Occum Industrial Center (OIC) Roadway Project
Response to CT DEEP Public Scoping Comments

The following responses are in reference to comments offered by Linda Brunza (Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection [CT DEEP]) on August 31, 2023, relative to Public Scoping for the OIC Roadway Project's Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) compliance documentation. CT DEEP comments were not individually numbered but rather categorized. Therefore, responses to CT DEEP comments are organized by these categories below.

1. **Comments related to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permitting and stormwater permitting:**

Response: The project received a Local IWWC from the City of Norwich in June 2022. Section 22a-39M of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act requires municipal inland wetland agencies to report all permit and enforcement actions to the Commissioner of the CT DEEP. CT DECD funding for the project was received in April 2023. The involvement of CT DECD funding triggered the need for CEPA compliance. The project will not require a Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as impacts to federal wetlands will be less than the 5,000 square foot (SF) threshold. A General Permit for Stormwater and Dewatering Wastewaters from Construction Activities will be required for the project as overall project disturbance will be greater than one (1) acre.

2. **Comments related to the CT DEEP Remediation Division:**

Response: A Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) was conducted for the project in support of the City of Norwich local inland wetland permit application (see reference in the Environmental Review Checklist) and was also supplied to CT DECD as part of the Community Investment Fund (CIF) application. The Phase 1 ESA concluded that there were no significant concerns other than the potential need to conduct some additional testing near an old Farmhouse on the project site prior to its demolition.

3. **Comments related to the CT DEEP Fisheries Division:**

Response: A review of the CT DEEP Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB) GIS mapping revealed mapped locations of rare species associated with the Project Site. A request for details of this rare species information was submitted to the CT DEEP, and in response dated November 28, 2022, the CT DEEP indicated that two State Special Concern flora species – Creeping St. Johnswort (*Hypericum adpressum*) and Alleghany Plum (*Prunus allegheniensis*) – and three State Special Concern and State Endangered fauna species – Spotted Turtle (*Clemmys guttata*), Eastern Hognose Snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*), and Eastern Spadefoot (*Scaphiopus holbrookii*), respectively – are now or formerly known to exist on the Project Site. However, based on determinations made in two reports submitted to the CT DEEP – the *Botanical Report for Project: Preliminary Assessment for New Arterial Roadway to Serve Future Business and Commercial Park, NCDC – Bryon Brook Study Area, 13 Parcels North of Rte. 395 Bordered by Lawler Lane to the West and Rte. 97 to the East in Norwich, Connecticut* developed by Dr. Bryan Connolly on September 12, 2022, and the *Diurnal and Nocturnal Amphibian and Reptile Surveys for the State Listed: Eastern Spadefoot, Spotted Turtle, and Eastern Hog-nosed Snake for New Arterial Roadway to Serve Future Business and Commercial Park, NCDC- Bryon Brook Study Area, 13 Parcels North of Rte. 395 Bordered by Lawler Lane to the West and Rte. 97 to the East in Norwich, Connecticut* developed by Dennis P. Quinn and dated November 21, 2022 – no state-listed plant, amphibian or reptile species were found on the Project Site. The CT DEEP accepted both reports and concurred with their findings in a November 28, 2022 response letter.

As a precautionary measure, the CT DEEP recommended the Proposed Action implement protection measures during construction activities to help reduce impacts to amphibians and reptiles. With the implementation of these recommended protection measures, adverse effects to state-listed flora and fauna species from the Proposed Action are not expected.

In addition to these five species, the CT DEEP identified two rare habitats as occurring on the Project Site: a freshwater community identified as "Alluvial Swamp", and a terrestrial community identified as "Floodplain Forest".

The potential occurrence of these habitats on the Project Site was assessed in November 2021 during site visits conducted to characterize and delineate wetland and watercourse resources. Based on field evaluations, there are no floodplain forests or alluvial swamps on the Project Site. These natural communities are alluvial wetlands influenced by seasonal inundation, with flood deposited sandy or nutrient-rich silty soils. These habitats are associated with the Shetucket River floodplain in the vicinity of the Project Site. There are no alluvial soil types on the Project Site. Site elevations and the location of Route 97 between the Project Site and the Shetucket River prevent seasonal flooding and alluvial deposition associated with the Shetucket River.

