

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

Special Meeting (via Zoom)

September 28, 2023

Minutes

**Review Board members present:** Tim Abbott, Karen Burnaska, Rebecca Dahl, Linda Francois, 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; Andrew Hoskins, Chief of Staff; Lindsay Suhr, Director, LAM Office

**Guests:** Victoria Jaskaran, Sandy Breslin Conservation Fellow, CLCC

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Amy called the meeting to order at 2:32 p.m.

## **Introduction: DEEP 2024 Administrative and Legislative Priorities regarding OSWA and UGCG**

1. With an October 2 deadline to submit 2024 concepts for agency legislative priorities to OPM, Andrew Hoskins reiterated DEEP's goal of this special meeting as getting Review Board consensus on statutory changes regarding OSWA and UGCG, which will primarily be focused on climate resilience and equity.
2. For the UGCG program, most of the changes will be accomplished through internal policies, except the statutory changes described below. Staff would like to use the December meeting to focus on UGCG changes.
3. DEEP's priorities for amending the OSWA statute include:
  - a. Adding Environmental Justice Communities as being eligible to receive up to 75% of the project's FMV (like Targeted Investment and Distressed Communities).
  - b. Removing the requirement that eligibility for the UGCG program is limited to municipally-owned land to allow nonprofits to apply to the program directly.
  - c. Adding representatives from Environmental Justice Communities and academia as Review Board members.

- d. Allowing due diligence costs for projects in EJ communities to be rolled into total project cost or be eligible for reimbursement.

## **Discussion**

1. Regarding #3c: Joe G. asked who would be making the appointments for the EJ representatives. Suggestions included having the Commissioner make those appointments. Members agreed that it is important that the representative is qualified to truly represent community needs. Andrew suggested seeking advice from CEJAC. Joe G. added that CEJAC has been meeting regularly for the past five years and can serve as a source of membership for the Review Board. He emphasized the need for geographic diversity on the Board. Elanah agreed and said more representation is needed from Eastern CT. Tim suggested we add a category for a representative of CT's tribal communities.
2. Regarding #3d: Tim questioned whether the reimbursement for due diligence costs should be limited to municipalities and not land trusts working in EJ communities. Lindsay stated that the goal of the change is to incentivize more EJ community participation in the program.

## **Other Changes**

1. Members discussed the working group's recommendation to remove the requirement that local government approval is needed for projects proposed in Targeted and/or Distressed Communities. Lindsay and Andrew suggested that this issue be addressed in a future session as more legwork is needed to investigate the reason behind the requirement and to discuss it with legislators.
2. Suggested change to Section 7-131d(c)(2) regarding the use of mobility equipment. The Board discussed whether it was better to keep the statutory language as-is and include a broader definition of "mobility equipment" in the OSWA conservation easement. Joe G. suggested DEEP pose the issue to the agency's legal staff and have them develop updated language.

**Other Business**

Amy stated that the next regularly scheduled meeting on October 12 may be canceled, and we will reconvene on November 9.

**Public Comment**

None

**Adjournment**

On a motion by Karen, seconded by John, the meeting unanimously adjourned at 3:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Amy Blaymore Paterson, Chair

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