

**Natural Heritage, Open Space, and Watershed Land Acquisition  
Review Board**

Regular Meeting (via Zoom/teleconference)

January 14, 2021

Minutes

**Board members present:** Karen Burnaska, Joe Gresko, Eric Hammerling (Co-Chair), Walker Holmes, Amy Paterson (Co-Chair), Elanah Sherman, John Triana, Joe Welsh (All by Zoom, except for Elanah, who attended by phone.)

**DEEP representatives:** Alyson Clarke, Nicole Lugli, Mason Trumble

**Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order at 10:33 AM.

Amy informed the Board that member Dan Morley had sent his regrets because of the recent deaths of his father and stepmother.

**Approval of Minutes of Meetings of the Review Board on December 10, 17, and 23**

On a motion by Amy, seconded by Karen, the Minutes of all three meetings were unanimously approved (with an abstention by Elanah), pending consideration of corrections by Nicole.

**DEEP Staff Updates**

Status of 2020 OSWA Grant Awards:

In answer to Eric's question, Mason said that award announcements would be made as soon as possible. He offered to provide the Board leadership a 'heads up' one week in advance of the announcement.

Status of 2021 OSWA Grant Round:

~ Budget Concerns and Communication: Mason opened the discussion by commenting on the uncertainties of the next budget season. Amy asked if the uncertainty extends to the \$7,000,000 bond allocation already approved; Amy also asked if the quarterly CIA (Community Investment Act) allocations would not be sufficient to assure funding for the next grant round. Mason responded that, with only the CIA funding, the OSWA budget would be extremely tight. He suggested announcing the uncertainties on the DEEP web page and communicating them to applicants.

In response to Mason's suggestion, Amy cautioned that a pessimistic announcement could have an adverse effect on applicants, possibly sowing confusion and insecurity. Eric added that such an announcement could, if not carefully worded, imply that CIA funding is at risk. He added that an overly pessimistic announcement could keep significant projects from moving forward.

Walker remarked that the availability of State grants to municipalities is a confidence-building element in project development. John Triana added that the prospect of adequate funding is “the carrot in front of the horse,” moving projects forward. Karen commented that, from a municipal standpoint, assurance of some State funding creates both credibility and continuity.

Eric and Mason concluded this discussion by agreeing that messaging should set expectations realistically but without alarm, emphasizing availability (and stability) of CIA funds, with possible addition of bonded State money.

~ Compliance: Regarding compliance issues, Eric remarked on the twin goals of achieving compliance and closing projects. One corrective method, discussed at previous meetings, is a reduction in the grant amount unless compliance issues are corrected within a 90-day period. Mason commented on the importance of public access as a significant compliance issue, compliance in this regard including clear and well-placed signage. Nicole said she would support strengthening the language around public access in the application for the next funding round (and added that she would like a full discussion on application revisions at another meeting). Joe W confirmed the importance of good access in this time of increased use of and need for open space. Elanah suggested that, when appropriate, public access concerns include attention to the disability-related requirements of the Connecticut State Building Code and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

~ Caps: Eric suggested that caps of \$100,000 – \$200,000 be applied to Urban Green projects, thus freeing up some money for OSWA grants. (He noted that this cap would still enable higher funding than in previous grant rounds.) Mason expressed concern that the cap proposed for Urban Green projects is much less than that (\$500,000) proposed for OSWA. On a related note, Walker stated that it may be valuable for Urban Green applications to require itemization that would reveal whether or not the applicant is requesting money for park construction (which is not covered by Urban Green funding).

Amy thanked DEEP staff for their willingness to engage in candid discussion of Review Board issues. She added that a future meeting should include time to discuss possible changes to Urban Green project criteria.

## **Old Business**

Preparation of Connecticut’s 2021-2025 Green Plan:

Tabled

Governor’s Council on Climate Change update/next steps:

Tabled

2021 Review Board Meeting Schedule:

Amy suggested that the Board change the meeting schedule from bimonthly to monthly. This suggestion will be discussed at the next meeting.

**Adjournment:**

On a motion by Joe G, seconded by Karen, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 12:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Elanah Sherman, Secretary

**Next meeting: Thursday, February 11, 2021 from 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM**