



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

**Land Subcommittee Meeting Minutes**

**Friday, December 1, 2023 1:00 PM-3:00 PM**

[\*Link to the recording\*](#)

This is a public meeting and will be recorded and posted on the [Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council](#) website.

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

CEEJAC Subcommittee Members:

Name	Position	Affiliation
Yaw Darko	CEEJAC Member & Subcommittee Chair	CT Land Conservation Council
Alex Rodriguez	CEEJAC Member	Climate Advocate for Save the Sound
Terry Adams	CEEJAC Member	Stamford Board of Representatives
Leticia Colon de Mejias	CEEJAC Member	EcoWarriors
Sharon Lewis	CEEJAC Member	Connecticut Economic and Environmental Justice
Gustavo Requena Santos	Subcommittee Member	COEEA
Anna Pickett	Subcommittee Member	Urban Resources Initiative
Reggi Saint Fortcolin	Subcommittee Member	Aspetuck Land Trust
Heather Dionne	Subcommittee Member	
Kathy Czepiel	Subcommittee Member	Save the Sound, Six Lakes Park Coalition

CEEJAC Members Present (full registrant list below)

- Alex Rodriguez
- Terry Adams
- Yaw Darko
- Alex Rodriguez
- Anna Pickett
- Gustavo Requena Santos
- Kathy Czepiel
- Leticia Colon de Mejias

1. Welcome
2. Roll Call

Yaw introduced guests from CT Department of Agriculture (DoAg) - Jaime Smith and Cyrena Thibodeau. They were invited to support one of the goals of CEEJAC is to support partnerships with other state agencies, want to highlight opportunities for collaboration.

3. Overview of Agenda
4. Update on Urban Forestry Grant Program Process; From Danica Doroski, CT DEEP

Danica provided an overview of engagement from CEEJAC: on Nov 8, 2023 met with Subcommittee members to talk about urban forestry RFP and circulated a draft RFP to the committee for comments. This draft of the RFP that was shared included edits from the CEEJAC Land Subcommittee meeting on Oct 13, 2023.

Update on Feedback that has been incorporated:

- This is a funding opportunity that is federally funded, thus needs to be approved by partners at USFS (US Forestry Service) and partners at DEEP.
- Feedback related to funding tiers – creating a tiered system so that smaller groups requesting less funding might find this more approachable.
- Jargon and terms in the RFP – broke down language and leveraged things like images, maps, diagrams to outline key points.
- Gave examples of project types to foster collegiality in these programs – now has a robust list with contacts.
- Grantees submit interim reports, and we had conversation with subcommittee to make these reporting requirements approachable.
  - Idea for the Future: Use check ins to do site visits. Have a model for grantees to host a workshop so that DEEP could share best practices and grantees could meet each other.
- Scoring rubric – wasn't shared with the subcommittee. Talked generally about things to incorporate, not just professional staff on the review committee. Developed a scoring rubric with examples of point by point (from Gustavo at COEEA) that spells out exactly what we are looking for to obtain maximum point allocation.
- Addressed capacity issues within groups, such as not having grant writing experience, and provided weighting scoring so that folks can be on an even playing field
- Translation of materials – good goal for the future, not something for this grant round

TIMELINE for Release: Early January 2024 - *USFS has approved, now internally being reviewed by DEEP.*

Resources including office hour information: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Forestry/Urban-Forestry/Grants/Urban-Forestry-Grant-Opportunities>

**5. Presentation on Urban Green and Community Garden Program - Lindsay Suhr, Office Director of Land Acquisition and Management at DEEP**

- a. Office Overview:
  - I. Manage grant programs, including OSWA, UGCG, and handle land and water conservation fund
  - II. Have been here for about a year in this office. Have been looking closely at these grant programs – issues that we’ve seen historically and trying to identify ways to improve these grant programs, potential to create something fresh and new.
- b. Overview of presentation:
  - I. Barriers that we’ve seen, what DEEP is hoping to do, and opportunity for engagement
- c. Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program Overview:
  - I. Defined under statute – one line “for restoration or protection of natural features or habitats on open space already owned by the municipality...”
  - II. Must take place on municipally owned land, right now EJ communities, as defined by statute, is not included within this grant program
  - III. May have a co-sponsor project manager (non-profit). Must have an agreement with the municipality, but the municipality must be the applicant.
- d. Potential Uses for this Grant Program:
  - I. In the past, it has primarily been used to create community gardens.
  - II. We haven’t provided examples of projects or worked with communities to develop ideas.
  - III. We have a short list: pollinator gardens, plantings, green infrastructure improvements (rain gardens, bioswales), passive recreational trails, and any of the above that is a portion of a larger park improvement project

Question: (Gustavo) Are green yard projects at schools eligible?