A City of Norwich local inland wetlands permit has also been secured for the project which considered impacts to Byron Brook.

4. Comments related to the CT DEEP Watershed Program:

Response: Based on a review of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) Connecticut Water Quality Classification Interactive Web Map,[1] all surface waters on the Project Site, including lakes, ponds, and brooks, are classified as Class A waters, or waters with uniformly good-to-excellent, natural quality. Class A waters have designated uses including habitat for fish and other aquatic life and wildlife; potential drinking water supplies; recreation; navigation; and water supply for industry and agriculture. The Project Site also intersects one area of groundwater classified as GAA, or an area where the existing or potential public supply of water is suitable for drinking without treatment.

Construction of Occum Way and associated utility connections will result in the temporary and permanent disturbance of surface waters on the Project Site, including for the construction of four box culvert crossings of existing surface waters as well as a bridge that will span Byron Brook. Additionally, several stormwater management basins are proposed within 100-foot Upland Review areas; however, these stormwater management basins are proposed to provide water quality and peak stormwater rate mitigation of drainage prior to it entering surface waters. In conjunction with the latest *Connecticut Stormwater Quality Manual* (effective March 30, 2024), the drainage design maintains or reduces the proposed peak stormwater rates to existing conditions. Moreover, the 1-inch water quality volume will be captured and allowed to slowly infiltrate the soil within the stormwater management basins. Erosion and sediment controls will be provided in concurrence with the latest *Connecticut Guidelines for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control* (effective March 30, 2024).

To avoid and/or minimize potential impacts to water quality, the Project will adhere to a project-specific Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan. The Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan will be implemented and maintained in conformance with the latest *Connecticut Guidelines for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control* (effective March 30, 2024) and other federal and state policies. Silt fences, hay bales, and other erosion and sedimentation controls will be installed adjacent to the Project's limit of disturbance. These controls will be maintained throughout the construction period (i.e., until exposed soils have become stabilized). Specialized drainage improvements proposed as part of the Project's design, including a temporary (construction) earth retaining system, installation of silt fences, compost filter socks, and sediment traps, and installation of a permanent drainage system, will facilitate longitudinal self-draining and eliminate saturation of Occum Way, and improve the quality of stormwater that ultimately discharges from the Project Site to surface waters.

The Proposed Action will not directly or indirectly impact areas of groundwater beneath the Project Site. Therefore, no adverse effects on groundwater will result from the construction of, or vehicular use of Occum Way.

5. Comments related to CT DEEP Air Management Bureau:

Response: The project is included in CT DOT's *Ozone and $PM_{2.5}$ Air Quality Conformity Determination of the 2019-2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan*, the *2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Programs as amended (February 2022)* and is also included in the CTDOT's *Ozone and $PM_{2.5}$ Air Quality Conformity Determination of the 2023-2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan*, and the *2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Programs as amended (February 2024).*

[1] CT DEEP. Connecticut Water Quality Classification Interactive Web Map. Available online at https://ctdeep.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=a23ad81358e749aab86342aed4c2dfe7. Accessed October 2023.

Air quality impacts from construction of Occum Way and its eventual use by OIC-related traffic are therefore not anticipated and the project conforms with the Clean Air Act. Any potential temporary impacts during the construction period can be avoided or limited by the contractor's proper operation of construction equipment and adherence to regulations limiting the idling of engines.

Occum Industrial Center (OIC) Roadway Project
Response to CT OEM Public Scoping Comments

The following responses are in reference to comments offered by Bruce Wittchen (Connecticut Office of Policy and Management [CT OPM]) on September 7, 2023, relative to Public Scoping for the OIC Roadway Project's Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) compliance documentation.

1. **The state has supported several infrastructure extensions to serve large-scale commercial and industrial development in the broader Norwich region in recent years, while also supporting brownfield remediation projects and other redevelopment efforts intended to return properties already served by such infrastructure to productive use. As such, state agencies should ensure that additional state investments complement rather than compete with previous investments and do not needlessly increase public obligations to maintain infrastructure. Please describe how the region's existing pattern of economic development, infrastructure, housing, and other resources have been considered in determining such a project to be appropriate at this location.**

