

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

Regular Meeting (via Zoom)

April 13, 2023

Minutes

Review Board members present: Karen Burnaska, Rebecca Dahl, Linda Francois, Joe Gresko, Eric Hammerling (Co-Chair), Walker Holmes, 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; Cameron Clegg, Environmental Analyst; 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

Welcome and Introductions

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

Approval of March 9, 2023 Meeting Minutes

On a motion by Amy, seconded by Joe W, the Minutes were approved with one abstention. (Walker originally voted to approve, but after the meeting changed her vote to abstention.)

DEEP Staff Updates

2022 Annual Open Space Report to Environment Committee

Lindsay reported that an Internal draft is circulating. She expects the Review Board will have a draft in two-three weeks; after that, it will go to DEEP Communications. Eric complimented Lindsay on the pace and timeliness of this and other reports.

Updating 2016-2020 Green Plan: Lindsay said a DEEP internal group continues to meet. The sticking point is lack of a uniform definition of open space. A definition is needed before an RFP goes out for a consultant on data collection.

OSWA Grant Review Update/Other Funding/Program News:

According to Lindsay, the hope is that next week DEEP will announce awards and the next round. The next round will likely have an early September deadline.

Status SB 1146, Sections 10 and 11: DEEP's proposal for technical corrections to C.G.S. Sec 7-131d(c)(3) and 7-131g: No change. (The Environment Committee approved the whole package.)
The lack of a uniform definition of open space continues to be a problematic issue.

Other

February and March Monthly Reports: Elanah complimented Allyson on the reports; she also observed that only the Wallingford project, described in the February issue, included a notation that a particular constructed feature would be accessible to people with disabilities. She expressed concern that built features mentioned in other project descriptions, such as viewing platforms, did not allude to accessibility. Allyson responded that project descriptions in the reports were taken from the application overviews, where accessibility would not necessarily have been referenced.

Old Business: Discussion - 2023 Review Board Work Plan

Continue to create a list of recommendations for the new Green Plan, administrative changes, budget negotiations, and legislative changes for 2024

~ Create working group and meeting schedule to focus on definition of open space: Amy said we now have a good list of samples, especially from the COGs (thanks to Rebecca). Amy predicted that the working group would need no more than four meetings. In addition to Amy, volunteers for the working group are: Elanah, Eric, John, Lindsay, Rebecca, and Walker. Lindsay suggested that one area of discussion be the distinction between 'preserved' and 'protected.' Previous to the meeting, Amy will distribute an outline of preliminary work to working group members.

2023 Legislative Session Updates

Joe G is advocating that OSWA funding be restored to the original benchmark of 10 million and that Trailways be restored to 5 million. Eric asked if there is any possibility of increasing staff capacity. Joe G responded that DEEP asked Appropriations for an increase. Joe G urged Review Board members to contact their legislators regarding increased funding for DEEP. (In an aside, Joe G added that Batterson Park might become part of the state park system.)

Review Board Member Updates: Eric announced that CT Trails Day is coming up on June 3 and 4, and that this Friday is the deadline to request t-shirts. Karen reminded Review Board members that conveyance time has come around again, and that scrutiny of the list is crucial. (The list has been posted on the Government Administration and Elections Committee page.) Lindsay said that no DEEP properties are on the list and that most are small, Department of Transportation parcels. Eric said that nothing about the list looks nefarious at first glance. Karen maintained that the Cheshire parcel is relevant to DEEP.

Lindsay reported that LAM, rather than Wildlife, is now responsible for Highlands processing; she predicts that this transition will result in faster and smoother implementation.

Regarding concern over drought, Rebecca reported that a division within OPM implements the State Water Plan and the State Drought Response Plan via the Water Planning Council; Rebecca added that she has been recommended for the position of State Drought Coordinator. (John and Joe W said there is presently no concern in their respective companies regarding water supply.) Rebecca also shared that DEEP had sent out an “Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey” to aid in updating the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP); she will put the link in Chat.

Public Comment: Shelley expressed enthusiasm that Highlands has been moved to LAM. Regarding the OSWA program, Shelley said appraisal problems, including key retirements, might require a deadline extension. In connection to a previous discussion, she said she believes that including accessibility data in monthly reports would have no practical value.

Adjournment

On a motion by Amy, seconded by Linda, the meeting unanimously adjourned at 11:13 AM.

Respectfully submitted, Elanah Sherman, Secretary

Chat is appended.

Next meeting: Thursday, May 11, 2023, 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

