

Water Planning Council Advisory Group – Watershed Lands Workgroup

March 10, 2023

Meeting Notes

(The meeting was recorded. The link to the recording is:)

Attendees: Alicea Charamut (Rivers Alliance), Aaron Budris (NVCOG), Amy Paterson (CLCC), Eric Hammerling (CFPA), Paul Aresta (CEQ), Bruce Wittchen (OPM), Rebecca Dahl (OPM), Steve Vitko (RWA), Lori Vitaglione (RWA), Ally Ayote (PURA) Margaret Miner (Rivers Alliance), and Karen Burnaska (Save the Sound). Special guest: Paul Hinsch of OPM.

Notes of December 10, 2022 Meeting: There were no comments or corrections.

Updates:

-MDC Declaratory Ruling re: Colebrook Reservoir: At its February 13, 2023 Board Meeting, MDC voted to withdraw the petition for a declaratory ruling and file an application for an abandonment permit.

-GAE Conveyance Legislation and public publication of information: Legislators land conveyance request questionnaires and environmental information supplements will be posted on the CGA website earlier this year and prior to the public hearings. Request questionnaires are due to the GAE Committee by March 15, 2023.

-WUCC update: Aaron will check with DPH on the status of posting information designed to help developers and land use officials better understand how best to protect watershed land.

Transfer of State Surplus Land: Paul Hinsch, Policy Development Director, Bureau of Assets Management, OPM

Paul discussed the transfer of state surplus land, the role of OPM, and how OPM interacts with DEEP. (DEEP was unable to attend the meeting but forwarded the link to CEQ's website on land transfers and also provided a procedural flowchart.)

In explaining the state's land transfer process, Paul noted that UConn is exempt from the process and DEEP has its own process. Agencies are asked to notify OPM six months in advance of when it wants to dispose of a property. If an agency declares a property as surplus, OPM advises all other agencies that it is available. Notification of disposal of surplus property is published in the CEQ Environmental Monitor. It is unusual for an agency to seek reuse of a property. If no agency wants the property, it is offered to the town where the property is located. The town has 60 days to respond. The price of the land is its appraised value. If a town does not accept the property, it is advertised and put out to bid. If a property is advertised, OPM will want to take the highest bid. Conditions are rarely put on the land and OPM rarely knows the end use. This process (which is outlined on the CEQ website) is different from GAE conveyances. Under GAE conveyance rules, if the land is sold at market value no conditions are placed on the sale. As for the relationship between OPM and DEEP, it is good. Kinks are still being work out.

In response to a question, Paul responded that if DEEP wants conditions placed on a property, DEEP will “take” the property. He responded to a question that he didn’t know UConn’s process for disposing of land. Paul also stated that he is happy to answer more questions. Margaret will compile a list and forward to him.

Paul’s complete discussion can be found in the link to the recording of this meeting.

2023 Legislation:

-HB 6483 OSWA funding: Amy Paterson reported that \$10 million/year is included in the budget.

-HB 5214 Conservation of certain lands and water of the Upper Farmington River: While all who spoke supported the importance of protecting the watershed land, comments were made that the all stakeholders should be brought to the table to discuss the process of preserving the land and water; waiting for a study would delay the process of reviewing options; and an abandonment process is a large concern.

-HB 5616 Inland Wetland Commissions: a bill is moving forward on educational requirements for commissioners.

-HB 5904 Notification to DPH and water companies re: solar installations on watershed land: status is not known.

-HB 6809 “Buffer bill” and use of stormwater funds: Moving forward.

-SB 1147 Environmental Justice: concern with adding “water diversions” to “facilities.”

-SB 985 Incentivizing Housing Production: Concern with Growth Development Zones and approvals being given by Zoning Board of Appeals with no other approvals needed.

-HB 6733 DPH Revisions Bill: Section 20 - Underscores DPH’s jurisdiction over current, future, and emergency water sources.

-Other: A PFACs bill is moving forward; bill on use of sodium chloride has not moved; protection of old growth forests is on hold.

-Funding for the update of the State Water Plan and hiring of a “water chief” is not in the budget. It was suggested that all supporters contact the Appropriations and ask that funding be added to the budget.

There were no other discussion items and no other comments.

Next meeting is June 9, 2023, 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.

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