

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

Regular Meeting (via Zoom)

March 9, 2023

Minutes

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

DEEP representatives: Allyson Clark, Property Agent; Andrew Hoskins, Chief of Staff; Lindsay Suhr, Director, LAM Office

Guests: Yaw Owusu Darko, Project Specialist, Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC); Shelley Harms, Executive Director, Cornwall Conservation Trust and Salisbury Association Land Trust; Eric Lindquist, Department of Public Health; Catherine Rawson, Executive Director, Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy

Welcome and Introductions

Eric called the meeting to order at 10:32 AM.

Approval of February 9, 2023 Meeting Minutes

On a motion by Karen, seconded by Amy, the Minutes were unanimously approved subject to clarification of Joe G's comment on funding authorizations.

DEEP Staff Updates

Updating 2016-2020 Green Plan: Lindsay reported that DEEP held an internal meeting two weeks ago. One point of discussion at this meeting was possible RFP for a contractor. No timeline has yet been established, but the group will likely regroup before the end of this month. Lindsay said the first focus will be data collection; after that, DEEP will work with the Review Board on topics and focus.

OSWA Grant Review Update/Other Funding/Program News: Lindsay shared a still-confidential funding spreadsheet. Sixteen OSWA projects and one UGCG are represented, with total funding of 5.145 million dollars. In answer to a question from Eric H, Lindsay said the scoring system did create more opportunity for distressed

communities, but probably not broader distribution. Amy commented on the need to incentivize smaller, more urban projects in both programs. Lindsay responded that DEEP would do more outreach during future rounds. Eric H said he is aware that some potential applicants declined to file; in response, Allyson reported that, in one case, the seller took another offer and, in another, the applicant couldn't obtain an appraisal review in time, even with the extension.

Public Hearing – 3/10 – SB1146, Sections 10 and 11: DEEP's proposal for technical corrections to C.G.S. Sec. 7-131d(c):

Amy thanked Andrew for including new easement language in DEEP's legislative proposal, and thanked Linda for drafting several iterations over the past two years. She added that discipline would still be required of projects.

Old Business: Discussion - 2023 Review Board Work Plan

Continue to create a list of recommendations for the new Green Plan, administrative changes, upcoming budget negotiations, and legislative changes for 2024 (focus on definition of 'open space'):

Lindsay reported that DEEP staff has been looking through open space definitions. One methodology is to only include parcels that have been legally preserved by organizations and municipalities. Eric H offered that one complication is distinguishing between 'protected' and 'preserved.' Karen said her COG relies on the EPA definition. Linda commented that the first definition in the most recent Green Plan is confusing. Rebecca said her review of all the COG definitions revealed that some include cemeteries and golf courses, adding that an issue is distinguishing recreational from non-recreational land.

Joe G said he would like to include a definitional recommendation for this session. Elanah suggested that the Review Board establish a working group on the topic. Lindsay said she would welcome the Review Board developing preliminary language. In response to Elanah's suggestion that the COGs be notified that the Review Board and DEEP are working on developing a uniform definition, Eric H advised that any notification should wait until we have a first draft.

2023 Legislative Session Updates

Eric H announced a public hearing tomorrow on eight DEEP bills; Amy added that HB 1146 relates to open space. Joe G gave a capsule description of each bill on the agenda.

Review Board Member Updates: Amy reminded members that the CLCC conference is coming up on March 25. She added that registrations are high.

Public Comment: Shelley asked Lindsay if she has an update on the announcement for the new grant round. Lindsay responded that the goal is an April announcement. Eric L reported that he has transitioned from OPM to DPH, where he serves in the water protection unit. Although he will no longer be on the Review Board, he wants to stay connected and invited Board members to reach out.

Adjournment

On a motion by Linda, seconded by Karen, the meeting unanimously adjourned at 11:43 AM.

Respectfully submitted, Elanah Sherman, Secretary

Chat is appended.

Next meeting: Thursday, April 13, 2023, 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM