

Water Planning Council Advisory Group

May 19, 2020 Meeting Minutes

A telemeeting of the Water Planning Council Advisory Group (WPCAG) was held by Zoom and an audio recording is available at:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Water/WPCAG_2020/2020-05-19_WPCAG.mp3

Members Present by video or phone:

Aaron Budris	Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments
Josh Cansler	Southeastern CT Water Authority
Alicea Charamut	Fisheries Advisory Council
Karen Burnaska	CT Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound
Virginia de Lima	USGS CT Water Science Center
Eric Hammerling	CT Forest and Park Association
Carol Haskins	Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition
John Hudak	South Central CT Regional Water Authority
Christian Joseph (Alt.)	CT Nursery & Landscape Assoc.
Patrick Kearney	Manchester Water & Sewer
Fred Klein	CT Power and Energy Society
Dan Lawrence	Aquarion
Margaret Miner	Rivers Alliance
Jeff Pugliese	Middlesex Chamber of Commerce
Denise Savageau	CT Association of Conservation Districts
Kelsey Sudol (Alt.)	Lake Waramaug Task Force
Tom Tyler	MDC
Brenda Watson	Operation Fuel

Other Participants:

Jonathan Avery	Hazardville Water Co./Jewett City Water Co.
Jack Betkoski	PURA
Corinne Fitting	DEEP
Peter Galant	Tighe & Bond
Bruce Wittchen	OPM

Members Absent:

David Knauf	Darien Health Department
Joan Nichols	CT Farm Bureau Assoc.

1. Call to Order

The WPCAG meeting was called to order at 1:35 and a quorum was established.

2. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made and seconded to approve the [minutes of the April 21, 2020 meeting](#). The motion passed unanimously, with Jeff Pugliese abstaining.

3. Water Planning Council Update

a. Implementation Work Group (IWG)

Virginia de Lima provided a brief overview of the meeting of the IWG prior to this meeting. She said there had been a discussion of the work that the [Alliance for Water Efficiency](#) (AWE) is contracted to do for the WPC and the AWE's Mary Ann Dickinson will provide an update regarding their analysis of CT laws and regulations.

Virginia said the drought topical group will meet this week and also noted that the private well group's effort to encourage modernization of the state's tracking of private wells is ending because the [Dept. of Consumer Protection](#) (DCP) went ahead and developed a database with requirements for better data submission. She added that two interns at DPH will begin inputting historic well data and noted that there was a discussion of what that group will morph into.

Virginia said the IWG also discussed creating two additional work groups – one to focus on marketing the state water plan and the other to focus on interconnections. Virginia also noted that IWG members whose terms expire this year have agreed to be included on the slate of members to be re-appointed for two-year terms. One position for a person representing out-of-stream interests remains vacant, however. She noted that there is a preference to refill it with someone representing agriculture.

b. Other WPC/State Water Plan matters

There were none.

4. Old Business

a. Water Utility Coordinating Committees

There was a discussion of [Water Utility Coordinating Committee](#) (WUCC) activities. Dan Lawrence said the Western WUCC is scheduling a meeting and has to approve a non-community system. Jonathan Avery said the Eastern WUCC is scheduled to meet by Zoom on 5/21. They will have elections and decide what to do next; what members' interests are.

b. Website progress update

Alicea Charamut said the [new state water website](#) is live. Bruce Wittchen provided some background, noting that significant formatting and organization remains to be done and suggested people send additional content, or suggestions for additional content to him.

c. COVID-19 issues for water-related agencies and other entities

Jack Betkoski said DPH's Drinking Water Section is been holding weekly webinars regarding COVID-19 and water companies. More information is available at the Section's [COVID-19 website](#).

Referring back to the earlier discussion of WUCCs, Margaret Miner asked about the coordination between water companies, WUCCs, and DPH. She asked if an Aquarion

interconnection must be approved by a WUCC and if the WUCC informs DPH. She requested that the WPCAG be updated about such activities and Dan Lawrence said they can do that.

There was a discussion of the limited level of activity at the WUCCs and if requests for new water systems should be approved by the WUCC before being submitted to DPH. Margaret Miner said she is interested in how a water company decides what to serve or to not serve. Dan Lawrence said many new system requests are for small developments, such as a dollar store or day care. They use so little water that even a 1000-ft water system extension is not affordable.

There was a discussion of the state's [Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity](#) process. Peter Galant said only new system requests go to the WUCC before DPH. New source development, interconnections and transfers between systems, and source abandonments are not required to be approved by the WUCC. Margaret Miner asked if those that do not go to the WUCC first are checked against the WUCC's plan.

There was a discussion of how interconnections are treated if not included in the WUCC plan. Corinne Fitting said the amount of water to be moved through interconnections is checked against information included in the water companies' individual water supply plans. Margaret Miner asked if WUCC plans are obsolete in a year or two and there was a discussion of the plan update process. Peter Galant noted that individual Water Supply Plans are updated regularly and, by statute, are a component of the WUCC Coordinated Water System Plan.

There was a discussion of the financial impacts of COVID-19 on the water sector and Brenda Watson said her organization is seeing an increase in people seeking help. Alicea Charamut asked about the organization's funding and Brenda mentioned their add-a-dollar program, a surcharge on electric bills totaling \$2.1 million, plus corporate and individual support. The annual budget is ~\$3.4 million. Jack Betkoski mentioned a situation with a person he knew in need of help in Beacon Falls. He was able to connect her to Operation Fuel and she received a new furnace and 500 gallons of fuel.

