

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

Regular Meeting (via Zoom/teleconference)

September 9, 2021

Minutes

**Board members present:** Tim Abbott, Karen Burnaska, 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, Nicole Lugli, Mason Trumble

**Welcome and Introductions**

Eric called the meeting to order at 10:36 AM.

**Approval of Minutes of the August 19, 2021 Meeting of the Review Board**

On a motion by Amy, seconded by John, the Minutes were accepted with Amy's correction that they contained an incorrect date for the September meeting. Karen, Tim, and Walker abstained.

**DEEP Staff Updates**

Mason announced that DEEP is planning to hire extra staff for land acquisition. Nicole said that potential new staff members – up to three – will likely include a paralegal, but added that DEEP is awaiting OPM approval. Dan offered to intervene in the event of OPM delays. Mason will follow up on the approvals. Mason also asked the Review Board for assistance in finding a diversified pool of candidates, adding that jobs have not yet been posted. Nicole said that, in addition to full-time staff, DEEP needs seasonal employees on board soon. Eric voiced the strong support of the Review Board for increased DEEP funding.

Mason reported that the scoring sheet has been developed, and thanked Allyson and Nicole for their contributions. He said that the sheet reflects an effort to create greater equity in terms of distribution, adding that the greater ecological impact of larger parcels remains a scoring challenge. Mason also noted that, because of past experience, some municipalities have stopped applying and that better outreach is needed to encourage these applications.

In regard to resources, Eric said the OSWA program will not progress "if the size of the pie stays the same, but is cut into smaller and smaller pieces." Amy offered Mason the Review Board's advocacy to increase the program's resources. Amy also asked Mason if he could address the specific application deterrents experienced by municipalities. In response, Mason said he is seeking a collaboration with Desegregate CT to work through conflicts between open space acquisition and affordable housing. Eric encouraged DEEP to demonstrate in these conversations that this conflict is often blown out of proportion and that the

many points of compatibility often go unrecognized. He added that this issue may be a good addition to the next Green Plan. Mason said he would like to see a representative from Desegregate CT participate in a Review Board meeting.

The conversation turned to revamping OSWA to meet social justice goals. Dan referred members to Public Act 21-29, Section 13, which establishes a commission on Connecticut development, and urged Review Board participation on the commission. Amy repeated her idea, originally voiced at the last meeting, that the Review Board form a sub-committee for examining how both OSWA and UGCG can become more equity focused. Mason observed that distressed communities are not just urban.

Mason shared the draft scoring sheet, pointing out that it is organized into four 'buckets,' each one worth 100 points. Review Board members contributed many comments about the sheet, a very small selection of which are recorded below:

#### Administrative

Tim expressed concern about mandates that can't be met by applicants, including the required volume of documentation.

#### Public Access and Outdoor Recreation

John noted that, because water company lands are not required to provide public access, the scoring would unfairly penalize these applicants. Elanah said she would email suggestions to DEEP regarding the question on disability access.

#### Environmental Justice and Equity

Mason said this section leans heavily on the GC3 recommendations. Eric suggested that the section offer more specificity, especially in regard to an area's need for more open space. Tim advised that consideration be given to what factors actually make a parcel accessible to urban dwellers, cautioning that distance is not necessarily a factor.

#### Climate Change and Natural Resources

Eric warned that the term "active forest management" is likely to provoke a negative response. Tim advised more attention to biodiversity.

Based on communications she's had with land trusts, Amy asked if both the application and appraisal deadlines could be extended; Allyson expressed enthusiasm for this idea. Amy also suggested that the scoring sheet be deferred to the next application round. Mason thanked the Review Board for the candid discussion and said that, although he wants to retain the bucket structure, he is willing to entertain a range of scoring sheet revisions. In regard to revising the sheet, Karen recommended that members "don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." DEEP staff agreed to create a process for Review Board members to submit scoring sheet suggestions and will email Amy a protocol sometime after the meeting. Amy expressed appreciation to DEEP staff for their high degree of collaboration, especially in view of the intense pressures they face.

**Business**

Preparation of Connecticut's 2021-2025 Green Plan:

Tabled

Revisions to OSWA and UGCG Program

Tabled

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Adjournment**

On a motion from Amy, seconded by Joe, the meeting adjourned at approximately 12:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Elanah Sherman, Secretary

**A date for the next meeting was not announced.**