

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

Regular Meeting (via Zoom)

September 14, 2023

Minutes

Review Board members present: Tim Abbott, Karen Burnaska, Rebecca Dahl, Joe Gresko, Walker Holmes, Amy Paterson (Chair), Elanah Sherman, John Triana, Joe Welsh, and Michelle Williams (all by video except Elanah, who attended by phone)

DEEP representatives: Allyson Clarke, Property Agent; Cameron Clegg, Environmental Analyst; Ray Frigon, Director, DEEP Remediation Division; Andrew Hoskins, Chief of Staff; Lindsay Suhr, Director, LAM Office

Guests: Cameron Beard, Board Member, East Haddam Land Trust; Yaw Owusu Darko, Senior Project Specialist, CLCC; Pete Govert, Executive Director, East Haddam Land Trust; Shelley Harms, Executive Director, Salisbury Association Land Trust, and Co-President, Norfolk Land Trust; Joene Hendry, President, East Haddam Land Trust; Victoria Jaskaran, Sandy Breslin Conservation Fellow, CLCC; Justine Phillips-Gallucci, CT Careers Trainee (CCT) Planning Analyst, OPM; Catherine Rawson, Executive Director, Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy

Welcome and Introductions

Amy called the meeting to order at 10:32 AM. Amy introduced the new Review Board member, Michelle Williams. Michelle is Vice President, Customer Service and Communications, of Connecticut Water, and Chair of the East Lyme Planning Commission.

Approval of July 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes

On a motion by Joe G, seconded by Rebecca, the Minutes were unanimously approved with two abstentions.

DEEP Staff Updates

Presentation by Ray Frigon, Director, DEEP Remediation Division - Grant Opportunity (DEEP CERCLA 128[a] Brownfield Grant Program): Ray said that grants are available for environmental clean ups across the State, from small projects (for example, residential) to larger ones. Municipalities and nonprofits are eligible to apply.

Brownfields remediation is a significant part of the work. The program collaborates closely with DECD to identify eligible applicants. Two goals are to bring jobs and housing through productive reuse. The program has broadened the way base EPA is allocated, with dollars now available for green space, quality of life, and recreation (all in underserved areas). He said that grants are not yet highly competitive, but he expects that competition will increase once the program becomes better known. In response to a question from Walker, he added that land trusts could benefit under the liability program if they want to acquire polluted property left to the State by bankrupt businesses. Ray told Lindsay he will share DECD networking opportunities. Amy said she is interested in hearing the experiences of any land trusts that apply to the program.

Updating 2016-2020 Green Plan:

Definition of Open Space – Lindsay reported that DEEP is still in the process of updating and finalizing the definition; in addition, they are working with the business office to determine if contractors are presently available, or if the contract must be put out for bid. Hiring will likely occur by the end of October. Rebecca said that OPM could be able to collaborate with data collection efforts. Amy asked that the Review Board be updated on collaborations, including any with the COGs.

Discussion, 2022 OSWA-UGCG Working Group Recommendations

Amy provided background on the process. The idea for the group emerged in 2021. Goals were separated into administrative and legislative changes. The first phase of the effort resulted in technical statutory corrections, submitted by DEEP, that layer federal and local easements. The second phase, about to begin, will build upon (and augment) recommendations previously established by the group. Lindsay suggested that goals be divided between short and long term. She singled out for future discussion environmental justice elements and reimbursement of services in distressed communities. Several Review Board members offered suggestions, but the pace of conversation precluded inclusion in the Minutes. Amy will set up a Zoom meeting of the Working Group before October 2.

Other

The deadline for OSWA applications is October 2, with a one-month extension for appraisal review. Allyson reported that many applications have been submitted, including several for “big ticket” projects. Joe G announced that Corteva will hold an update event regarding Remington Woods at 5:00 pm on October 3; both Joe and Andrew will attend.

Updates: Review Board Membership

Regarding new member: See above, Welcome and Introductions.
Regarding reappointments and nominations: Joe G volunteered to assist in the process. He asked that resumes be submitted to Amy, who will then funnel the documents to him. Amy asked that this information be submitted to her within a week. Amy added that she will include discussion of vacancies on a future agenda.

Review Board Glossary of Acronyms

Elanah had prepared a draft Glossary to enable readers, especially those outside the Review Board community, to better understand the Minutes. Amy announced that the Glossary will be included from now on with the Minutes and amended, as needed. (Amy had previously sent it out for comment to Review Board members as a Google doc.)

Review Board Member Updates

Tabled

Public Comment

None

Adjournment

On a motion by Joe G, seconded by John, the meeting unanimously adjourned at 12:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Elanah Sherman, Secretary

Chat and Glossary appended.

Next meeting: Thursday, October 12, 2023, 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM.