

**PA 490 Working Group Meeting**  
**February 10, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at 450 Columbus Boulevard in Hartford by Office of Policy and Management (OPM) Undersecretary Martin Heft at 9:35 AM.

Working Group attendance:

Undersecretary Martin L. Heft, Department of Agriculture (DoAg) Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt, Christopher Martin, David Beers, Paul Larson, Damon Braasch, Bill Lee, Nicholas D'Addario, Mark Walter, John Emmanuel, Keith Bishop, Kim Grijalva, Ben Freund, Joseph Orefice, Mike Gilman, Bonnie Burr, John Casertano, Connor Blunovsky, Ella Kennen and Jennie Kapszukiewicz.

State agency staff attendance: Chris Collibee, OPM; Rebecca Eddy, DoAg; Dr. Kayleigh Royston, DoAg; Nate Wilson, DoAg; and Amanda Samokar, DoAg.

Undersecretary Heft introduced himself and made opening remarks including thanking the group members, recognizing the importance of the land use values and the collaborative process ahead.

Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt made remarks.

Governor Lamont's Legislative Director Anne Kleza made remarks.

Members of the working group made self-introductions.

**Review of Governor Lamont's Directive**

Undersecretary Heft referenced Governor Lamont's January 19, 2026 correspondence directing OPM, in consultation with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, to:

- Revoke the 2025 Recommended Land Use Values and Best Practices for farmland, forestland, open space, and maritime heritage land, and reinstate the 2020 recommended land use values for these categories;
- Immediately notify all municipal tax assessors of this revocation and reinstatement; and
- Convene a working group in collaboration with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, including representation from agricultural organizations, farmers, municipal leaders, and assessors, to recommend alternative measures to improve data collection, review, and valuation processes consistent with state law.

Undersecretary Heft additionally reviewed the relevant Connecticut General Statutes Section 12-2b and Section 12-63.

Mr. Larson noted that the CT Farm Bureau's goal is to look forward in process and appreciate working with administration, agencies and legislators to look at issue and come up with a reasonable, transparent process.

Mr. Orefice remarked that forest appears to be left out of the directive and is a part of PA 490.

Undersecretary Heft noted that we have representation from all land group classes on the working group. Process is similar, but slightly different for forest that is based on stumpage data.

Mr. Freund mentioned that this is not a competing interest as many farmers have tracts of land that are forest.

### **Review of Current Process and Methodology**

Undersecretary Heft stated that in review of the current process and methodology, both the UConn Zwick and the Farm Credit East reports were distributed prior. Shall the group wish to have presentations on the reports we can schedule those. He ran through the full timeline process from the start to publishing the recommended values.

Discussion on the process:

- Mr. Braasch inquired if there is an attempt to resurvey, start a whole new survey set or just clean up existing. Undersecretary Heft replied that everything is on the table and open to suggestions and recommendations.
- Ms. Kennen noted the data numbers do look off.
- Ms. Grijalva mentioned that through an FOI request she received survey data. She noted that the survey entries were anonymous. She would like to see math of the survey data to see the "holes".
- Mr. Braasch clarified his question about clean existing data set or recommend new survey set. Commissioner Hurlburt stated the Governor's charge to recommend alternative measures. Not looking back at the data and develop a new process including how we improve the process and assessment.
- Mr. Orefice stated that it helps understanding "what went wrong". There were some survey design/implementations based on rents. Forest land is based on stumpage. The farmland is based on rents. A couple of issues including a stop if a respondent answered "no" to renting land. Additionally, lump sum entries were reported for a parcel of land. The Farm Credit East report reflects split parcels with single lump sum entry. A question to ask is if rental values are the way to do this.
- Mr. Bishop noted that he would like to see the data changes through the decades. Need to look outside the rental rates; Simplify process is needed such as a COLA and add predictability.

- Ms. Kapszukiewicz requested to hear from both UConn and Farm Credit East. She noted surveys not received by people.
- Mr. Emmanuel inquired if there was an expiration date on Governor's directive. Undersecretary Heft noted that the 2020 values are in place until the next cycle is completed. Commissioner Hurlburt stated that there is no expiration date. This is a new process to collect data per directive. No requirement to use the 2025 collected data.
- Mr. Emmanuel asked for the timeline process flow chart. Undersecretary Heft will provide this.
- Mr. Bishop referenced CGS 12-2b (1). What is statutory vs administration, and how much leeway does the group have? Undersecretary Heft noted that legislative is one option to put in statute. Administratively can change pending legal vetting. Commissioner Hurlburt noted that Vermont has a group that convenes and votes, Massachusetts has a similar process. All options are on the table. We could memorialize a process through the legislative process.
- Mr. Freund mentioned survey concerns and how difficult they are to answer. They don't line up with the way farms do business. Cited the forestry idea with known values of produce produced on land as a good example.
- Mr. Braasch discussed finalizing Grand List by local assessor. Assessors change rates at revaluation time (five-year cycle). Everything is taxed based on value in CT. Different valuation than market. Value based on use, an "in use valuation". It doesn't mean its based on income. Income can be used as a tool, looking at the actual income.
- Ms. Kenned added there are two processes - vetting and methodology. Need to figure out the vetting process in future and assure it is robust for future.