Answer: (Lindsay) Yes, Hamden has done this in the past

- e. Application Requirements:
  - I. Need to show proof of ownership and an agreement with the municipality and the co-sponsor.
  - II. Site plan designs can be hand drawn - We just need an idea of what you are looking to do.
  - III. Like to see local support letters and look at past grant compliance.

Resource from Chat: (Cyrena) An opportunity that we have available to schools for gardens as well is <https://portal.ct.gov/DOAG/ADaRC/ADaRC/Grants/CT-Grown-for-CT-Kids-Grant>

DoAg's Farm Viability Grant may be an option for projects not eligible for this funding.

The 2024 Guidance should be out within the month:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DOAG/ADaRC/Publications/Farm-Viability-Grant>

Question: (Ashley Stewart) - Have you all considered how funding programs like the Community Match Fund with Sustainable CT can complement or support projects for community gardens? Also, does the municipality have to be the applicant?

Answer: (Lindsay) Various parts of DEEP are having conversations with Sustainable CT about how we can co-mingle funds and programs can be supportive.

Question: Does Municipality have to be the applicant?

Answer: (Lindsay) Yes

- f. Eligible Expenses:
  - I. Provide minimal outdoor structures like shade structures – these small ones can be justified under statute, but can't do large infrastructure ones like playgrounds.
- g. Required Match Share:
  - I. Grant funds cannot exceed 50% of a total project cost, we take volunteer labor and any match funds from municipal funds or in-kind donations
- h. Known Barriers: we get very few applications and we want this to be oversubscribed.
  - I. Funds can't be used for intensive purposes like splash pads or playgrounds.
  - II. Targeted at Distressed communities and right now, EJ communities are not eligible. It could add an additional 30 communities to the groups eligible
  - III. Projects must be on municipal land and only municipalities can apply – discourages smaller organizations from applying
- i. What is DEEP planning on doing?
  - I. We are having conversations for statute changes – adding EJ communities and allow nonprofits to apply directly
  - II. Looking at Policy Changes – liberal interpretation of uses and matching outside the eligible expenses.
    - 1. For larger projects that are doing infrastructure – we have gotten feedback that it's okay to include these projects as long as the money is going towards eligible expenses like tree planting, walking paths, community gardens.
    - 2. We will allow match funds for the larger infrastructure part of the projects (like bathrooms), but DEEP funding can't pay for those aspects.
  - III. We want to do increased outreach
    - 1. Need to do more events within communities and advertising outside the typical places
    - 2. Want to gain understanding of barriers/funding that is needed
- j. How can CEEJAC help?
  - I. Want to identify the additional barriers: what funding do communities want/need?

- II. Can we work within existing programs or do we need something completely new?
- III. Outreach: spreading word about program, initiating presentations within communities, ideas for improving outreach/advertising.

**k. Questions**

- I. **Leticia** – Heard you ask what are the needs from the community. I represent Green ECO Warriors – we haven’t had funds to access parks. How can you ensure that this funding goes to educate EJ organizations who have not had existing funding, or partnerships but have effective work in the past?
- II. **Leticia** – EJ communities’ parks don’t have bathrooms, trails, playgrounds, parking that is safe, well-marked trails (Beth Bernard, CFPA). People would like to go to parks if there were things they could do and they felt safe. There has been a lot of organizations who were small, and couldn’t sustain themselves, could DEEP offer planning support?
  - 1. **Lindsay** – Danica, Kim Bradley, Lindsay have been talking about planning grants and federal sources of funding and change the way that we do things. Helping with planning and grant writing assistance.
  - 2. **Lindsay** – Through our office we run land and water conservation fund (federal funding granted to DEEP) – DEEP has discretion for park improvement and acquisition or to give to communities. We haven’t done a grant round for that funding since 20 years ago. That money is complicated to get, but state would work with you to put in place. Could be used for park infrastructure – playground, trails, parking. Hoping to get additional staff to start a grant round for communities. Outdoor recreation legacy program – in the process of getting a new RFP for communities to apply for that. Money is geared towards EJ communities. Want to do a better job for outreach. This must be municipalities that apply.
- III. **Ashley Stewart, CT Green Bank** – Municipal ownership and applicant is going to be a huge hurdle for EJ communities. Reasons they are EJ communities is because they are disconnected from systems that are established. Communities have found pieces of land to cultivate that are not municipally owned. Like Hartford Land Bank, which uses blighted land to grow things. Why do we have these requirements? If state needs authority who should receive grant funding, make another pathway for communities. Sustainable CT Match Fund is a good way to get money to communities – what can DEEP learn from that program?
  - 1. **Lindsay** – Want to move forward with statute changes to allow nonprofits to apply. Is there a need for it to be nonprofits apply? Who is the owner of the property? Municipality, privately owned?

