

West Rock Ridge Advisory Council Meeting  
April 3, 2003 West Rock Nature Center  
Meeting Minutes

Attending:

D.E.P. Mark Rickert, Lori Lindquist

Council: Steve Broker (at large), Bill Doheny (Hamden), Steve Collins (Bethany), Karen Gilharg (New Haven), Ted Lyn (at large), Steve Masey (Bethany), Louis Melillo (Hamden), Don Menzies (Woodbridge), Gilbert Spencer (Hamden), Eric Stone (Bethany), Mike Walter (Woodbridge)

Guests: Barrie Collins

Meeting convened at 4:10 PM by M. Rickert. Park's Director Pamela Adams unable to attend and chair meeting.

Prior to the regular agenda Dr. S. Collins read and submitted his letter of resignation as Vice-Chair of the Advisory Council. S. Collins made a motion to nominate Dr. B.Doheny to replace him as Council Vice-Chair. Motion seconded by M. Walter. Motion was passed. S. Collins to remain on Advisory Council in same capacity as Designee of First Selectman of Bethany.

MINUTES:

S. Collins noted the omission of the following to the Minutes of the October 3, 2002 meeting: Page 2 "Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program" add *acres* after 4,071. B. Doheny made motion to accept minutes. Seconded by E. Stone. Minutes accepted.

LAND ACQUISITION:

Mike Walter requested Land Acquisition to be first topic of discussion

1. M. Rickert read Land Acquisition report provided by Beth Brothers:
  - a) "The agency's Land Acquisition & Property Management Division has not closed on any new properties within West Rock Ridge Conservation Area since the October 2002 meeting."
  - b) "The closing of the Schwenk property (13 acres in Hamden) has been delayed due to the owner's difficulties with a title issue."
  - c) "DEP Land Acquisition will be unable to make any new offers for the purchase of properties unless additional funds are made available."
2. M. Rickert advised council of recent budgetary reductions to the agency's open space land acquisition program. Level of Open Space funding as in former years has ended. DEP received only \$11.5 million for open space acquisition during the 3/28/03 bond appropriation. The agency currently has approximately \$20 million in pending signed property contracts. Agency is uncertain of any subsequent bond appropriations at this time due to fiscal crisis.
3. Nugent Property:

- a) M. Rickert advised Council of property status that was provided verbally by Beth Brothers: Appraisal is “delayed – actually over due”. Appraiser is having difficulty performing comparative analysis of this parcel against similar properties in the locale. DEP cannot make formal offer until appraisal is performed. Also, the land may ultimately be appraised at considerably less than the \$10,000/ acre asking price.
- b) A general discussion followed in which many of the council members expressed their frustration at both the appraiser’s delay and the Land Acquisition’s lack of follow-through in not having the appraisal completed in a timelier manner.
- c) Mr. Walter reminded the Council that a formal offer had been made to the State in October 2002 for about 23 acres @ \$10,000/acre. This offer excluded 5 acres of the Rt. 69 frontage for possible development. It is evident that the owner would have to spend a considerable amount to determine whether or not a house could be built anywhere on that 5 acres. Slope, setbacks, and floodplain is serious issues. No survey conducted to date. Development of back land would be very difficult and expensive. Need to bring a road across West River; distance too far for a driveway.
- d) Mr. Walter noted that 6 months had passed since the offer was made, and that no appraisal should take that much time. He also indicated that if the State could not pursue acquisition, the Town of Woodbridge, together with groups like the Nature Conservancy or Trust for Public Land, and local organizations, might be willing to take up the project.
- d) M. Walters requested that if the DEP is unable to purchase this property at this time due to lack of funding, not to immediately waive, or sign off on our intent to purchase.

STATE BUDGET:

No 2010 bond appropriations approved since last year. All capitol improvement projects on hold. O & M Budget (paid through General Fund and Fees Accounts) is OK through this 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. Budget cut anticipated for next fiscal year “will be bad but not catastrophic”. Seasonal budget will not be cut (\$2.2 million). Same as last year’s initial budget

STATE PARK STAFFING:

Parks Division-wide: 8 staff were laid off; 8 Park staff taking the early retirement package. Parks Division is now down 48 positions, or approximately 1/3 of it former staffing levels of 1999.

PARK OPERATIONS:

Parks Division has developed a Services Reduction Operation Plan to implement this season until budget & staffing conditions improve. Plan consists of reduced services ( i.e. reduced bus capacity, shorter campground operating season, fewer lifeguards); reduced maintenance operations; establish more walk-in parks. Focus resources on primary developed recreation areas.

West Rock Park to be open as usual: Memorial Day through last weekend in October, Thursday to Sunday. Lori: WRR will continue to be open 4 days per week Thursday through Sunday from Memorial Day through last weekend in October.

LEGISLATION -STATUS:

Some concern among Council members that the penalties to be imposed on sellers of land within the Park boundaries who try to sidestep the acquisition process, are not being enforced. How can we be assured that this important part of the Legislation is adhered to?

Shared Landscape STATUS:

Book is completed and funding avenues are being explored for printing.

NATURAL RESOURCE REPORT:

Steve Broker gave a report on the current state of the Vernal Pools within the Park (never seen them in better shape). Confirmed that Ravens are breeding in the Park.

Steve then gave us a very interesting report on his heretofore-unreported discovery of a breeding pair of Peregrine Falcons on the cliffs of the Park, going back to 1999. He recounted watching the female deposit an egg into the nest on March 29, 1999. She apparently left the nest and perished. The male returned the next year with another female. She was at that time too young to breed, but they returned the following year. The female laid two eggs that were subsequently predated. She laid three more, but all three perished due to severe weather conditions. The male showed up again in March of 2002 with a third female, also too young to breed. This year (2003) the male did not show up at all. Steve shared a magnificent photograph of one of the falcons.

Broker complimented L. Lindquist on park mowing operations performed at Lk Wintergreen and also his desire to restore 1<sup>st</sup> Easterly vista on Baldwin Dr (North side) for benefiting bird habitat.

ADVISORY BOARD VACANCY:

Unclear as to what vacancy exists. No action.

(Note: Subsequently determined to be establishing replacement for Peter Cooper's vacancy)

NEW BUSINESS:

Council requested an Updated Roster to be included with Minutes.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 5:35 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Rickert

w/ additional notes from Don Menzies (Woodbridge)