Undersecretary Heft noted the recommendation from Ms. Kapszukiewicz to have UConn and Farm Credit East make presentations. He asked if all were in consensus to review the materials.

- Ms. Grijalva noted focus on farmers not just the farmland. Farmers need viability and look beyond categories and all the variables.
- Mr. Orefice stated farmland in Massachusetts is taxed based on what you are doing on it. Look at the valuation on quality of land, not the potential.
- Ms. Burr noted the original intent was farmland preservation. Reminded that River Valley rates were driven by the tobacco industry, but no longer the same volume. Based on the quality of land and tax land on how things can be grown on it.
- Mr. Bishop added that perhaps there are too many categories and questioned if the separate River Valley category is needed. If there is a change in the use, suppose to complete paperwork change with local assessor. Need to look at paperwork flow.
- Mr. Braasch noted that this is currently based on use value. Assessors have to determine use.

- Mr. Larson remarked about dairy farms. Negative for them depends on economic climate factors.

Undersecretary Heft stated that we will schedule UConn and Farm Credit East to provide presentations to the working group.

### **Workgroup Procedures and Discussion**

Undersecretary Heft reviewed some suggested procedures for the working group. An email has been established ([OPM.PA490@ct.gov](mailto:OPM.PA490@ct.gov)) and available for comments, recommendations and suggestions. He reviewed meeting schedule options and whether they should be in-person, full virtual or hybrid. Suggested meeting every three weeks. A listing was provided of potential subject matters.

- Ms. Burr asked if there was any case law on PA 490. Mr. Braasch added that CT Farm Bureau has a summary in guidebook. Not aware of anything on valuation.
- Mr. Braasch asked if we were recommending a new set of values. Undersecretary Heft replied no, but a process and methodology only.
- Mr. Bishop added PDR Land differential and building values
- Mr. Larson asked if there are records of any Assessors going through process. Mr. Braasch responded that there are no recent examples.
- Ms. Kennen suggested we decide at meeting how the next one will be. How do we ensure methodology makes sense and is fair to all land classes.
- Ms. Grijalva asked if we could introduce discussions around other items that cause farms to lose money. Are there improvements and recommendations that can be made such as exemptions. Undersecretary Heft noted the Governor's directive and these should be addressed through assessor or the legislative branch.
- Mr. Larson suggested that we meet every three weeks; possibly every other being virtual.
- Commissioner Hurlburt asked about the time of day. Consensus on morning was good - 9:30 AM - Tuesday's.
- Mr. Orefice likes the Zoom option, but appreciates in person.

Background and other resources are on the shared drive. If anyone has items to add please email them.

Public participation is available via Zoom and is limited to three minutes. Participants will be asked to identify themselves and make statement. It is not a question-and-answer session.

### **Public Participation via ZOOM:**

- Cindy Harrison - Glad process is transparent and availability for public comments.
- George Purtill - Concerns that assessors will not implement promptly. He has land in Portland and Glastonbury. Glastonbury revaluation not until 2027, changes not implemented until then. Same in Portland. Problems with River Valley inclusion - not appropriate. Mechanics - difficult to hear on zoom and no camera.
- Will O'Meara - PA 490 new values diminish non-farming landowners for future. Rental values make it less affordable. Farmland that is owned, the projected value is not the driving force, but economic viability. Look at productive value of the land.
- Grace O'Connell - Appraisal method is being set with more - influence from developers, bankers, etc. Survey responses - review methods. Suggested Certified Mail, online links. Future meetings be in person/hybrid; participation is vital.
- Shannon Chatfield - Strengthen how values are assessed with focus on transparency and affordability. Reflect agricultural use. Predictability and system that can be understood and relied on. We should establish an Agricultural Committee in legislative branch.
- William Dellacamera - Family that inherits land/ incentive for families to keep. Still need to be taxed. Topography of land. "View tax"
- Duncan Wilbur - Incentive through reduced rates, like a mill rate cap (i.e. motor vehicle).
- Jerry Grabarek - Preston Selectman. Noted not enough farmers on the group. Recommends inviting Joan Nichols - PA 490 CT Farm Bureau.
- David Wasniewski - Like hybrid option. Agree with more farmers and Joan Nichols.

In closing, Undersecretary Heft noted that if there were additional comments to please email them. The next meeting will be in approximately three weeks. Notes of the meeting will be distributed and posted.

Undersecretary Heft adjourned the meeting at 11:37 AM.