



FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 4, 2022

CONTINUING TECHNICAL EDUCATION DISCUSSED IN HOUSE COMMERCE

Members of the House Commerce Committee heard from a number of groups, asking them to consider findings ways to reduce the stigma that CTE tracks are somewhat less than traditional college-bound education. Suggestions were made to consider incorporating middle school with Technical Centers to raise awareness of options. All witnesses noted there is currently an access issue as well as capacity issues for CTE. AOE representatives noted there is some money in the AOE budget to reimburse sending schools for transportation costs, but it is not full reimbursement.

Chair Marcotte noted they are working with the House Education Committee to make some changes in CTE and may invite parents and students to testify in coming weeks.

S.277 INTRODUCED IN SENATE TRANSPORTATION ON FEEBATES

Senator Mark MacDonald walked through S.277, a bill that would set up a self-funded system of pleasure car registration fees and rebates based on vehicle efficiency. The bill would increase registration fees for higher emission vehicles at the DMV and would facilitate a credit for registration relief for those who purchase low to zero emission vehicles. Senator Mazza, chair of the Committee, noted they must find a solution for the loss of the gas tax due to promotion of electric vehicles but is not sure this is it. He will ask DMV to come in and testify about the feasibility of the proposal.

S.166 DELAYED IN SENATE JUDICIARY

One minor change and then further comment by Legislative Counsel sent the Broadband bill into consideration for next week rather than markup and vote. There was a question about whether this language (Broadband site cleanup) had to do with transmission lines only or would affect distribution lines. Chair Sears has asked representatives from VELCO to testify on Tuesday about any implications.

PUBLIC HEARING ON FISH AND WILDLIFE BILLS NEXT WEEK

The Senate Natural Resources Committee will host a public hearing on Thursday, February 10, 2022, from 5:30 to 7:30 virtually. The focus will be on three bills:

- S.281 hunting coyotes with dogs
- S.129 transferring rulemaking from the Fish and Wildlife Board to the Department of Fish and Wildlife
- S.201 prohibiting the use of leghold traps

This meeting will be streamed on YouTube (the link will be on the Senate Natural Resources Committee webpage). Written testimony can be sent to testimony@leg.state.vt.us (please indicate which bill number you are writing about). Anyone interested in testifying in person (zoom) needs to fill out a request form – you can find it by googling the Vermont Legislature, click on Committees, click on Senate Natural Resources and at the bottom of the left hand column, you will find the link with the form. Any other questions should be directed to Mike Ferrant, mferrant@leg.state.vt.us.

H.606 BIODIVERSITY

House Natural Resources heard continued testimony on this bill, which requires increased percentages of conserved land by 2050. Several environmental groups support the proposal but suggested that it include a broader stakeholder process and that working land enterprises should be included. The Committee did not discuss this suggestion but may prior to markup. The Nature Conservancy was supportive of this language but the Vermont Forest Products Association was not.

S.268 INTRODUCED IN SENATE AGRICULTURE

The Senate Agriculture Committee asked Legislative Counsel to walk through the Right To Farm language, S.268, even though the bill has been assigned to Senate Judiciary. Senator Starr is trying to get possession of the bill with no luck to date. Senators Pearson and Pollina questioned what exactly was this new language trying to resolve, although Senators Starr, Collamore and Parent thought the changes could be important. At this point, until the Agriculture Committee actually “owns” the bill, it doesn’t look like much more discussion will take place.

H.626 CONTINUED DISCUSSION

House Agriculture continues to bring in witnesses on both sides of the issue; as you may recall, H.626 proposes to prohibit the use of neonicotinoid pesticides until rules are adopted; failure to adopt rules will result in a permanent ban of their use, and farmers would not be able to use any neonics after July 1, 2022, while rulemaking is occurring. Representatives from the beekeeping industry, chemical companies and VAAFM have all presented their viewpoints. The Committee is trying to be supportive of all types of agriculture but is finding it difficult to solve the issue with a compromise. This bill will be an agenda topic for the newly formed Ag Innovation Board which the Legislature voted into existence last year and takes over the responsibilities of the Vermont Pesticide Council. The AIB will be meeting the end of February.

H.610 IN HOUSE AGRICULTURE

This bill is a request by VTrans to exempt any regional airport expansion from having to mitigate prime ag soils as a criteria of an Act 250 permit. Testimony from VTrans and the manager of Highgate noted this was particularly necessary in the Franklin Airport scenario, as there may be a developer ready to purchase land across from the current airport runway and ag soils mitigation may slow or halt the process. Unfortunately, the land in question is the current site of the Franklin Field Days, which raised other issues for the committee (who is very supportive of the fairs). Further discussion on this language will take place next week.

VAAFM AND CAPITAL BUDGET IN HOUSE INSTITUTIONS

Agency of Ag staff presented their capital requests for clean water and food and markets. The Capital bill includes funding for both FY22 and FY23 in one bill. It includes over \$3.4 million in water quality funding for this year and \$2.6 million for FY23; most of this money will be swapped with ARPA funding.

The Best Management Practices and Capital Equipment Assistance Program will receive \$2.4 million from ARPA; the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program will receive \$200,000. Through ANR, the Agency receives \$3.5 million in FY22 for clean water projects.

Chair Emmons asked staff to return with an overview of what money has been spent to date and where it is allocated in the future; she also wanted to know if VAAFM had capacity to "get the money out the door." Eight engineers are currently on staff and can also receive assistance from USDA engineers.

HOUSEKEEPING BILLS IN AG COMMITTEES

Legislative Counsel Michael O'Grady walked through the 11 page Senate bill and the 21 page House bill; both contain "asks" from the Agency of Agriculture that clean up or clarify language passed in the last session. Hemp, certifications, clarification of on-farm accessory businesses and other considerations will be worked through in both committees; these bills are later "swapped" and compromises are reached by the end of the session. Both these bills are listed on the Senate Ag webpage under drafts dated 2/4/22.

FARM FIRST WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Farm First, a Vermont-based public program providing support and resources to farmers, knows that you are in a unique position to help each other endure the stressors of farm life and learn to thrive together.

They are excited to announce the launch of the Peer Support Network for Vermont Farmers. Please join them on Thursday, February 10, 2022, from 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. to meet and connect with other Vermont farmers, learn about becoming a trained Peer Support Farmer, or share your opinion on what farmers need.

For more information or to register, contact Leanne at leannep@farmfirst.org or call 802-277-5060. You can also check out www.farmfirst.org/events online.

That's it for this week – thanks for supporting Vermont Farm Bureau!

From the team – Bridget, Jill, Gerry, Joe and Jackie