2. **Ashley** – We see people gardening on municipally owned, school-owned, community organizations. Could tap into the types of property that people are using.
- IV. **Kathy Czepiel** – Are these statute changes for the upcoming legislative session? Some of us are lobbyists.
1. **Lindsay** – that is the hope. We can't promise anything. Not sure if DEEP is putting info out about it. Will have land conservation partners putting info about it – Yaw's organization CLCC will be doing it. Or we could figure out a better outreach path for that.
- V. **Denise Savageau** – I have worked for municipalities for many years – private entities, and municipalities. We may want to limit who can apply, like nonprofit (private not commercial). Community gardens and community space having it adjacent to playgrounds is really important – having these spaces side by side is a good thing.
1. From an env'l education perspective – we build spaces, but we don't fund the programmatic side that Leticia mentioned. COEEA, Sue Quincy at DEEP don't get the dollars to do that programming. There is dollars needed for env'l education. State agencies have put in their legislative priorities, but if it's not in your package then it is not happening.
    - a. Environmental Education in CTAT DEEP  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Education/EducationAT>
    - b. CT Outdoor and Environmental Education Association (COEEA) <https://www.coeea.org/>
  2. **Lindsay** – had conversations with Open Space Review Board about statute changes. We're hoping to move forward with some of them. Think it will just be a start.
- VI. **Jaime Smith** – I have known that this program existed. Have been messaging with Danica, think the 3 of us should chat more. Want to share that DoAg has a couple of grant opportunities that could backfill some gaps that this grant program can't provide. Nuance of our program is that it has to be about agriculture (food producing, community gardens) not recreational trails or playscapes. If there's a nonprofit, COG, municipality are available to apply for farm viability grant.
1. Releasing farmland climate resiliency preparedness grant for farmland and production focused land.
- VII. **Gustavo** – In regards to outreach, Hamden school could be highlighted and focus outreach to school districts. Need to work with Housing Authorities. Focus on outreach for specific projects. Thinking about how small organizations can apply for grants – can we simplify steps of the process?
1. **Lindsay** – hopeful that something sticks and there is a way to support planning and grant assistance for DEEP grant programs and projects like this.

- VIII. **Christina Smith, Groundwork Bridgeport** – have tried to get smaller NPO’s support on grant funds. Have been at Groundwork for 8 years. It’s possible for small NPO’s to be successful at grant writing. Small NPO’s can partner with other small NPO’s to get these grants. We partner with TNC and TPL, but there are other examples that have reached success. It is on my radar and we will be brainstorming more of this in the coming year.
1. Have seen a number of programs who are providing funding for grant writing support
    - a. deb.abibou@uconn.edu
    - b. <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/2022/11/14/long-island-sound-resilience-grant-writing-assistance-program/>
- IX. **Lindsay** – Statute for this grant program defines the Open Space review board, we are hoping to create two spaces for EJ communities on that review board.
- X. **Leticia** – We don’t require CT schools to offer math and science. It’d be critical to reach out to communities who don’t have access to municipal land, land trusts.
- XI. **Denise** – When you are putting in a grant around land, you often need mapping skills. There are people who can help with that. We are doing grant writing skills, but it’s also about access to data. It’s about knowing about the GIS site that Uconn has. Let Denise know how she can help about how to include data and what information they might need.
1. CT Conservation Districts can help with grants and with GIS mapping etc. Provide technical assistance and outreach on natural resources <https://www.conservect.org/>
- XII. **Theresa Hopkins-Staten, Eversource** – We need to have these funds available and not sitting there un-accessed and under-utilized. It’s usually about knowing about it and making sure that any barriers are limited, especially when they are desperately needed. Need to understand the “why” of why the funds exist without getting to the communities.
- XIII. **Yaw** – Can there be a list of resources for applicants to use to write these grants? Could these grant programs have the resources that were shared in this chat?
1. **Lindsay** – need to update our grant materials, outreach, policies, statutes – it all needs to be rehashed.
  2. **Lindsay** – OSWA grant program has a lot more barriers. The issues to use that funding to acquire land in EJ communities. It’s going to be a long haul to make all the adjustments. This grant program is too hard for EJ Communities.
- XIV. **Maisa Tisdale** – it’s going to be essential to dismantling systemic racism to allow ppl in EJ communities to purchase the land where they live. The land that we live on/in is controlled by people who don’t live in the communities themselves. We could remediate the land and engage with some type of development. These programs give advantages to people who don’t already

live in these communities. Either you want EJ or you don't – it means doing things differently and giving it to different sources. Instead of hearing that there are barriers, we need to know what are the barriers that we need to bring down. We are state taxpayers and when we are left to the mercies of our municipalities, we need the state to recognize that we are state citizens and that their deals shouldn't just be done through the municipalities.

- XV. **Alex Rodriguez** – Whether it be an agency proposal to address these barriers, or Yaw, CLCC's legislative proposal to remove these barriers – it's something that Save the Sound would support.
- XVI. **Sarah Huang** – What was the history of the statute and why did they put "municipally owned" requirement in there? It might be helpful to understand the "why" to provide recommendations for moving forward.
  - 1. **Lindsay** – Can look into what this history is
- XVII. **Christina Smith** – Finishing a partnership grant to install bioswales in Bridgeport, would these qualify as a right of way project?
  - 1. **Lindsay** – We should chat about what those projects look like. If you have a bioswale next to a small urban park, then it would for sure qualify.
- XVIII. **Lynne Bonnett** – What is the source of the money for the grants? President of Greater New Haven Green Fund and we face a lot of the barriers that you all face. Our money is from an endowment, we just stopped requiring that organizations have a 501c3 status because that was a huge barrier. Legal requirement to give money, the IRS requires us to report money given out that is \$600+.
  - 1. **Lindsay** – This is bond money (state) and CIA (recording fees for land records)
- XIX. **Christina** – Funding that is small, small grants is important. We are a small staff and don't always have the administrative capacity to manage large grants.
- XX. **Terry Adams** – Is there any history from when they drafted this, why was EJ communities not qualified? Look at oversight of not including EJ communities, it could be a correction of language instead of a new bill.
  - 1. **Lindsay** – We can share language when it is available.
- XXI. **Anna Pickett, URI** – URI received a grant in spring 2022 to reinvigorate a park in a community that really needs a park. We haven't gotten the grant agreement signed yet. We were required to get matching funds, but we had to spend those funds for other work. The Matching Fund requirement is the biggest challenge for us.
  - 1. **Lindsay** – Our office is frustrated about this too. This is Kimberly Fields project. Danica, myself, and offices that manage grant programs are working with legal office and business office to get contracts out the door faster. We need to hear about those things faster.



## 6. Goal of Subcommittee & Subcommittee Work Plan

### a. To identify a public participation process that includes community stakeholders in the development of grant funding programs that are specifically focused on EJ communities.

