



**Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council  
(CEEJAC)**

**Thursday, April 04, 2024, 1:00-3:00 PM**

**Land Subcommittee Meeting Minutes**

[Link to Meeting Recording](#)

Disclaimer: Please note this is not a word for word translation

CEEJAC Land Subcommittee Members:

Name	Position
Yaw Darko	CEEJAC Member & Subcommittee Chair
Terry Adams	CEEJAC Member
Alex Rodriguez	CEEJAC Member
Sharon Lewis	CEEJAC Member
Gustavo Requeno Santos	Subcommittee Member
Kathy Czepiel	Subcommittee Member
Reginald Saint Fortcolin	Subcommittee Member
Anna Pickett	Subcommittee Member

**1. Welcome**

**2. Presentation on Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) Lindsay Suhr,  
Director, Office of Land Acquisition and Management, CT DEEP**

- This grant program was created in response a 21% open space goal initiative in statute in 1997. The first round started in 1998 and has been generally offered once a year. Funding comes from state bond money (\$10 million) and the Community Investment Act.
- The program can be for permanent interests in land (fee acquisition or conservation). Once people are given grants they close on the property. Permanent conservation easement granted in favor of DEEP with commitment for passive recreation.
- Priorities listed in the statute include recreation, natural resources, water quality, land (which is eligible to be classified as Class I land/Class II after acquisition), and local agricultural heritage. Two additional priorities are equitable geographic distribution of the grants and the proximity of a property to urban areas or to areas with open space deficiencies and underserved populations.

- In 2020 staff added a section on environmental justice and equity which became a new ranking criterion. Ranking score criteria includes administrative, public access and outdoor recreation, environmental justice and equity, and climate change and natural resources.
- Mary Pelletier asked a question and Lindsay responded by saying she will dive deeper into the barriers that exist in the following slides. Lindsay also mentioned how the question of development is a tricky one and more conversation should occur.
- Reggy asked a question and Lindsay answered that the statute does not allow for the use of this funding if there's contamination on site. Reggy also asked if contamination is defined and whether it is an evolving term? Lindsay says this would be a question for their remediation team.
- OSWA grant application requires two appraisals: 1. Yellow book appraisal completed – appraisals cannot be more than a year old (Yellow book is a higher standard – the one the federal government uses) and 2. 1 appraisal review confirming that the appraisal is yellow book complaint.
- The way the statute is set up now if you are a distressed community or targeted investment community you can get 75% of fair market appraisal if not then its 65%. The way the statute is written it does not include environmental justice community, but this is something that Lindsay's team is trying to change. This would add 48 communities that would be eligible.
- Known existing barriers include:
  - Small, isolated parcels did not score as high in the criteria. Made these tweaks in 2020 to try to help with that and it has. A lot of the properties that come in that are in EJ/distressed/investment communities have started to bump up their ranking. Lindsay's team is still looking at improving this.
  - The length of term is another barrier which is about a year to get a contract grant in place. In highly developed areas where its prime real estate for somebody they may not be willing to wait that length of time. They are brainstorming ways to approach this.
  - Complicated process and there is a need for expertise (surveyors and real estate experts). They acknowledge how these resources are not available in every community. Trying to think for options to improve this.
  - Coming up with creative ways to address contamination ahead of time since contamination is not allowed.
  - Funding cannot be used for traditional urban parks with infrastructure. So, if someone wants to put a playground, bathhouse, or pool this funding source cannot be used.
  - Hoping to address protection projects done by non-profits.
  - Review board defined by the statute lacks representation of environmental justice representation. They are trying to change this.
- Mary Pelletier says this is not working for suburban communities. Lindsay responded by saying that the funding is being used since they are giving out

potentially \$15 million. While the funding is being used across the state, but it is not set up well to serve urban communities.

- Denise Savageau said these concerns have to be considered seriously. Lindsay says there are proposed statute changes they are working on and hope they get voted on. They have a good handle of the percentage DEEP has acquired but does not have good handle on the numbers their partners are acquiring, or the numbers based on what acreages get protected through this grant program. Working with the state GIS office which are collecting poll data to understand what the world of open space looks like.
- Amy Blaymore Paterson said these proposed changes have been coming through the Land Acquisition review board whose meetings are open to the public. This group has been evaluating statutory changes.
- Updates and improvements:
  - The current statute includes language for this program. They are hoping to add environmental justice communities for areas that qualify for 75% market value. These changes would also benefit the Urban Green Community Garden program. There is a section on due diligence clause including legal work and how this is not funded. There is also language on adding two positions on the review board to be focused on environmental justice. They are trying to simplify and make this grant program easier to apply to. Considering lessening the yellow standard to make it easier for communities to do it. Her team is open to conversations of statute changes that would make this easier to apply to.
- Lindsay's team have been giving presentations and conversations about this grant application effort. Partnerships have been key and working on ways to break barriers. CIRCLA, for example, has funding for remediation geared directly towards projects that are going to become open space. These resources will help treat the remediation before applying for this program. There is also assistance such as grant writing applicants can make use through Save the Sound.
- How can CEEJAC help?
  - Provide insight into additional barriers to using this funding in environmental justice communities.
  - Provide feedback on application, process and scoresheet changes that will help.
  - Provide thoughts on potential future statute changes.
  - Help facilitate outreach opportunities.
- Public Comment
  - i. Ashley Stewart: Is there a map display of the distribution of the grant funds? Yaw said there is a list with the areas that have been received the funding.
  - ii. Ashley: Without the distribution you vaguely know where the gaps are. Urban spaces being neglected might point toward statute changes that should exist. The discussion is why open spaces is defined a certain way and why does the criteria was set that way and whether they can be adjusted. Lindsay said this was written a long time ago and needs major changes.

