

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

Regular Meeting (via Zoom/teleconference)

February 10, 2022

## Minutes

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

**DEEP representatives:** Allyson Clarke, Property Agent; Andrew Hoskins, Chief of Staff

**Guest:** Sylvie Boucher, Sandy Breslin Conservation Fellow, Connecticut Land Conservation Council; Eric Lindquist, OPM (attending at the request of Dan Morley)

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Eric called the meeting to order at 10:31 AM.

### **Approval of January 13, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

On a motion by Karen, seconded by Amy, the Minutes were unanimously approved.

### **DEEP Staff Updates:**

Status of '21 OSWA/UGCG applications under review and awaiting awards

Andrew reported the following numbers:

- Available balance: \$18.4M in allocated OSWA funds and \$3.9M in CIA for a total of \$22.3M
- Unspent funds: \$14.9M in previously committed, unspent funds going back to 2015
- 2021 OSWA and UGCG applicant funding totals: Full approved cost of \$11.4M for all requests; 65% reduction equals \$7.6M
- Existing, unallocated bond authorizations: \$17M, with an additional proposed \$10M in FY '23, for a total of \$27M in future bonding.

Andrew added that DEEP is eager to announce the next round.

A discussion of the DEEP budget followed Andrew's report. Eric announced that the budget includes \$25M for outdoor

recreation/state parks. In answer to a question by Elanah, Eric said that funding for accessibility improvements are included in the budget.

Andrew reported that the budget includes 53 new positions (some state funded, some funded by the federal government). He added that IT positions removed from DEEP have been transferred to DAS. Regarding hiring for LAM, Andrew said two environmental analyst candidates are currently under review for two positions, and that an Office Director will replace Nicole. He expects that hiring decisions will be made within six weeks. Andrew added that a paralegal will also be joining LAM.

In response to a concern expressed by Eric, Andrew said that DAS and OPM are trying to streamline hiring so that it keeps up with the flow of retirements.

## **Business**

### Update from OSWA/UGCG Working Group

Amy shared a screen that showed four proposed recommendations on the UGCG program, summarized below:

- 1) Administrative recommendation: Transfer community garden development/enhancement to DoAg, leaving greenspace restoration and park development in DEEP. Elanah expressed the importance of ensuring that DoAg absorb the current awareness at DEEP of civil rights protections for people with disabilities in the construction and alteration of community gardens.
- 2) Administrative recommendation: Utilize LWCF stateside funds and Urban Forestry programs to enhance UGCG program. (Walker will provide information to Andrew on how other states implement LWCF stateside.)
- 3) Combination administrative/statutory/legislative recommendations: Allow UGCG funds to be used for acquisition (statutory) OR allow for urban and/or non-traditional acquisition projects to be submitted under OSWA (administrative, per current agency trend). In regard to the latter, increase funding for OSWA program to ensure the budget includes adequate dollars to cover increased costs (legislative). Work with DEEP to develop two-track application process that will avoid 'apples to oranges' ranking. Linda expressed enthusiasm for expanding UGCG program through OSWA, adding that people don't

- appreciate the value of open space when they can't access it. (Linda also pointed out that the expense of urban property is a complicating factor.) Eric mentioned that implementation of these proposals will require more administrative resources.
- 4) Statutory recommendation: Allow nonprofits to directly apply for UGCG funding. Joe G advised that this effort be delayed until 2023 and committed to making it a priority.

### Green Plan

Andrew said he has no information on progress toward hiring a seasonal dedicated staff member.

### Plan for 2021 Annual Report (due February 15)

Eric asked that the next Report acknowledge the work of the Review Board.

Allyson noted that DEEP has not issued an Annual Report since the one that covered 2019.

### Other

Tim shared the good news that Highland reauthorizations are on track with no negative changes. Eric thanked Tim for his Highlands advocacy.

Joe G announced that House Bill 5039, generated by the Governor's Office, addresses air pollution caused by medium- and heavy-duty vehicles. Amy voiced appreciation for Joe's vigilance on this issue.

### **Public Comment**

No public comment

### **Adjournment**

With no motions, the meeting adjourned at 11:49 AM.

Respectfully submitted, Elanah Sherman, Secretary

**Next meeting: The date of the next meeting was not announced.**