

Appendix D

State Office of Policy and Management Advisory Report on Revised Green Plan

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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF POLICY AND MANAGEMENT INTERGOVERNMENTAL POLICY DIVISION

TO: Graham Stevens, Office Director
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DATE: March 1, 2016

SUBJECT: Green Plan Advisory Report Prepared Pursuant to CGS Sec. 16a-31(e)

Pursuant to Section 16a-31(e) of the Connecticut General Statutes, I have reviewed the February 2016 preliminary draft of the *2014-2018 Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy* (Green Plan) for consistency with the *2013-2018 Conservation and Development Policies Plan: The Plan for Connecticut* (C&D Plan). My review has determined that the Green Plan is generally consistent with the C&D Plan. Findings and comments pertaining to my determination are outlined in the bulleted paragraphs on the following pages.

Please be aware that beginning in Spring of 2016, OPM will begin the five-year revision cycle for the C&D Plan. As part of this revision, the corresponding Locational Guide Map will also be updated to reflect any changes in land classification since the previous update. Since the Locational Guide Map utilizes some of the same GIS datasets that DEEP uses to inform land acquisition priorities for the Green Plan (critical habitats, drinking water supply watersheds, protected lands), I would like to coordinate with your office, as well as other DEEP and DPH staff, at the appropriate time to ensure that such datasets are uniform and up-to-date.

I find DEEP's new pilot mapping system, the Public Use and Benefit Land Registry (Land Registry), to be promising tool for advancing implementation of the Green Plan and tracking land acquisition goals. OPM, through its GIS coordination responsibilities under CGS Sec. 4d-90, is available to advise your office on efforts to build out the Land Registry and strategy to update the aging Protected Open Space Mapping (POSM) dataset, which currently serves as the state's protected open space inventory. Additionally, in order to protect high quality open space from the threat of future sale or conveyance by the state, OPM welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposed "strategies for preserving in perpetuity state lands of high conservation value" when prepared under CGS Sec. 23-8(d).

The following is a list of C&D Plan policies most supported by the Green Plan, followed by my comments as sub-bullets:

- *ENCOURAGE AND PROMOTE access to parks and recreational opportunities, including trails, greenways, community gardens and waterways, for affordable and mixed-income housing — GMP #2*
 - The Green Plan acknowledges the importance of increasing urbanized forms of open space such as recreational trails, community gardens, and water access. Such forms of open space are specifically promoted as acquisition targets under the “Natural Resource-based Outdoor Recreation” land acquisition priority in its 5-year Action Strategy.

- *CONTINUE TO PROTECT permanently preserved open space areas and facilitate the expansion of the state’s open space and greenway network through continued state funding and public-private partnerships for the acquisition and maintenance of important multi-functional land and other priorities identified in the State’s Open Space Plan (i.e., Green Plan) — GMP #4*
 - OPM recognizes that this is the core mission of the Green Plan, which aims to achieve the statutory goal of protecting 21% of the state’s land as open space through both state acquisitions and those of public-private partnerships. The 2014-2018 Green Plan further meets the above C&D Plan policy by (1) planning to establish a data-driven methodology for identifying the highest priority lands for conservation to make the most efficient use of limited funding resources; and (2) planning to establish a process under CGS Sec. 23-8(d) for preserving lands of high conservation value in perpetuity.

- *PROTECT AND PRESERVE Connecticut Heritage Areas, archaeological areas of regional and statewide significance, and natural areas, including habitats of endangered, threatened and special concern species, other critical wildlife habitats, river and stream corridors, aquifers, ridgelines, large forest areas, highland areas, and Long Island Sound — GMP #4*
 - OPM notes that the Green Plan’s four “statewide land acquisition priorities” largely encompass the forms of land identified in the above C&D Plan policy. Archaeological or sacred sites of statewide significance are specifically mentioned as a criterion of the State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program.

- *ENCOURAGE collaborative ventures with municipalities, private non-profit land conservation organizations and other entities to provide a system of appropriately preserved and managed natural areas and resources that allow for a diversity of well-functioning habitats and the sustainable use of resources; PROMOTE innovative land conservation and banking practices that further local, regional, and state conservation and development objectives, and minimize the need to expand infrastructure to support new development in rural areas — GMP #4*
 - The Green Plan clearly states that DEEP’s “land conservation partners” are critical to achieving a common goal of conserving valuable open space land over the next five year period and beyond. OPM concurs with such statement and urges DEEP to continue working closely with municipalities, regional councils of governments, land trusts, environmental planners, and others to ensure that DEEP’s conservation priorities align with regional and local conservation priorities, and that priority conservation lands are identified in regional and municipal plans of conservation and development.
 - In order to adapt to limited fiscal resources for new land acquisitions, OPM recommends DEEP to continue exploring alternative practices to complement the traditional land acquisition model, such as promoting voluntary conservation easements, partnering with

land trusts for staff assistance, and considering other recommendations as may be made from time to time by the Council on Environmental Quality and the public.

- *PROTECT the ecological, scenic, and recreational values of lakes, rivers, and streams by promoting compatible land uses and management practices in the vicinity of these resources; PROTECT, MAINTAIN, AND RESTORE the chemical physical, and biological integrity of surface waters to ensure that existing and designated uses are maintained — GMP #4*
 - The Green Plan heavily emphasizes the importance of conserving and protecting natural waters and drinking water resources including core forest and watershed lands. The conservation of such lands is important not only for ecological, scenic, and recreational value, but necessary for public health and ensuring a safe and reliable supply of drinking water for future generations (GMP #5). It is unclear how DEEP rates potential future drinking watersheds and unutilized aquifers when evaluating drinking water lands for open space acquisition. OPM encourages DEEP's consideration of protecting future drinking water resources in addition to current ones.