Response: Norwich has one significant business park which is currently at 90 percent capacity and has not physical room to grow. Most of the buildings were erected in the 1980s and 1990s and, as a result, are functionally obsolete to meet current industrial criteria for such characteristics as floor loads, ceiling height, robotic conduit, and logistics. There are several old mills left in Norwich which are designated brownfields and are located (with one exception) in the densely populated downtown region of the City's core making transportation to and from these facilities not practical. NCDC engaged third party marketing expertise as well as input from third party industrial brokers which resulted in the same message: eastern CT, particularly along the I-395 corridor, is underserviced with modern industrial buildings in excess of forty thousand (40,000) square feet with desirable building characteristics and immediate access to I-395. I-395 is an essential corridor that services the Boston, Worcester, Providence, Hartford, New Haven, and New York markets and is a major commuter route for many of the employees of Electric Boat and other major employers in Groton, in the southeast region of the state. The markets that Norwich and the greater Norwich can serve lack large industrially zoned parcels.

The greater New London County area is experiencing a growth in apartment housing ranging from low income to market rate. In particular, the City of Norwich and the City of New London have multiple projects that are either planned, about to break ground, or nearing completion that provide housing for virtually the entire income arc. In addition, many of the smaller communities in New London County have seen a spurt in the development pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 8-30g, of work force housing which is providing a much-needed boost to that income segment.

2. **The scoping notice says: *"The roadway is anticipated to be constructed in phases that will progress depending upon user demand within Business Park North."* Please describe any aspects of the project that will proceed regardless of demand and the procedure for allocating individual properties so that development proceeds in an organized manner and takes maximum advantage of public investment in infrastructure. Is the industrial park expected to be served by public and wastewater infrastructure and, if so, what funding would be used to provide that infrastructure, and would that also be phased?**

Response: The arterial roadway design incorporates all of the required wet and dry utilities to service the industrially zoned lots and coordination with Norwich Public Utilities will be ongoing through the build-out of OIC. The first phase of the project involves the construction of an approximately two thousand two hundred (2,200) linear foot section of Occum Way, which would connect Route 97 to the proposed signalized intersection. This phase "opens" up the proposed industrial center and allows NCDC to consummate parcel sales as future phases of the roadway are developed. NCDC continues to seek additional sources of funding to extend the initial phase by another approximately one thousand (1,000) linear feet to open up two to three of the larger parcels on-site. NCDC has retained Cushman Wakefield Industrial Group to market OIC. Based upon their projections, it is anticipated that initial users will be on board concurrent with the physical construction of the initial phase.

Future development of the OIC (i.e., indirect and cumulative impacts with respect to the same) are discussed above in this Environmental Review Checklist. However, it is noted that future development of OIC falls under the purview of NCDC and that the subject of this CEPA documentation is only construction of Occum Way and its associated wet and dry utility infrastructure.

3. **What is the objective in creating a rotary at the I-395 interchange and shifting it to the west as shown on the project map? That location results in the rotary being adjacent to properties proposed to be developed, potentially creating conflicts not only between vehicle access to I-395 and to those businesses but also potentially increasing the threats to bicyclists, pedestrians, and others not in motor vehicles. If a rotary is appropriate in this setting, constructing it further east where the proposed new road intersects the existing on and offramps would seem to provide the desired safe and efficient access to Route 97 and the new Business Park North Roadway from I-395, while reducing potential conflicts. Will the proposed road be a state or local road?**

Response: The project involves the construction of one signalized intersection and one proposed roundabout. The signalized intersection is designed strictly as part of the proposed relocation of the existing southbound I-395 Exit 18 ramps. Its design does not impact any of the proposed industrial sites and will provide improved ramp geometry which includes establishing deceleration and acceleration lanes for enhanced safety on I-395. The location was designed by CDM Smith, traffic consultants, and will be reviewed by OSTA, CT DOT and FHWA as part of the parallel NEPA review process.

The roundabout along Occum Way at Canterbury Turnpike is designed to mitigate an existing speeding issue on Canterbury Turnpike (in the north/south axis) with a multi-use trail (see response to Comment #5 below) included as part of the design which will protect pedestrians and bicyclists. Crosswalks will be installed at the intersection of Occum Way and Canterbury Turnpike on the north side of the proposed roundabout.

Occum Way is designed as, and is anticipated to be, a City of Norwich public roadway following the sequence of submission to, and acceptance by the City for new roads in the City's subdivision regulations.

