

Agriculture, Natural Resources, Open Space, Recreation, and Hazard Mitigation Focus Group held July 18, 2017

In attendance: David Sulkis, City Of Milford City Planner; Miriam E. Brody, League of Women Voters Hamden/North Haven; Matt Reed, Branford Land Trust; Mary Bigelow, League of Women Voters; Barbara Malmberg, REX; Cindy Ruggerio, Orange Conservation Commission; David Sargent, North Branford Land Conservation Trust; Kevin Magee, Town of Guilford Natural Resource Department; Kelly Hammill, Town of Woodbridge; Warren Connors, Town of Woodbridge; John Triana, RWA; Hank Petroskey, North Branford Land Conservation Trust; Carl Amento, SCRCOG; Eugene Livshits, SCRCOG; Rebecca Andreucci, SCRCOG; Rebecca Augur, MMI; Nick Armata, MMI

Discussion Summary:

- Remains significant unprotected farmland, funding is the challenge for communities and the State
- Some communities more proactive than others in pursuing open space for any purpose (farm, natural etc...)
- Guilford established fund from cell tower lease income for land conservation, although increasingly diverted for other purposes
- Guilford also proactively monitors land availability adjacent to existing protected land
- Need to better facilitate teamwork between various agencies who purchase and maintain open space (land trusts, towns, water companies, etc.)
- Collaboration between towns for properties that cross borders necessary – role for COG in identifying opportunity sites, mapping, etc.?
- The RWA communicates with all towns and land trusts on the purchase of land, especially around reservoirs that are currently active. However, the RWA does not have the budget to purchase big ticket lands in the region as it once did. Now the Authority must be more strategic in its purchasing.
- The RWA does not purchase land that is threatened with development. Typically when a tract of land is slated for development, the costs for acquisition is too high for the RWA to acquire.
 - The Authority has a 10 year strategy for land acquisition in which it identifies priority properties within the watershed – purchase is ultimately based on the willingness of the seller, the price and timing.
- Impact assessments are important tools. While the cost of acquiring a piece of land upfront may seem large, the cost to developing land will may cost more over time.

- Farming is a growing segment of the area economy, with agri-tourism becoming particularly important. Lack of funding for tourism initiatives have impeded efforts. Regional marketing and promotion of agri-businesses, farmers' markets, etc. is desired.
- CTFarmlink.org is a great way of connecting farmers to open spaces/ farmland – useful for open space land holders maintaining farmland/ meadows, etc. to connect with farmers who can maintain.
- Cuts in State/Federal funding for shellfish and water testing challenging the shellfish industry in the state.
- Accessing shellfish beds can be a challenge due to private property on coastline.
- Shoreline Greenway challenges in Guilford likely to continue – difficulty finding acceptable off-road route
- Concern over State's fiscal position, and effects on parks and trails – Towns increasingly going to be responsible for maintenance of trails and parks?
- Coastal access in the area is somewhat limited, as a result the areas available to the public are becoming crowded and overused. Example: Silver Sands Beach in Milford. Parking lots fill up quickly forcing visitors to park along the road which upsets property owners in the area.
- Acquiring private land along the coast, as it becomes available could open up new access, and support sea level rise adaptation; however, high cost of land
- Septic tank systems continue to be a challenge for coastal communities though progress has been made to mitigate their effect on the environment.