

**Environment Committee
Meeting Summary
January 26, 2009**

Present: Margaret Wirtenberg*, Weston; Robert Byrnes*, Greenwich; Anna Duleep, Norwalk; Floyd Lapp, and Nicole Davis, SWRPA;
*Committee co-chairs

Dr. Wirtenberg called the meeting to order at 3:34 P.M.

I. Dr. Wirtenberg made a motion to approve the minutes from the November meeting, which was seconded by Mr. Byrnes and the motion passed unanimously.

II. Reconnaissance Study Update

Dr. Lapp stated that Congressman Himes was expected to attend the February MPO meeting. Congressman Himes would also be available to discuss regional planning, which will include the ACOE Reconnaissance Study for Fairfield County. Dr. Lapp summarized that the meeting would recap what Nita Lowey had done in Fairfield County and Congressman Shays efforts to have a study conducted for Fairfield County. A discussion ensued regarding the previous efforts to have the study completed.

Dr. Lapp commented on the responsiveness of the newly elected congressman and his staff and hoped that in 10 months a study will be completed for all the rivers in Fairfield County.

III. Status of Grants

Ms. Davis provided the committee with an update of the status of the grants that SWRPA had applied for in 2008. She commented that the FEMA grant had been forwarded on for national review and that they were still waiting to hear on the status of the 319 grant. She further explained that to the best of her knowledge the 319 grant was still being reviewed by the state.

Mr. Byrnes referred to the grants table provided at the November Environment Committee meeting and asked how the current economic climate would affect the grants listed. Ms. Davis was unsure and hoped that money had already been allocated for the recent funding cycles. She expressed concern that if they received funding through the 319 program there was a possibility money would only be available for the first year of the two year grant period.

Dr. Lapp asked Ms. Davis to expound upon the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Update. She stated the region's plan was set to expire in July of next year and FEMA and the state each needed 90 days to review the final draft of the plan. Therefore, she intended to begin working on the plan early in the spring. She also commented that work on the plan prior to award of the FEMA grant would count as in-kind services. Dr. Lapp stated that a number of municipalities in the region had received FEMA grants as a result of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and asked Ms. Davis the total

amount received. Ms. Davis stated that she could not recall the total, but the Darien had recently received approximately \$400,000 for three projects and applied for money for another home elevation, and both Greenwich and Norwalk had received grants since the plan was adopted. She also commented that prior to the adoption of the current Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan Westport had also received a number of grants to elevate homes and reduce flooding. Dr. Lapp remarked the need for a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan comes back to what the RPA can bring into the region, and that an approved plan is required in order to receive FEMA aid.

IV. Ideas for Future Meetings

Dr. Wirtenberg began the discussion by recommending the Environment and Referrals Committee work together to look and stormwater. Shed commented that it would be nice to have “inter-departmental” collaboration and a spread shed with the current stormwater regulations for each town would be useful. She stated Weston had just submitted a referral to amend the town’s language for stormwater regulations. The committee discussed the idea and Dr. Wirtenberg summarized that it would be a project by staff, from both environment and housing, to develop an inventory/cross tabulation, which could be used to see the effects of development on runoff, to compare progress in each town, and identify where updates may need to be made.

Dr. Lapp recommended the committee consider holding an environment summit in the fall. He explained the previous TOD and housing summits had been very successful and that an environment summit would likely have the same result. Dr. Wirtenberg concurred that it would be a good idea and suggested the theme be “when it rains it pours.” Mr. Byrnes opened a discussion by questioning whether the summit should deal with watershed or environment in genera. The committee agreed that a water related summit would be best.

Dr. Lapp discussed the format of the summit indicate that a half day event, with a keynote speaker, and 1 or 2 panel discussions was a successful format for the housing summit. He also suggested that \$10 be charged to help cover the cost of the event.

Ms. Davis suggested that they consider hosting the summit jointly with the Saugatuck River Watershed Partnership (SRWP)/Nature Conservancy. She commented that the SRWP had been discussing holding a similar event. Dr. Wirtenberg thought it would work and commented that a co-sponsored event would help make SWRPA’s watershed planning efforts more regional.

Mr. Byrnes commented that he thought it was a good idea, but question if it was realistic. Dr. Lapp responded “we can do it,” and commented that based on the turnout at previous watershed meetings, with a good key note speaker they should be able to draw 150 people. The committee discussed possible keynote speakers, which included Jim Himes, Nita Lowey, Gina McCarthy, and Chris Perone. It was decided that the committee should decide on the topic for the summit before identifying a keynote speaker, and several topic areas were discussed.

Ms. Davis requested that the committee begin thinking about possible topics and possible key note speakers and have a list ready for the March 9th meeting.

V. **2009 Meeting Schedule**

Dr. Wirtenberg noted the new meeting schedule.

VI. **Other Business**

Ms. Davis mentioned the committee had been asked to provide comments on Greenwich's Plan of Conservation and Development. Dr. Wirtenberg and Dr. Lapp informed the committee this had been discussed that the referrals meeting earlier that day and they had agreed to review the plan and attend the hearing next Tuesday.

Dr. Wirtenberg thanked the staff for the work they had been doing and commented that there had been an article in Norwalk Hour about Ms. Duleep

Ms. Duleep commented on the possibility of her new role with the Norwalk Common Council and stated that she saw no reason to leave the SWRPA board unless it became a conflict, which she did not anticipate.

Dr. Wirtenberg commented on a new bill dealing with regional government which the committee discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 4:34 P.M.

Prepared by Nicole Davis,
South Western Regional Planning Agency