- i. Yaw - Are we getting our targeted audience to this space? How do we go about conducting outreach to make sure that people who need to be here are here?
  1. How can we do outreach better? What organizations can we tap into?
- ii. **Jaime Smith** – DEI Working Group Recommendations (from DoAg) that was a 2.5 year project. Some of the recommendations and the approach that we could implement them – there is an opportunity for our agencies to collaborate.
  1. <https://portal.ct.gov/DOAG/Boards/Boards/Diversity-Equity-and-Inclusion-Working-Group>
- iii. **Maisa Tisdale** – Our issues here don't just focus on money, they function around land use. That is an issue that we need to address on the ground and in neighborhoods. In Bridgeport, we are facing a situation where UI is placing energy infrastructure in neighborhoods, they are taking easements for property. If this plan moves forward, then this EJ community will never have a chance to revitalize. These all go through the state, how we are communicating with all these land use issues is critical.
- iv. **Eric Hammerling** – Batterson Park 260 acre park owned by City of Hartford, located between Farmington and New Britain. June 2023, DEEP was required to do a study on the park and make recommendations regarding it's future. We have a draft study on the Public Notices page and will be holding public meetings related to the park study.
  1. [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/Public Notice Attachments/Batterson-Park/Public-Notice---Draft-Batterson-Park-Study-Final.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/Public%20Notice%20Attachments/Batterson-Park/Public-Notice---Draft-Batterson-Park-Study-Final.pdf)
  2. [Draft-Batterson-Park-Study-for-Public-Input-Posting.pdf \(ct.gov\)](#)

### b. Identify strategies for conserving and revitalizing/remediating land in urban environments

- i. **Christina Smith** – Groundwork Bridgeport is focused around Brownfield revitalization, which takes millions of dollars and the technical know-how (laws, rules, process). A big challenge for communities like Bridgeport where you have people working multiple jobs, there is a lack of time to commit to this. It's not just access to resources, it's time, educational background. Don't think there was enough knowledge on our city council to fight this in Bridgeport; wealthy communities get to do that. Spending time on the positive things that communities want – there needs to be something who are employed to not just put it on the community.

Knowing what's best for the community and better for the community – that is what the state can do.

- ii. **Maisa Tisdale** - There are also issues of permanent street closures by municipal government and private institutions that increasingly block access of People of Color to public parks. In our case, access to Seaside Park is being blocked, and part of the park is now fenced off for private university use. Freeman Center is establishing a center to do this – look at what the regulations are/not in EJ communities. The Resilience Center will be established in one of the Freeman Houses to do educational programs and communicate our needs and visions all the time.
    - 1. CEEJAC can include us when the state writes grants and there is funding available – asking groups like Christina's and Mine “how can we write this grant that impacts the ability to do what you are doing?” We need to build our capacity to build the visions – funding for capacity building. Matching grants are ridiculous for EJ communities.
    - 2. UGCG has a required match that is written into statute. 50% match required. We try to be as lenient as possible for what can be qualified.
  - iii. **Lindsay** – This program is funded through CIA program, which gets split to DEEP, Historic Preservation, Housing. A few of the different contacts there have talked about starting to have conversations to integrate all these uses into different grant programs. If you think about our land acquisition program, there can't be infrastructure or contamination. We recognize that we need to focus on more in-depth conversations to have meaningful discussions about land in general.
  - iv. **Ashley Stewart** – we need to reshape decision-making and include EJ communities and allowing them to prioritize land use needs over historical methods of land use planning. Maybe conservation takes a priority for that, but maybe it doesn't.
- c. **Identify opportunities to reduce barriers to accessing open space beyond urban parks**

## 7. Announcements

## 8. Closing and Announcements

- a. Scheduling Survey: <https://forms.office.com/g/r7SrAg6xR1>
- b. Announcements
- c. CEEJAC Quarterly Meeting – Monday Dec 11, 6-8pm
  - i. Register in advance for this meeting:  
<https://ctdeep.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZIkceuhrz0vHtxfmLVp32O5nqWL-48Nx03>

**Full List of Registrants**

Lori Mathieu  
Terry Adams  
Diane Hoffman  
Halle Lisette Pierce  
Jonathan Savage  
Dave Rauch  
Danica Doroski  
Doris Johnson  
Michael Davis  
Evelyn Green  
Teri Powell  
Annie Decker  
Reggy S  
Adrienne Houel  
Lindsay Suhr  
Maritza Bond  
Ryan Boggio  
Gustavo Requena Santos  
Diane Lauricella

Eric Hammerling  
Sharmin Akter  
Abbie Winter  
Yaw Darko  
Sean Cardwell  
Denise Savageau  
Sarah Huang  
Ian McDonald  
Katherine Bennett  
Kathy Czepiel  
Christina Smith  
James Fowler  
Brandon McGee  
Jaime Smith  
Cyrena Thibodeau  
Anna Pickett  
Alexander Rodriguez  
Maisa Tisdale