- iii. Jaime Smith: Is your scoring criteria based on the current statute? Lindsay responded by saying there is language in the statute that identifies areas they have to focus on. There is flexibility in the statute which is why they are making smaller changes.
- iv. Laura Cahn: If there is funding for playgrounds, she hopes it doesn't include any plastic services which contain PFAS. She hopes everyone is going to support the PFAS bill that is going through the legislature right now. There is a proposal for a waste processing facility called EchoPark and they were denied first application in North Haven for filling in a wetland. In retaliation they put up a fence. She is wondering if there is anything Lindsay's group can do about this. Can her program do something about this space being preserved? She is hoping they can stop pesticides from being used near open spaces and hoping this can be included as part of the criteria for awarding this grant. Lindsay said the tricky issue is they work with willing landowners. If there aren't willing landowners, they cannot be forced. A lot of potential for public input throughout the process. In terms of pesticides, they currently do not have anything in their grant program that prevents that. Depending on what they are using they might be making habitat improvements depending on use so they would not put out a flat out ban but she understands where she is coming from.
- v. Mary Pelletier: Logging throughout Hartford city parks because liability issues and fear has raised her awareness of the importance of having a gradient. There is a need for fallen trees to stay in place since their decay provides habitat for insects and birds. This is another reason to establish a gradient in high density suburban areas. Lindsay does not think they would take the viewpoint of 'no never cutting trees' but seeing where trees are being cut is something they might do.
- vi. Reggy: Are these changes to the statutes and federal regulations stuff that OSWA group can even do? Lindsay: This program is a state program set up by state statutes. There are some definitions the grant program references but they don't have to be referenced within the grant program.
- vii. Reggy: On the CEEJAC side it seems like they have figured it out. Appreciate the conversation but seems like they know what the problems are.
- viii. Gustavo: What is the goal of those applicants preserving that land? This seems like a great opportunity to address environmental education. Landowners especially those from getting funding from the state should developing environmental education plan for applicants to look at. Not adding more work to applications because some may already be doing that. Outreach and educational program that should address accessibility (e.g. for Latinx heritage visitors) to programs. This helps demonstrate how DEEP cares about accessibility. Hopes someone with physical disability, educators, and multilingual folks to be involved in the process of developing out OWSA's efforts. Lindsay explained how as part of their scoring criteria, they do provide extra points for accessibility and clearly showing how they did

community outreach to the local community and interested parties. She says they can take it further by asking for plans to incorporating and bringing communities into the site especially through signage. Open to talking about what this will look like. Gustavo encourages Lindsay's team to look at the Literacy plan led by DEEP on how community partners can work towards that.

- ix. Ashley Stewart: The program needs revamping around definitions. Knowing it housed within our house to edit and change maybe we can look at how to use this space and comments to think of what an overhaul of the OSWA program can look like. Since Connecticut's landscape is more developed, if they have harder restrictions, it will make it difficult to preserve land. How can they use a space as a brainstorming space to prep for change. Maybe at the end of the year before the session comes around using this space as an informing space but not just as a telling space. Lindsay asked what would a program look like if Ashley could design? Ashley responded saying that if we know the waves of environmentalism, we can track racism (e.g. redlining, segregation, etc.). Should consider how we avoid a program like this from reinforce the ideals that are outdated? It is crucial to find the spots within the program that are based in a conservation that is not informed in valuing everyone's involvement. Lindsay said they are trying to understand what the landscape looks like and shouldn't be discounting spaces that have been used as recreational spaces. This is the direction they want to go in. When thinking about environmental justice communities also must think about communities like rural and city communities that have contamination issues.
- x. Denise Savageau: Having worked in a large and rural and urban downtown landscape municipality there was a tension around how to do the pocket parks. When you try to make a criteria or checklist that fits both should be aware of how they are different.
- xi. Reggy: We don't need to reinvent the wheel so work on what we already have. Also made a comment about how he works in land trusts and doesn't see how this industry fits into equity. Lindsay explained how if you are a non-profit organization holding space, you are a land trust.
- xii. Amy Balymore Paterson: Wants everyone to be clear on the difference between OSWA and the Urban Green Community Garden program. They have different requirements. Amy also mentioned how OWSA funds have been mainly used for community gardens. Encouraged participants to attend their review board meetings. CLCC website has information on the review board.
- xiii. Gustavo: Wants to comment on the process since it seems complicated. Is glad to hear about the allocation of funding and technical support to support applicants. Looking at the scoring sheet thinks it should highlight how they are going to evaluate the way they are going to implement the programs. Provide examples on what is being rewarded and provide best practices or resource documents. This helps make the process more

