

**Environment Committee
Meeting Summary
June 26, 2007**

Present: Leigh Grant, Norwalk; 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 3.02pm. The meeting was held at the SWRPA office.

1. Approval of Minutes of Environmental Committee Meeting of May 29, 2007

Dr. Margaret Wirtenberg made a motion to approve the May 29, 2007 minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Leigh Grant and approved unanimously with Mr. Reese Hutchison abstaining.

2. Old Business

2a. 2007 South Western Region Open Space Inventory

Mr. Alex Karman explained that public involvement meetings had been tentatively set with two communities, Weston and Greenwich, and that a meeting date with Norwalk would be firmed up soon. Dr. Floyd Lapp indicated that he would like to conduct public involvement meetings with the remaining five communities by October 5, 2007. In response to a question from Ms. Grant, Mr. Karman indicated that the meetings would be open to anyone who wished to attend.

Mr. Karman explained that the Norwalk Land Trust has requested from SWRPA a letter in support of its application to Connecticut DEP’s open space and watershed land acquisition grant program for funds towards the purchase of a property in the Rowayton section of Norwalk. He explained that although the property is only two acres in size, it is bounded on two sides by preserved land and is located on Farm Creek near its mouth on Long Island Sound. He explained that under normal circumstances, the request for a letter of support would have been brought before the Committee and eventually the full SWRPA Board for approval. However, the grant application deadline necessitated that the letter be considered quickly by the SWRPA Executive Committee. He explained that the Executive Committee wanted to make sure that the City of Norwalk supported the application before providing a letter of support. He indicated that both the Norwalk Planning and Zoning department and the Conservation officer were consulted and that both were supportive of the application. He indicated that based on this information, the Executive Committee was in favor of providing a letter of support to the Norwalk Land Trust. Mr. Hutchison inquired as to how other entities could obtain SWRPA support. Dr. Lapp responded that the SWRPA Board should be willing to consider any such similar request.

2b. CL&P Underwater Cable Project in Norwalk

Ms. Grant explained that both the Norwalk Planning and Zoning Commission and the Norwalk Shellfish Commissioner has applied for standing to review Connecticut Light & Power’s (CL&P) application to replace existing underwater electrical cables in Long Island Sound. She indicated that Connecticut DEP had granted the request and scheduled two meetings. She explained that CL&P has proposed to replace the existing underwater electrical cables using a high-tech underwater trenching method, which would traverse public shellfish beds in and adjacent to Norwalk Harbor. She described the available documentation of the project as being difficult to understand.

She explained that CL&P’s application to the Connecticut Siting Council had been approved but with conditions, including provision for an independent monitor to oversee the project. She added that provision for an independent monitor had been left out of the project’s Connecticut DEP permit.

Ms. Grant explained that the existing oil-filled lines were leaking and needed to be replaced. She explained that several environmental groups had been advocating for the replacement of the lines.

However, she questioned CL&P's motive for replacing the underwater cables, noting the high cost (approximately \$60 million) and limited potential return on investment.

3. New Business

3a. Connecticut DEP's Green Plan Update – Draft

Mr. Karman explained that Connecticut DEP has recently released a draft update of its Green Plan for review and comment. He explained that the plan contained a summary of Connecticut's open space goals, objectives, policies, programs, and funding sources for the period 2007 – 2012. He indicated that Connecticut DEP deadline for comments is the end of June.

Ms. Grant explained that Norwalk had many dams but no fish ladders. She added that because the dams do not have sluice gates, large amounts of silt had collected in the impoundments behind the dams. She recommended that it should be Connecticut DEP's policy to remove dams in order to restore natural flows to rivers and streams. She added that only one of Norwalk's reservoirs in New Canaan has a sluice gate.

Mr. Hutchison explained that the Darien Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) has just been designated the Flood and Erosion Control Board for the municipality. He commented that it was possible for Flood and Erosion Control Board to violate the Inland Wetlands Act if they were to ask a property owner to create an impoundment on their property. He suggested that it might be prudent to order impoundments lowered before a major rain event. He added that the EPC has increasingly been requesting the use of above ground storage instead of infiltrators to deal with stormwater from large properties. He noted that golf courses and other similar managed properties are good candidates for on-site storage. Ms. Grant described a property owner in the Silvermine section of Norwalk whose development was continually intruding into the wetlands. She explained that although there was a penalty for such a violation, a certificate of occupancy for the property was nonetheless issued. This means that once the property owner paid the fine, they were essentially free and clear of any punishment for intruding into the wetlands. Mr. Hutchison commented that in the Town of Oxford, there was a per diem fine for intruding into wetlands, proceeds from which were put into the municipality's open space fund.

3b. Connecticut Climate Change Action Plan

Dr. Lapp indicated that he had attended a meeting of the Governor's Steering Committee on Climate Change, which included many participants. He explained that the Governor's Steering Committee had been working for some time to develop a list of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Ms. Grant inquired whether the Connecticut plan was based on the California plan. Mr. Karman responded that Connecticut had adopted California low-emission vehicle standards, which will go into effect in 2008. He added that climate change was one of the items to be discussed at the upcoming New England Governors / Eastern Canadian Premiers meeting in Prince Edward Island, although neither the Governor nor the Lieutenant Governor nor anyone from Connecticut DEP was scheduled to attend.

4. Next Meeting Date

Mr. Karman indicated that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, September 4, 2007 at the SWRPA office. Dr. Lapp inquired whether the Committee would entertain the idea of holding another meeting before September if needed, to which the Committee responded positively.

5. Adjourn

There was general consensus to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 4.10 pm.

Prepared by Alex Karman, South Western Regional Planning Agency.

Approved on September 4, 2007