

SUBJECT: Granting authorities to The Woodlands Township

COMMITTEE: County Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Coleman, Farias, Burrows, Romero, Spitzer, Stickland, Wu

1 nay — Tinderholt

1 absent — Schubert

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 15 — 31-0, on local and uncontested calendar

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 4149*)

For — Howard Cohen and Miles McKinney, The Woodlands Township;
(*Registered, but did not testify*: Rob Eissler, The Woodlands Township)

Against — None

DIGEST: SB 2020 would allow The Woodlands Township to merge or consolidate with a qualified association to carry out certain functions in order to promote business retention, sustain employment, and prevent substandard and blighted housing conditions.

The bill would consider the Township as an “endorsing municipality” for the purpose of authority over certain economic actions. This would include allowing the Township to seek financial assistance for qualifying events from the Events Trust Fund. The bill also would entitle the Township to receive a certified appraisal roll, an estimate of the taxable value of property in the district, and assistance in determining property values in the manner authorized for municipalities, including the requirement that the appraiser provide the appraisal roll by July 25 of each year.

The bill would authorize The Woodlands Township to:

- engage in or contract with another person to perform activities to

further transportation and traffic purposes of the Township, including any work on a rail system;

- apply for and receive state and federal transportation funding, including grants or other assistance, and carry out functions and obligations associated with the funding;
- contract for an improvement to a highway on the Township's boundary and consent to a tax imposed by another municipality under provisions in the Transportation Code;
- adopt and enforce rules regarding access to and use of the Township's transportation projects, facilities, programs, and services; and
- charge a fare, fee, rate, toll, or other charge for the use of a Township transportation project, facility, program, or service.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2015.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 2020 would provide The Woodlands Township in Montgomery County with necessary additional powers. The Township is the largest urban population in Montgomery County, with more than 100,000 residents. Although the Township is not a city, such a large population creates many of the same challenges that cities have, and the Township should have similar authority to deal with those problems.

The bill would allow the Township to receive tax rolls by July 25, which would allow for appraisals to be sent out earlier and for the Township to prepare a budget earlier. The authority provided under the bill that would allow the Township to establish a rail system is no different than the authority enjoyed by any home rule city. Establishing rail would not be required but merely permitted. The bill also would help the city fund its boating transportation system. The system is no longer self-sufficient, and imposing a ridership fee would be necessary to make it self-sufficient, not for the purpose of raising extra revenue for the Township.

OPPONENTS

SB 2020 would authorize additional tolls on the Township's residents to

SAY: pay for the boating transportation system, which is funded now by the Township and some federal dollars received for transportation. The bill also inappropriately would allow rail to be established in the Township.