

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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Issue 5

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WEEK 5

WATER QUALITY

The House Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife committee continued the discussion on clean water. This week the committee focused on the more than 30 revenue sources that were laid out in the Clean Water Report from Treasurer Pearce.

Of interest to the committee were the parcel fee options. Treasurer Pearce offered four different scenarios:

Revenue Source	Annual Amount
\$50 Annual Flat fee	\$16.7 million
\$3 Per Acre fee	\$15 million
Impervious surface tiered Acreage fee	\$18 million
Impervious surface tiered Parcel fee	\$18 million

Right now the state is working on creating an up-to-date GIS database of parcel boundaries. Parcels will include SPAN information that will allow the data to be linked to the grand list. The state is continuing to update the Orthophoto Program that will have a minimum 30cm resolution and accuracy within 73.4cm meeting NSSDA accuracy. The final piece to this is the LIDAR mapping. LIDAR is a remote sensing technology that produces elevation models of sufficient resolution to support high precision river, stream and unnamed tributary mapping.

Utilizing all of this technology would allow the state to determine the impervious surface of each parcel in the state. Date for this entire mapping project to be completed is late 2019 or early 2020.

The House Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife committee will continue to take testimony next week on other suggestions from the Clean Water Report. The committee will then come up with their recommendations to pass on to House Ways and Means committee where the majority of the work of crafting a “water funding bill” will take place.

WAGES

The House General Housing and Military Affairs committee took testimony this week on bills, **H-64** and **H-93**, both raising the minimum wage to \$15.00 an hour. **H-64** requires \$15 an hour by 2019 and **H-93** requires it by 2022.

In 2014 the minimum wage was increased to \$10.00 an hour to start in 2017 and after that a series of stepped increases (roughly 50 cents per year) until 2018 with an annual cost of living adjustment thereafter. Much of the discussion was what impact this would have on small businesses and the challenge businesses are having in finding good employees.

With all of these bills there are no exemptions from the hourly wage.

There will be a Public Hearing Thursday February 9th in room 11, at the statehouse, from 7:00 to 8:30pm on a wage increase.

ATRAZINE

The House Agriculture and Forestry committee, the House Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife committee, the Senate Agriculture committee and Senate Natural Resources committees will hold a joint hearing in room 11 at 9:00 on Thursday February 9th to discuss Atrazine.

FROM THE LAKE CHAMPLAIN REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR UPDATE

A working group of labor union and business association representatives continues to work on changes to Vermont's workers' compensation and unemployment insurance laws as they relate to independent or "freelance" contractors. One of the Chamber's top priorities for this legislative biennium, we feel strongly that Vermont's laws need to be modernized in order to support those who choose to go into business for themselves and allow employers to contract for their services. Given the long, and often messy path, this issue has travelled we are hopeful that continued collaboration may yield a positive compromise. In the interim, we are interested in hearing from members about whether your businesses utilize any freelance or sole proprietors or if you currently work as a sole proprietor.

PAID SICK LEAVE

Thursday afternoon leaders of various organizations and legislators held a press conference to call attention to a bill that would create a paid family and medical leave insurance system. The bill would direct Vermont to develop a state run family and

medical leave insurance program for all public and private sector employees. The insurance would cover things such as pregnancy, serious illness, or non-work related injury of the employer or a close family member. In order to receive benefits, a person must have paid into the program for six of the past 12 months and the maximum duration of the benefit is 12 weeks.

The paid family and medical leave insurance program would cover 100% wage replacement up to a cap of two times the livable wage as calculated by the Vermont Joint Fiscal Office. The program would be financed through a 0.93% payroll deduction divided between the employee and employer at a rate of 0.465% each. Sole proprietors and self-employed people may opt-in to the program provided they pay both the employer and employee shares of the payroll deduction.

POSSIBLE DR. DYNASAUR EXPANSION

Thursday the House Committee on Ways & Means heard testimony from Andrew Dick of the RAND Corporation. He was commissioned by the State to do study on the benefits, effects, and funding mechanisms for expanding the Dr. Dynasaur health care program. The potential proposal would expand the program to young adults up to the age of 25 with no income limit, as opposed to the original Dr. Dynasaur program that provides health care to youth at low to no cost up to a household income of 317% of the federal poverty level. The study looked at three possible funding streams for the program. They include increasing the state income tax, a payroll tax on employers, and a business enterprise tax modeled after New Hampshire's business enterprise tax.

BILLS

H-177 An act relating to the moisture content of firewood sold in Vermont

This bill proposes to require the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation to adopt rules regarding the moisture content of firewood sold in the State.

H-191 An act relating to the recalculation of a town's education tax liability after a reduction in property tax values

This bill proposes to lower the threshold for towns seeking reimbursement from the State after a property tax valuation is lowered as a result of an appeal.

S-51 An act relating to renewable energy goals for Vermont's total energy consumption

This bill proposes to establish a statutory goal that, by 2050, 90 percent of Vermont's total energy consumption be from renewable energy. It also proposes to establish additional supporting goals and to require State plans that affect energy to recommend measures to achieve these goals.

S-58 An act relating to creating an education property tax that is adjusted by income for all taxpayers

This bill proposes to create an education property tax system where the amount of tax due is adjusted by income for all taxpayers.

S-66 An act relating to a cap and trade program for greenhouse gas emissions caused by transportation, heating, and other energy use

This bill proposes to enable Vermont to participate in a multijurisdictional cap and trade program for greenhouse gas emissions caused by transportation, heating, cooling, and ventilation.

S-73 An act relating to the Vermont Commission on Employee Misclassification

This bill proposes to create an interagency commission to investigate, evaluate, and address the negative impacts from employee misclassification in Vermont on workers' compensation rates, unemployment insurance contributions, and State tax revenues, and to recommend changes to Vermont's workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, tax, and other laws to improve the clarity and consistency of the laws relating to employee classification. This bill also proposes to permit the Attorney General to enforce complaints of employee misclassification under the workers' compensation and unemployment insurance laws.

Below is the link to the Vermont Legislative website
Legislature.vermont.gov

EVENTS OF INTEREST

18th Annual Vermont Dairy Producers Conference
Tuesday February 21, 2017

8:00 to 4:00

Sheraton Burlington Hotel and Conference Center
Register online at **vermontdairyproducers.com**

**20th Anniversary of the 2 + 2 Program
Dairy Reception
Thursday March 30th, 2017
4:00 to 6:00
Cedar Creek Room
At the Statehouse**

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Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, staying together is success”

– Henry Ford

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