

**Environment Committee
Meeting Summary
April 24, 2007**

Present: Bob Byrnes, Greenwich; Reese Hutchison, Darien; Margaret Wirtenberg, Weston; Floyd Lapp, SWRPA; Alex Karman, SWRPA.

Mr. Alex Karman called the Environment Committee (“the Committee”) meeting to order at 3.10pm. The meeting was held at the SWRPA office.

1. Approval of Minutes of Environmental Committee Meeting of March 13, 2007

Dr. Margaret Wirtenberg made a motion to approve the March 13, 2007 minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Mr. Reese Hutchison and approved unanimously.

2. Old Business

2a. 2007 South Western Region Open Space Inventory

Mr. Alex Karman presented a demonstration of the geographic information system (GIS) used to inventory open space parcels. He explained that municipal parcel maps include a land use code, which is maintained by the assessor for tax purposes, and presented a map of land uses in Stamford. He explained that some open space, such as that so-called 490 properties, were easy to pick out because they were so coded in the parcel database. He explained that other parcels were determined to be open space based on an analysis on ownership and acreage and by comparison with state open space databases. He demonstrated how it was possible to overlay environmental datasets such as floodplains or waterways onto the open space inventory.

Dr. Floyd Lapp explained that the public involvement process for this project was still being determined. He explained that it was his intent to present the inventory to each municipality in the South Western Region with the goal of determining those properties best suited for acquisition. Mr. Robert Byrnes stated that it was absolutely necessary to involve municipalities in order to promote the project. Dr. Lapp agreed, explaining that it is important to build roles and responsibilities and share the information among a wider audience. Dr. Wirtenberg commented that it might be useful to start in Weston. She explained that the inventory could be integrated into the Weston’s plan of conservation and development update.

Mr. Byrnes inquired as to the purpose of producing a regional inventory if some communities have already produced their own inventory. Mr. Karman responded that in the past, there have been opportunities to acquire regionally significant open space properties that extend beyond the geography or means of any one community. He added that a regional inventory might prove useful in these circumstances. Dr. Wirtenberg described the purchase of the Bridgeport Hydraulic (Kelda) lands as just such an instance. Mr. Hutchison inquired whether SWRPA could work with an attorney to promote the permanent preservation of open space. He suggested that individuals and business would be more likely to dedicate a property as open space if there was a better articulated financial incentive. Dr. Lapp responded that hiring an attorney was not likely given SWRPA’s means. Mr. Hutchison suggested that the regional benefits of open space should be emphasized. As an example, he described how acquiring land in an upstream watershed might mitigate flooding in a downstream community. He commented that the risk of flooding should be the bells and whistle that bring a community’s attention to open space acquisition outside of its boundaries. Mr. Byrnes responded with a tale of caution, noting how one land trust in Rhode Island has attempted to expand its geographic outreach only to find out that its supporters were not interested in a broader mission. Dr. Lapp suggested that public outreach might begin by targeting a land trust, which would have a significant interest in the findings from the study. Dr. Wirtenberg commented that Weston first selectman Woody Bliss had an interest in open space and would

be a good target for public involvement. Dr. Lapp explained that an update on the open space study was included on the agenda of the South Western Region town planners meeting schedule for May 3, 2007. He encouraged Committee members to attend the meeting.

3. New Business

There was no new business.

4. Next Meeting Date

Mr. Karman indicated that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, May 29, 2007 at the SWRPA office.

5. Adjourn

Dr. Wirtenberg made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hutchison and moved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 4.00 pm.

Prepared by Alex Karman, South Western Regional Planning Agency.

Approved on May 29, 2007