

**Environment Committee  
Meeting Summary  
October 16, 2007**

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

Mr. Alex Karman called the Environment Committee (“the Committee”) meeting to order at 10.04am. The meeting was held at the SWRPA office.

**1. Approval of Minutes of Environmental Committee Meeting of September 4, 2007**

Dr. Margaret Wirtenberg made a motion to approve the September 4, 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 explained that public involvement meetings had been held with officials from Stamford and Wilton and that SWRPA was scheduled to meet with officials from New Canaan and Westport later in October. He summarized the discussions that took place at the meetings and provided a sample of the maps that were presented to local officials. He described the overall response as positive. He explained that most comments received concerned specific properties included or excluded from the map but that some substantive comments regarding the direction of the study had also been received. Dr. Floyd Lapp explained that the final draft of the study would be presented to the SWRPA board at its December 3, 2007 meeting. He explained that the final plan will include technical memoranda 1 and 2, a region-wide map, and a document summarizing the findings and recommendation of the study.

Dr. Lapp commented that, based on the participation at the public involvement meetings, it was his feeling that some communities devoted more staff and resources to open space conservation than did other communities. He cited Weston and Wilton as two municipalities that play an active role in expanding the open space inventory in their communities. Dr. Wirtenberg suggested that this was in part attributable to the diversity of communities within the South Western Region.

Dr. Lapp suggested that the Committee should develop summary recommendations to include in the final study document. Ms. Grant suggested the study recommend the development of a greenbelt, which could counteract the effects of sprawl, adding that greenbelts had been successful in England. Dr. Lapp commented that greenbelts were a good idea but the reality was that urban growth would eventually expand beyond the greenbelt. He suggested the study recommend putting a greater emphasis on open space connectivity. He challenged the Committee to conceive of the study as a graduate student workshop and to suggest bold recommendations that do not necessarily have to be grounded in reality. Dr. Wirtenberg suggested the study recommend development of open space linkages in areas designated for “conservation” (shaded in light green) on the Regional Land Use Policy map. Ms. Grant suggested the study recommend focusing open space conservation efforts on riparian corridors because of the environmental benefits. She also suggested the study recommend promoting open space linkages between historic and recreation areas. Dr. Lapp suggested the study recommend focusing open space conservation efforts on areas designed “neighborhood conservation” (shaded in pink) on the Regional Land Use Policy map and to think about connecting open space parcels within these zones. Dr. Wirtenberg suggested thinking about overlaying the “preservation” designation on areas currently designated “neighborhood conservation.” Dr. Lapp asked Mr. Karman what opportunities there were to expand the inventory of open space parcels in the South Western Region based on his research. Mr. Karman responded that, based on his research, much of the land in the region is developed and that the

remaining open land would be expensive to acquire. Dr. Grant suggested that study recommend opening up the waterfront to public access. She explained that this could be accomplished by municipalities requiring public access as part of any redevelopment of the waterfront. Dr. Lapp suggested that the recommendations contained on page 42 of the *Regional Plan of Conservation and Development, 2006-2015* could be reiterated and expanded in the conclusion of this study. He suggested no more than ten points of guidance or recommendations in the final study document. Dr. Wirtenberg explained to the Committee that she conceives of the region as three bands or layers, with Long Island Sound on the bottom, the densely settled urban area in the middle, and the more rural backcountry on top. She requested that the population of each layer or band be included in the study. Ms. Grant commented that the aquifer protection areas should be considered as part of a greenbelt assessment. Dr. Lapp suggested that the recommendations contained in the conclusion should be tailored to each layer or band in the region, based on population and development. He also suggested the study include a recommendation noting the importance of adequate human resources in each municipality devoted to open space.

Dr. Lapp suggested the possibility of holding a half-day conference on open space, modeled after SWRPA's recent conference on transit oriented development (TOD). He added that SWRPA could showcase the Region's open space accomplishments much like individual TOD projects were highlighted at the TOD conference. Ms. Grant suggested that Mike Greene could talk about Norwalk's efforts to improve access to the Norwalk Harbor. Dr. Lapp suggested that the Antares Company could talk about the open space elements of their redevelopment of the South End of Stamford. Ms. Grant suggested that DEP commissioner Gina McCarthy would be a good speaker. Dr. Wirtenberg suggested a speaker from Weston, either the current first selectmen or his predecessor, who could talk about Weston's efforts to acquire open space in the northern portions of town. Dr. Lapp asked the Committee to provide guidance points to Mr. Karman by October 31, 2007. Dr. Wirtenberg commented that a study of this particular nature had never been done before. Dr. Lapp suggested looking for examples in Westchester County's 'Patterns' plan. Dr. Lapp reiterated his vision of holding a housing conference in April 2008 and an open space conference sometime in early 2008. He also suggested the possibility of creating an advisory group of practitioners to guide policy on open space, similar to the transportation technical advisory group. Dr. Lapp explained that he would bring up the concept of a half-day conference to the SWRPA board at their December 2007 meeting.

### **3. New Business**

Dr. Lapp explained that the SWRPA board is currently considering new initiatives to undertake in the coming year and beyond. Ms. Grant suggested a study of watersheds, which she believes no one in the Region has yet tackled. Dr. Wirtenberg remarked that groups such as the 8 Mile River group, as well as NEMO (Non-Point Source Education for Municipal Officials) and CLEAR (Center for Land Use Education and Research) had already established themselves in the area of watershed study. Dr. Lapp commented that the discussion of new initiatives and a half-day open space conference would continue at the next meeting.

### **4. Next Meeting Date**

Mr. Karman indicated that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, December 4, 2007, 3.00pm, at the SWRPA office.

### **5. Adjourn**

Dr. Wirtenberg made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Ms. Grant. The meeting adjourned at 11.20am.

Prepared by Alex Karman, South Western Regional Planning Agency.