

**Environment Committee
Meeting Summary
March 13, 2007**

Present: Ken deSanctis, Westport; Leigh Grant, Norwalk; Reese Hutchison, Darien; 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 January 31, 2007

Dr. Margaret Wirtenberg made a motion to approve the January 31, 2007 minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Ms. Leigh Grant and approved unanimously.

2. Old Business

2a. 2007 South Western Region Open Space Inventory

Mr. Alex Karman provided a brief overview of the Open Space Inventory to Mr. Ken deSanctis and Mr. Reese Hutchison, who are new members of the committee. He presented a draft map depicting the parcels that have been identified as open space so far, according to the criteria determined by the Committee. Mr. Hutchison inquired as to how large properties containing only a house were counted, since many communities target those properties for open space acquisition. Mr. Karman responded that the Greenwich open space inventory identified residential properties larger than ten acres and that it was possible to do the same for this plan. Mr. deSanctis inquired whether it was sensible to only include properties protected “in perpetuity” in the inventory. Dr. Floyd Lapp responded that it would be unreasonable to only consider open space properties protected in perpetuity. Mr. Hutchison inquired whether it would be possible to include conservation easements in the inventory. Mr. Karman responded that such data was not readily accessible. Ms. Grant explained that standards for open space would vary by municipality meaning that not every municipality would be satisfied by what is included in the inventory. Dr. Lapp indicated that he would eventually like to see one map that depicts only recreation and open space. Ms. Grant indicated that it seemed as if some of the identified parcels contained residences and that others, such as golf courses, were identified as public open space despite being privately owned. Mr. Karman indicated that broad criteria were used to determine whether a property would be included in the inventory. He added that end users of the data would be able to determine for themselves which properties are open space and which are not.

Mr. Hutchison inquired as to whether it was possible to add wetlands as an overlay on the inventory and to flag those properties that include significant wetlands. Mr. Karman responded that it was possible to include other environmental criteria, such as DEP determined aquifer protection areas, and overlay those criteria on the open space inventory. Ms. Grant inquired why portions of the Merritt Parkway right-of-way had been omitted from the map. Mr. Karman responded that it had to do with the ease of adding data and that the entire Merritt Parkway right-of-way would be included in the final inventory.

Mr. Karman requested suggestions for conducting the public involvement portion of the study. He proposed that it might be beneficial to present the study using the laptop so that the public could better understand the usefulness of GIS. Dr. Wirtenberg suggested that an interactive presentation would be well received. Ms. Grant suggested that simple measures such as open space per thousand people and percent of total land preserved as open space be presented for comparison purposes. Dr. Lapp suggested that public involvement should be conducted on a town-by-town basis in order to facilitate discussion. Dr. Lapp suggested that the open space study be presented at the next SWRPA board meeting on April 9, 2007. Ms. Grant suggested that the conservation commission would be the best audience in Norwalk.

Ms. deSanctis noted that open space had been identified as a priority by Westport residents who participated in the update to municipality's plan of conservation and development.

Mr. Hutchison suggested that there should be two important considerations in the open space study: identifying parcels and encouraging conservation. He noted that some municipalities in the State of Connecticut had programs in place to reduce the tax burden on a property because of the presence of wetlands. He suggested that this study might eventually help property owners self identify their properties as containing wetlands, rather than relying on a technician to make the determination. He suggested that this information would be useful to owners of large parcels for tax planning purposes. Mr. Dan Wilder suggested that the study should emphasize best practices and should provide templates of successful programs such as those referred to by Mr. Hutchison. Mr. Hutchison mentioned that there was neither a map nor a list of conservation easements in Darien.

Dr. Lapp inquired as to the first step for public involvement in the study. Mr. Hutchison suggested that the municipalities would have little interest unless they could understand the objectives and usefulness of the study. He advised that more than the map was needed to make the municipalities feel that this study would be of use. Dr. Lapp explained that the study would be presented at the upcoming SWRPA board meeting and that there would be an opportunity then to choose a community to visit first as part of the public involvement. Mr. Hutchison suggested Greenwich might be the best community to visit first. Mr. Wilder suggested that this study could eventually become a component in a regional build-out analysis.

3. New Business

There was no new business.

4. Next Meeting Date

Mr. Karman indicated that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, April 24, 2007 at the SWRPA office.

5. Adjourn

There was general consensus to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 4.32pm.

Prepared by Alex Karman, South Western Regional Planning Agency.

Approved on April 24, 2007