

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

Regular Meeting (via Zoom/teleconference)

May 12, 2022

Minutes

Board members present: Tim Abbott, Karen Burnaska, Linda Francois, Joe Gresko, Eric Hammerling (Co-Chair), Walker Holmes, Dan Morley, 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

Welcome and Introductions

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

Approval of April 14, 2022 Meeting Minutes

On a motion by Tim, seconded by Amy, the Minutes were approved with one correction and three abstentions (Karen, Dan, and Elanah). (Amy corrected the date of the most recently due Annual Report, which should be 2021, not 2022.)

DEEP Staff Updates

Status of 2021 Annual Report (due February 15): Andrew said the report was a priority for the agency, but that hiring for new positions had necessarily assumed higher importance (along with announcement of the 2021 awards and finalization of new grant round materials). He said that the report will be completed in the next few months. Allyson reminded the Board that no Annual Report had been produced for 2020, either. Brief discussion ensued, without resolution, regarding the possibility of combining the 2020 and 2021 Annual Reports.

Seasonal/Staff dedicated to updating 2016-2020 Green Plan: Andrew said he supports use of a consultant for production of the updated Green Plan, which will be produced this year. Eric expressed concern that a consultant may have real or perceived conflicts of interest and stated his preference that a seasonal employee, speaking singularly on behalf of DEEP, be responsible for the Plan.

Andrew responded that consultants, at the least, could provide supplemental assistance, with all policy recommendations remaining DEEP-driven. Walker conveyed support for DEEP doing “whatever DEEP needs to get it done,” including issuing an RFP for a consultant.

Karen asked if the audience of the Green Plan has been defined, and said the writing should serve this intended audience. In response, Andrew said DEEP will look for opportunities to collaborate, adding that, however the Plan is produced, DEEP will provide a high degree of management and oversight.

Other:

Hiring, funding, and legislation – Andrew reported that analyst interviews are complete and offers will be going out next week. Regarding agency funding, Andrew said he expects a “full funding scenario,” including \$15,000,000 in open space bonding and \$5,000,000 in CIA. (Additionally, DEEP will receive \$22,500,000 via ARPA for infrastructure.)

Eric and Tim thanked Joe G for his legislative leadership, mentioning, among other wins, Joe’s successful opposition to a plan to convey a piece of Housatonic State Park to a neighboring landowner. Eric brought up for discussion the \$1,000,000 removed from the \$52,500,000 state park allocation to fund improvements at a City of New Haven park. Both Eric and Amy warned that such an earmark establishes the dangerous precedent of raiding designated funds that should remain dedicated. (Amy said that an optional municipal conveyance fee could be a future source of funding for municipal parks.) Walker, although not endorsing this precedent, noted that municipalities have few funding sources for their park needs and that the earmark demonstrates a “flaw/gap” in available funding alternatives.

Allyson - *Everyone* expressed appreciation for Allyson and her many contributions to the land acquisition program, especially in regard to the grants program and the hiring process.

New Business

2021 Grant Awards – status: Andrew said the announcement will be imminent.

2022 OSWA Application Package – status: No news.

FY 2023 Budget: Tabled

Old Business

OSWA/UGCG Working Group – Amy speculated that the conclusions of the group may be applicable to the upcoming Green Plan update. She will consult with Joe G. The Working Group will reconvene this summer.

Other

Highlands – Tim reported that Highlands passed the House in April and is on the Senate calendar. The House proposal is for \$10,000,000 and the Senate proposes \$20,000,000. (Funds require a match.) All four Highlands states have large working groups.

CLCC News – Amy announced that the CT Conservation Partnership Grant program is ready to launch. Workshops for land trusts are forthcoming. The CLCC conference begins tonight. Because of the numerous supporting organizations, CLCC was able to provide many scholarships.

CT Trails Day – Eric said that CT Trails Day, the largest trails day celebration in the country, begins on June 4 (and continues on June 5). A total of 180 events are scheduled.

Public Comment

No public comment

Adjournment

With a motion by Amy, seconded by Karen, the meeting adjourned at 11:20 AM.

Respectfully submitted, Elanah Sherman, Secretary

Next meeting: No date for the next meeting was announced.