

**Environment Committee
Meeting Summary
January 31, 2007**

Present: Leigh Grant, Norwalk; Dan Wilder, Weston; Margaret Wirtenberg, Weston; Floyd Lapp, SWRPA; Alex Karman, SWRPA.

Mr. Alex Karman called the Environment Committee (“the Committee”) meeting to order at 3.05pm. The meeting was held at the SWRPA office.

1. Approval of Minutes of Environmental Committee Meeting of December 12, 2006

Dr. Margaret Wirtenberg made a motion to approve the December 12, 2006 minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Mr. Dan Wilder and approved unanimously.

2. Old Business

2a. 2007 South Western Region Open Space Inventory

Mr. Alex Karman presented drafts of technical memoranda 1 and 2 to the Committee. He explained that the documents were based upon the information presented to the Committee at its previous two meetings. He explained that technical memorandum 1 contained information about the structure of the study and the Committee and that technical memorandum 2 contained information on open space definitions and grant programs.

Mr. Karman asked the Committee to review and comment upon the proposed categories to be used to describe open space properties. Ms. Leigh Grant explained that the City of Norwalk, unlike other South Western Region municipalities, included parking lots in its open space inventory. She explained that the Norwalk Planning and Zoning Department believes that parking lots have the capacity to be transformed into urban parks and that they may even have a secondary use as a play area outside of work hours. Ms. Grant suggested that paved or generally non-green urban space could be designated as *public space*.

Dr. Wirtenberg inquired whether the Merritt Parkway right-of-way should be considered open space. Mr. Lapp commented that he believed the right-of-way should be considered open space, as is the case for other parkways in the New York metropolitan area. Mr. Karman responded that the Merritt Parkway right-of-way would be included in the study.

Mr. Wilder questioned whether ‘desirable for acquisition’ should be a category. Mr. Lapp responded that identifying those parcels that are desirable for acquisition is necessary in order to move this study from *inventory* to *plan*. Mr. Wilder inquired whether transfer stations and landfills should be included in the study. There was general consensus to include landfills in the study and omit transfer stations. Ms. Grant suggested that the *use* category be broadened so that it better reflects the variety of uses that can occur on an open space property. Other descriptive categories suggested by the Committee included: important viewsheds, cemeteries, and urban public space.

Mr. Karman explained that he had presented a survey to the town planners in attendance at the January 25, 2007 South Western Region planners meeting. He explained that the survey asked the planners to describe the status of open space planning in their communities. At Ms. Grant’s request, Mr. Karman presented some of the findings from the survey. He explained that many planners considered their communities to be substantially built out with little remaining vacant land available for acquisition. He added that legal and stewardship concerns regarding subdivision open spaces were also identified as important. Mr. Wilder responded that despite the conditions described by the town planners, there are active land trusts in many South Western Region communities. Ms. Grant described the open space strategy in the Region as “catch as catch can”. Mr. Lapp responded that a “catch as catch can” approach was insufficient and that a plan listing properties desirable for acquisition should be developed. Ms.

Grant suggested that golf courses should be included in this plan, as they become available for acquisition from time to time. She mentioned the Silvermine Golf Course in Norwalk as an example.

Mr. Lapp explained that the Committee should discuss public involvement at a future meeting, including who to invite, where and when to hold the meetings, and what to present.

3. New Business

Mr. Karman indicated his desire to bring a speaker from the EPA's Long Island Sound Study to a SWRPA board meeting at some time in the future. Ms. Grant indicated that the Scenic and Historic Roads conference discussed at previous meetings would be postponed at the suggestion of a consultant retained by the Merritt Parkway Conservancy. She explained that the consultant had suggested that a coalition including the Merritt Parkway Conservancy should first lobby the General Assembly's environment and transportation committees. She added that the conference would hopefully take place in the fall after the legislators had become familiar with the important issues surrounding scenic and historic roads. She indicated that there would be more to report later in the year.

4. Next Meeting Date

Mr. Karman indicated that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, March 13, 2007 at the SWRPA office. Mr. Lapp indicated he would not be able to attend.

5. Adjourn

There was general consensus to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 4.15pm.

Prepared by Alex Karman, South Western Regional Planning Agency.

Approved on March 13, 2007

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