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AND FORESTRY

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MEMORANDUM

To: Representative Mary Hooper. House Committee on Appropriations

From: Rep. Carolyn Partridge, House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry

Date: February 16, 2021

Subject: Comments on Provisions in the Governor's Proposed FY2022 State Budget

The House Agriculture and Forestry Committee wants to thank you for the opportunity to offer our thoughts regarding the FY2022 budget. We also want to thank you for your hard work, and to honor the hard decisions you must make.

We support the FY2022 budget for the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, including the addition of a new meat inspector in the Agency's budget to support the needed growth in the meat processing industry. We appreciate the continuing support for stipends for Vermont Fairs and Field Days; the 2+2 Program; Farm to Plate; Farm to School; the Natural Resources Conservation Council; Local Food Grants; and of course the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative.

We strongly support the Governor's proposal to use \$3 million in one-time funds for the Working Lands Enterprise Fund. The money will be going to an organization that has been critical to the goal of sustaining the agriculture and forestry sectors during the pandemic, and has a proven track record of strategic investment in our working landscape. Looking to the future, given the huge demonstrated success of the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, we would support an increase to the base funding of this program from \$594,000 to \$1.5 million.

We support the FY2022 budget for the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation. This department has done an extraordinary job of keeping the outdoors accessible to both residents and visitors alike.

We also support the Governor's recommend of \$4.52 million for the Agricultural Water Quality Special Fund and \$3.43 million in the Capital Bill for AAFM Water Quality Grants.

We support the Governor's recommend of \$20 million in one time funding for FY2022 for Vermont Housing and Conservation Board with some additional language that would provide added flexibility, and would request the following changes highlighted in red:

(12) \$20,000,000 to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to be used primarily for affordable housing initiatives. Up to \$5,000,000 of this amount may be used for conservation projects and Farm and Forest Viability Program activities that support the rural economy.

Should there, by some miracle, be additional funds available, we request that up to \$500,000 be appropriated to the Farm to School Program. This program has been instrumental in getting food to our kids during the pandemic, and has the capacity to use extra funds in well-coordinated statewide programs to feed our children.

Additionally, for future planning purposes we recommend that when any new federal stimulus funds arrive in Vermont that some of these funds be prioritized to support the rebuilding of Vermont's restaurant industry.