ethically be able to provide if the Board passed this ordinance. Chair Berns twice requested that the Law Department make every effort to provide an answer to these questions and that Ms. Hornish determine if HWA might seek such a volunteer *pro bono* firm (preferably one big enough to take on significant litigation were the matter to come to that).

After the discussion period, Rep. Berns moved to recommit Item No. 3 (LR31.072) and Rep. Pierre-Louis seconded. This failed via roll call vote of 1-7-0 (Rep. Pierre-Louis in favor; Chair Berns, Vice Chair Boeger and Reps. Cottrell, Fedeli, Matheny, Sherwood, and Vandervoort against).

Subsequently a motion to approve was made, seconded and approved via roll call vote of 6-1-1 (Chair Berns, Vice Chair Boeger and Reps. Cottrell, Matheny, Sherwood, and Vandervoort approved; Rep. Fedeli was against; Rep. Pierre-Louis abstained).

Chair Berns adjourned the meeting at 11:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil Berns, Chair

This meeting is available on video ([Part 1](#)) & ([Part 2](#)).