transparent. Lindsay said there are categories that have point systems and are discussing whether the individual items should include how much points applicants would be rewarded for including things. Will consider a resource hub to show applications that got funded and serve as great examples.

- xiv. Mary: One of the big challenges in West Hartford is seeing large owners that have been holding on to property and allowed it to be degraded. It is her understanding that these groups having a fixed asset in their books allows them to leverage funding mechanisms. Eventually they sell it off and cash in on it. Mary wants the group to consider how to maintain the distribution of open space while also appreciating the open space they do have so it is not just banked for future sale. How do you create incentives that will stop that kind of sacrifice of open space that the neighbors have come to appreciate and believe has become part of their neighborhood? Does not know if this is part of the Green Plan or what but wanted to bring this up since she thinks it's not feasible for the state to buy all this land. In response to her question, Lindsay says it's a way for land to be valued for tax purposes. We cannot force people to come to us or land trust for protection. Denise chimed in by sharing that what happens is that non-profits don't pay taxes. They get their land assessed for land development potential. Can take that asset and leverage that as an asset at the bank since it has development potential. This is a huge issue in downtown areas where there are churches or other non-profits that own land and aren't protecting it. Lindsay said there can be incentives, but people cannot be forced.

- xv. Lindsay said people can email her with more questions or comments:

[Lindsay.Suhr@ct.gov](mailto:Lindsay.Suhr@ct.gov)

### 3. Announcements, Updates, & Events

- Mary Pelletier: Said it is nice to be invited to the group and sees how CEEJAC is asking for recruits. In her experience with the Hartford area a lot of people who care about nature do not have the time to attend a lot of meetings. Their voices will not be included if they do not attend these meetings. CEEJAC should therefore meet with Hartford Next or attend neighborhood meetings that already exist since sometimes people cannot attend all meetings.
- Denise said there is a bill looking to exempt land that has sewer and water from wetland review. From an EJ perspective she says this is a bad thing.

### 4. Upcoming Meetings

- Thurs April 18, 2024, 1-3pm  
CEEJAC Land Subcommittee Debrief about Open Space and Watershed Acquisition Grant Program

### Registration List:

Maisa Tisdale  
Sharon Lewis

Terry Adams  
Kathy Czepiel

Maggie Favretti  
Chadwick Schroeder

Jeffrey Stewart  
Yahshua WS  
Lissette Andino  
Dave Rauch  
Florencia Bugatti  
Jacquelyn Torres  
Janet Ainsworth  
Lindsay Suhr  
Julianna McVeigh  
Amanda Thompson  
Stephen Dewey  
Becca Dahl  
Inventor Eddie Oquendo  
Frida Berrigan  
Latha Swamy  
Brenda Geer  
Aicha Woods  
Anstress Farwell  
Mayor Pete Bass  
Victoria Carvalho  
Yaw Darko

Halle Lisette Pierce  
James Fowler  
Laura Cahn  
Kaleigh Pitcher  
Mary Pelletier  
Anna Pickett  
Luis Daniel Beauchamp  
Stephanie Camp  
Gustavo Requena Santos  
Eric Hammerling  
Ryan Boggio  
Danielle Russell  
Akiebia Hicks  
Caitlin Daddona  
Leigh Whelpton  
Ashley Stewart  
Reggy (he|him) - Bridgeport  
Cyrena Thiobdeau  
Ian McDonald  
Jaime Smith  
Danica Doroski

Denise Savageau  
doris johnson  
Aziz Dehkan  
Michael Davis  
susan halpern  
Maybeth Morales-Davis  
Patricia Houser  
Rahiem Eleazer  
Aaron Goode  
Tenaya Taylor  
Molly Johnson  
Jonathon Savage  
Andrew Hoskins  
Alfredo Herrera  
Nicolas Dostal  
Amy Blaymore Paterson  
Joanna Wozniak-Brown  
Paul O. Robertson  
Manuel Larson