A detailed Traffic Impact Study (March 19, 2024) was performed for the project by CDM Smith. The study considers full build-out of the 184-acre OIC site by 2033, which is anticipated to consist of approximately 1,495,000 square feet of warehouse, manufacturing, and distribution space, 36,000 square feet of flex space, and 40,000 square feet of office space, and approximately 2,534 parking spaces.

The following is a list of findings and conclusions along with CDM Smith's opinion on the traffic impact of the proposed OIC development on the adjacent roadway network:

1. The construction of the proposed Occum Way between Lawler Road to the west and Route 97 to the east would provide an overall benefit in traffic circulation and access between the site and I-395, Route 97, Canterbury Turnpike, and other points. The proposed Occum Way should be designed to meet City of Norwich standards.
2. Route 97 at Occum Way intersection is anticipated to operate at an overall Level of Service (LOS) B under the future (2033) Build AM and PM peak hour traffic conditions with the suggested traffic mitigation in place.
3. Route 97 at the I-395 Exit 18 Northbound Ramps/Gas Station driveway is anticipated to operate at an overall LOS D or better under the future (2033) Build AM and PM peak hour traffic conditions with the suggested traffic mitigation in place.
4. The Canterbury Turnpike at Occum Way intersection is anticipated to operate at an overall LOS A under the future (2033) Build AM and PM peak hour traffic conditions with the suggested traffic mitigation in place.
5. The Lawler Lane at Occum Way intersection is anticipated to operate at an overall LOS A under the future (2033) Build AM and PM peak hour traffic conditions with the suggested traffic mitigation in place.

6. The proposed signalized intersection at I-395 SB Exit 18 Off-Ramp at Occum Way is anticipated to operate at an overall LOS A under the future (2033) Build AM and PM peak hour traffic conditions respectively with the suggested traffic mitigation in place.
7. Any proposed improvements to I-395 including the on- and off-ramps should be designed to meet FHWA and CT DOT standards.
8. The round-about on the Occum Way at Canterbury Turnpike should be designed to meet City of Norwich and CT DOT standards.
9. All site driveways to the proposed development should be designed in accordance with the City of Norwich standards.

Intersection traffic mitigation measures are documented in detail in the Traffic Study Report.

CDM Smith concludes that the planned OIC development will not create a significant impact on the adjacent roadway system and the nearby study area.

4. **The proposed industrial park is in an area of what appears to be limited public transit service, with a bus from Norwich's Transportation Center arriving in the area every other hour six days per week. The scoping notice says expected uses of the proposed industrial park include work-force development and businesses likely to employ some low-wage workers and service providers. Given that those in job training or low-wage positions are likely to have a greater dependence on public transit, how might this project's location limit employment and job training opportunities for people in the broader region? What would be the impact on the transit provider to provide more frequent service, including potential cuts to other service if additional funding is not available?**

Response: NCDC, as part of its planning process, has been and continues to be in contact with Southeast Area Transit (SEAT), the local transit authority. SEAT currently operates 30 routes each weekday to the area of I-395, Exit 18, which means SEAT can easily accommodate the anticipated two-to-four bus stops along the proposed arterial roadway (Occum Way) accessing OIC. SEAT has indicated it will add Occum Way to its bus lines that directly connect the core of Norwich to the Occum neighborhood and will provide transportation to employees of the future businesses located in OIC.

Workforce development: NCDC in partnership with the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) is actively developing a workforce training and employer engagement model which will increase job opportunities for the underserved Norwich community in the OIC catchment area. This NCDC/EWIB effort will also assist in providing the entire employment catchment area with a source of skilled labor including training in coding, CCN machine operation, vocational skills and computer skills.

Manufacturing and Technology-Based Economic Development: The goals of NCDC in developing OIC are to make it easy for existing businesses to expand and invest capital in modern, new plants; and to attract new businesses which will construct new plants, opening the potential for supply chain expansion, additional capital investment in plant, equipment and technology.

Section 4 Partners in Program Outreach – Workforce Enhancement: NCDC is working with EWIB, a lead institution in the Offshore Wind Cluster Initiative workforce development project and will make available flex sites within OIC should EWIB require additional facilities for its programming. EWIB and its partners have previously created a strong governance structure of workforce stakeholders who will serve this manufacturing project, including employers, organized labor, colleges, comprehensive high schools, technical high schools, economic development and other state and regional agencies.

EWIB has established strong outreach to underserved communities in its manufacturing and other programs, driving equity results by making the skills training accessible to all members of the community through the American Job Center system.

NCDC is working to develop OIC with the General Dynamics (Electric Boat Division, manufacturers of submarines) purchasing team; the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Association, the Connecticut Manufacturing Collaborative, and the Connecticut Business and Industry organization, as well as the University of Connecticut Real Estate Center.

NCDC is also actively working with AdvanceCT and the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technologies (CCAT) to market to prospective users interested in locating their businesses in a labor market with highly skilled workers. Defense-oriented companies like Sikorsky, Pratt and Whitney, Electric Boat and Stanley/Black and Decker along with over 4,000 tier II and tier III suppliers in their supply chain have established a skilled work force pool.

5. **Is the proposed multi-use path a stand-alone path intended to serve only the industrial park or is it expected to be a component of a regional network? Will the trail be built in phases like the road and potentially only traverse a short, disconnected distance for an extended time? There could be other places in the city or region lacking such an amenity but having significantly greater use by bicyclists, pedestrians, and others not in motor vehicles. If so, is this the best location for the state to fund such a path?**

Response: The proposed multi-use trail is being constructed to comply with the requirement of the City of Norwich's subdivision regulations which require a sidewalk along any new road. In lieu of the traditional four (4) foot wide sidewalk, NCDC has opted to provide a multi-use trail that will be open to the public extending from Route 97 to the east and terminating at Lawler Lane to the west. This sidewalk, to be constructed of pervious concrete, is designed as part of the required roadway system and storm water management best practices. The sidewalk will be built simultaneously with the road phases as each phase is developed.

6. **Much of the project area is underlain by agricultural soils and a portion appears to be in active cultivation. This is a project that must be consistent with the state Conservation & Development Policies Plan (C&D Plan), which includes these relevant policies:**

   4.10 Promote agricultural businesses and supportive industries that are vital to the local and regional economy, preserve prime farmland through the acquisition of development rights, and when avoidance of such lands is not practical, minimize the loss or conversion of agricultural lands by state-sponsored development actions.

   5.8 Preserve and maintain traditional working lands for the production of food and fiber, and support niche agricultural operations that enhance community food security throughout Connecticut.

   Agricultural land having good road access so close to a regional center seems especially favorable for niche agricultural operations that could enhance community food security. Furthermore, even the limited current transit access to that land is better than what is available in many of the state's agricultural areas. The state and town should consider options for minimizing the conversion of such lands to uses that could also utilize other, previously developed areas in the region in a manner consistent with the state C&D Plan.

Response: The proposed use of the property is consistent with the City of Norwich's *Comprehensive Plan of Zoning* (2013) as well as the recent City of Norwich's *Plan of Conservation & Development Strategic Elements* (2023), which was approved by the Commission on the City Plan in August 2023 and effective September 2023. The property has been and continues to be designated as PPD and GC zoning districts which allow for commercial and industrial uses.

In addition, the City Council, acting in its role as the Zoning Commission, adopted a Business Master Plan District which "the City of Norwich recognizes that there exist properties located proximate to I-395 and the Taftville-Occum area of the City which represent important opportunities for economic growth and community development. There may also be other areas in the city which may be identified from time to time which present

such opportunities." These three zones: BMPD, PPD and GC are in place to allow the city to capitalize on "important opportunities for economic growth and community development" in this area of the city.

Both the 2013 and the 2023 Comprehensive Plans address the entire city's agricultural assets. While the property in question was, in part, and at one time, a farm, it has not been actively farmed in over 25 years. Examining the detailed agricultural and potential development plans in the *Plan of Conservation & Development Strategic Elements* (2023) demonstrate that the city, in adopting these two plans in the last ten years excluded the property from its agricultural inventory as it recognized the need to balance conservation of agricultural land with the need to attract new businesses to underwrite real estate taxes, personal property taxes and utility revenue to reduce the cost of the municipal government on the citizens of the city and provide a catalyst for employment opportunities.

A review of both agricultural soils and historic/current agricultural practices on the Project Site, as well as the Project's consistency with relevant policies of the state's *Conservation and Development Plan* (C&D Plan) are provided in the Environmental Review Checklist for the project.