John Hudak said Regional Water has a residential support program and has suspended shutoffs. Alicea asked about federal support and Brenda described the competition for relief funds and said money might become available through the EPA. Jonathan Avery said his companies have suspended shutoffs and late charges, but noted that there is no significant increase in non-paying customers. They are working with their customers and he noted that some have monthly billing and some have quarterly.

d. Alliance for Water Efficiency work

Alicea Charamut said Virginia de Lima has already covered this.

5. WPCAG Work Groups

a. Watershed Lands Work Group

Karen Burnaska began by noting that the group's questions about DPH's process for permitting green energy installations on water company lands are on the back burner. She provided an overview of another issue discussed in recent WPCAG meetings – last year's legislative conveyance of aquifer protection land in Cheshire – and described Margaret Miner's research regarding it.

Margaret provided a brief history, noting that it was not approved in the 2018 and 2019 regular sessions and then was approved without a hearing in a special session later in 2019. She noted that the bill had been sponsored by Speaker of the House Joe Aresimowicz and Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney.

Margaret said the [Dept. of Transportation](#) (DOT) has encountered problems regarding the Cheshire property's titles and mapping, so the property has not gone through the state property review process yet. She mentioned that she wrote to Rep. Aresimowicz last night describing concerns that have been raised. She added that there should be a process for flagging conveyances warranting further review.

Karen Burnaska said they want legislators to have the information necessary to make a decision. She described the questionnaire the legislative committee currently receives from a legislator requesting a conveyance and the additional questions the work group believes should be included. She asked if anyone has any additional suggestions.

Alicea Charamut recommended that people ask questions today and submit comments afterwards. Jack Betkoski said he will wait for PURA attorneys to review this before commenting. John Hudak said the conveyance review process desired by the work group lends itself to online mapping, using publicly-available data layers. Aaron Budris noted that most relevant layers, other than drinking water system information, are available from [CT ECO](#).

There was further discussion of the current conveyance process and its shortfalls. The current questionnaire has been in use for many years and does not ask about current land use. There was a suggestion to compile a list of what the group believes should be added and to negotiate with the legislature's [Government Affairs and Elections Committee](#) (GAE).

In response to a question of whether legislators have the capacity to furnish the discussed additional information, Denise Savageau said such requests typically originate with a town and town staff or its COG's staff can compile it. There was further discussion of the capacity of those involved to provide and to review such information and a deadline of 5/31 was established for receiving comments.

b. Conservation Pricing and Rate Recovery Analysis

Alicea Charamut said the WPCAG had been waiting for the outcome of the Alliance for Water Efficiency work before proceeding with this work group, but that is delayed and she recommends putting a group together now. She suggested a proposal be placed on the water website, with interested people being directed to contact her. Virginia de Lima noted that a number of the same people are involved with the work of the [Governor's Council on Climate Change](#) (GC3). There was a discussion of the demands on people involved in such groups but also of the desire to support the work to be done by the Alliance for Water Efficiency. Fred Klein asked that the invitation to join the work group also be circulated by email.

c. Utility Merger Analysis Workgroup

There was a discussion of a possible new group to consider goals for the future makeup of the state's water utilities. The group should consider the goals of state agencies and of existing water utilities, changes that might be coming in the future, and revenue issues. It was noted that there would be no vote on forming such a group today.

Margaret Miner said we need such a group and Virginia de Lima said we are seeing cracks in the health system; someone should look at cracks in the water system. She noted concerns about the number of companies and rates charged. Alicea Charamut said former DEP Commissioner McCarthy said utility infrastructure costs cannot all be on the backs of ratepayers.

Jack Betkoski highlighted the degree of private water company consolidation that has already occurred, noting that 35 companies were subject to rate regulation when he began at PURA and now there are 10. He said billions are spent on energy infrastructure and government should also look at water. He also mentioned that owners small systems routinely underinvest in their systems and then want to hand over the keys when the system is failing.

There was further discussion of the intentions for the group and Alicea said this is just a proposal for people to react to and it would be necessary to get WPC approval to proceed. It was noted that CT's unusual level of private water companies, in combination with municipal and regional systems, provides a choice of many models.

6. New Business

There was no new business.

7. Public Comment

Denise Savageau said the GC3 initiative should look for more coordination with water because the nexus between climate, energy and water is critical. She noted that GC3 is considering issues broadly and Alicea said it is unfortunate that the Governor's [GC3 Executive Order](#) directs agencies to provide their information by the end of the year, which will be after the committee work. Denise mentioned discussions of wastewater and land use issues.

Virginia de Lima said she has discussed climate change aspects of water planning with Len DeJong, Kirk Westphal, Joe Laliberte, and David Radka. GC3 will establish the policy and it can direct further science and modeling efforts.

Denise Savageau said people should be prepared to review GC3 documents when they are released and provided some background regarding the committee process. Margaret Miner said water issues are fragmented among committees and people should advocate for an auxiliary report focusing on water. She also noted that committee chairs were instructed to minimize redundancy between their respective work. Water issues are the 2nd or 3rd highest priority in each group, but water is not represented in any meaningful way.

8. Next Meeting Date

Alicea noted that the next WPC meeting will be on 6/2/2020 and the next WPCAG and IWG meetings will be on 6/16.

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM