

Representative Policy Board
Land Use Committee
South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
Meeting Location: Seymour Wellfield, 151 Roosevelt Drive, Seymour

AGENDA

Regular Meeting of Wednesday, August 14, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

1. Safety Moment
2. Approval of Minutes – July 10, 2024 regular meeting
3. Seymour Wellfield Update: J. Triana
4. Updates on land and RWA properties, including invasive species update
5. Other land items
6. Next regular meeting - Wednesday, September 11, 2024, at 4:30 p.m.
7. Adjourn

*In the event of rain *ONLY*, the meeting will be held at 90 Sargent Drive, New Haven, Connecticut. To view meeting documents, please visit <http://tinyurl.com/tvu5cy9m>. For questions, contact the board office at 203-401-2515 or by email at jslubowski@rwater.com.

SAFETY MOMENT

OCCUPATIONAL WELLNESS

Occupational wellness is the ability to achieve a balance between work and leisure in a way that promotes health, a sense of personal satisfaction and is (for most) financially rewarding.

Signs of unwellness include stress, burnout, unmotivation, decreased productivity, low concentration, digestive issues, low communication, negativity, disorganization, anxiety and depression.

Below are some tips to help improve your occupational wellness:

- Don't settle, keep motivated, and work towards what you want
- Increase your knowledge and skills to accomplish your goals
- Find the benefits and positives in your current job
- Enjoy what you do, do what you enjoy
- Create connections with your co-workers
- Write out goals, create a plan to execute them, and then start working on your plan
- Look for something new and/or talk to a counselor if you feel stuck or unhappy

Tap Into
Safety



Regional Water Authority



Service – Teamwork – Accountability – Respect – Safety

Safety is a core company value at the Regional Water Authority .
It is our goal to reduce workplace injuries to zero.

 Regional Water Authority

Representative Policy Board
Land Use Committee
 South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
 July 10, 2024

Minutes

The regular meeting of the Land Use Committee (“Committee”) of the Representative Policy Board (“RPB”), of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water District (“RWA”), took place on Wednesday, July 10, 2024, at the Prospect Reservoir, 2 Cornwall Avenue, Prospect, Connecticut. Chair Betkoski presided.

Committee Members Present: P. Betkoski, P. DeSantis, B. Eitzer, M. Horbal, M. Levine, G. Malloy, and J. Oslander

Committee Members Absent: J. Mowat Young

RPB: R. Harvey and C. Havrda

Guest: Mayor Robert Chatfield

Management: L. Marcik, C. Savoy, and J. Triana

Chair Betkoski called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He reviewed the Safety Moment distributed to members.

On motion made by Mr. Malloy, and seconded by Mr. Eitzer, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of its June 12, 2024, special meeting.

Mr. Marcik, the RWA’s Capital Program Lead, and Mr. Savoy, the RWA’s Project Engineer, provided and update on the Prospect Dam, which included:

- Historical information
- Design phase advancement
- Permitting and regulatory approvals
- Water supply
- Project funding

Update on *The Land We Need for the Water We Use Program* – Mr. Triana, the RWA’s Real Estate Manager, reported:

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average	Drought Status
June 30	94%	92%	88%	None

Rainfall (inches)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average
June 2024	3.94	2.48	3.71
Fiscal YTD (6/1/24 –	3.94	2.48	3.71

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- Hamden, Preisner property – Received packet from Murtha. Filed in vault.
- Cheshire, Bis/Bowman property – Seller supposedly removed the contamination source. We indicated preference to carve out the farm dump area due to contamination and possible wetlands violation. Discussed size of this with the seller.
- North Branford, Beech St., and Poms La. properties (NB 4) – NBLCT reported they got a review of the survey back from DEEP.

Rental houses:

- Woodbridge, 1029 Johnson Rd. – Owner stated that would schedule a meeting with us and their architect in July.
- Woodbridge, 2040 Litchfield Tpk. – Corresponded with owner about replacing rear chimney.

Forestry Update

- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) – 75% complete.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – The harvest was halted in early June, and the logger pulled his equipment off the property on June 13th. It is uncertain at this point whether the buyer will continue with the salvage operation even if a market is found - 15% complete.
- Guilford - Menunketuc High-Grade Rehabilitation Cut and Conifer Release (GU12/12A) – 20% complete.
 - Planned and implemented the first field season of the Landscape Scale Restoration grant.
 - Worked with vendor and Field Operations to manage vegetation at the Gaillard Christmas tree farm.
 - Cleared black birch from within new white oak sapling release plots at BE13.
 - Scouted potential witch hazel harvesting locations in advance of upcoming field meeting with a former witch hazel harvester.

Recreation

- CT Trails Day hike at Chamberlain had 12 participants.
- Bass tournament at Lake Saltonstall had 33 participants.
- Butterfly walk at Lake Saltonstall had 20 participants.
- Butterfly walk at Lake Gaillard had 35 participants.
- Put up new large sign at entrance to Lake Saltonstall.
- Discussed additional signage with Bethany Horsemen to be placed at Lake Chamberlain.
- Cleared trails at Lake Chamberlain.
- The Water Wagon attended five events in June.

	June		May	
	2024	2023	2024	2023
Permit Holders	4,989	4,980	4,571	4,972

Special Activity Permits

- Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station – (Dr. Elisabeth Ward) conduct research on invasive plants and regenerating ash trees by monitoring plots in areas where ash has been affected by Emerald Ash Borer. In ash stand along Fram River at the northern end of Lake

Gaillard (41.3798800, -72.7455400) and Lake Chamberlain (41.404111, -72.9910951) (6-3-2024 – 6/3/2025).

- Bimble's Bluff 50K (Russell Hammond) - Annual 50K foot race - Use of trails through Genesee Preserve north of Guilford (10/20/2024)
- Native Plant Trust (formerly New England Wild Flower Society) – (Michael Piantedosi, Conservation Director) – survey and seed collection of CT endangered plant species with DEEP approval species name Carex typhina, Totoket Mountain Guilford (6/20/24-12/31/24)

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
 - Orange, 854 Greenway Rd. (OR 4) – Abutter signed license agreement.
 - Seymour, 8 Jefferson St. (SE 1) – Notified that the abutting property was sold. Sent letter to new owner about encroachment (Mindlin).
 - Hamden, 95 Booth Ter. (HA 22 & HA 22A) – Surveyor set two pins along the line.
 - Hamden, Hamden Hall (HA 9A) – Spoke to Amodio about his initial impressions of the appraisal.
 - Hamden, 14 Russell St. (HA 6B) – Received sign agreement from the abutter.
 - Branford, 91 Linden Ave. – Discussed the matter of encroachments over water mains and within water main easements. Set up meeting to discuss with other RWA staff.
 - West Haven, Shingle Hill Tanks (WH 7) – Discussed plans with Engineering staff. We are still waiting for Yale’s consultant to provide a structural analysis of the roof of the tank.
- Invasive plants – Treated or documented invasive plant populations in East Haven and Branford.

Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac)	55 acres
Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH)	4 acres

- Deer hunt – Mailed out acceptance letters to hunters.
- East Haven, Beach Ave. watermain – Consultant continued submitting the plans to DEEP. Corresponded with Beach Ave. property owners.
- West Haven, Allings Crossing Rd. (WH 6) – Continued corresponding with UI/Avangrid staff about old and new poles by the 20” water main.
- Yale Divinity School – Met with YDS staff to talk about land conservation as part of their Living Building Certification.
- Orange, Baldwin Rd. utility pole – A UI/Avangrid vendor requested to put a guy wire and anchor on our property. Attempted to get more information from UI/Avangrid staff directly.
- Durham, Madison Rd. – Received letter and photos from Vassel about activity on his neighbor’s property. Forwarded to Environmental Planning staff.
- Drone inspections – Flew drone for American chestnut flower search. Flew drone at Page’s Millpond to document water chestnut population.
- Personnel – Joshua Tracey was promoted to Forester II. Juliette Doyle and Brenda Leard started in the positions of Natural Resources Specialists.

There were no other land items to report.

Representative Policy Board
Land Use Committee
July 10, 2024

Chair Betkoski stated the next order of business would be to elect the Land Use Committee Chair for 2024-2025. He commented that he has served his maximum consecutive four-year term and advised the Committee that one member expressed interested in the position. Chair Betkoski asked the Committee if there were any others interested in serving as chair for the upcoming year. Hearing none, Mr. Malloy made a motion to nominate Mr. Levine as chair for the upcoming year. After discussion, Mr. Betkoski seconded the motion, and the Committee voted unanimously to elect Mr. Levine as Land Use Committee chair for 2024-2025.

The next regular meeting is on Wednesday, August 14, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

At 6:35 p.m., on motion made by Mr. Malloy, and seconded by Mr. Horbal, the Committee voted to adjourn the meeting.

Peter Betkoski, Chair

UNAPPROVED

August 14, 2024
Land Use Committee Meeting

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average	Drought Status
July 31	90%	95%	81%	None

Rainfall (inches)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average
July 2024	5.24	7.08	3.75
Fiscal YTD (6/1/24 – 7/31/24)	9.18	9.56	7.46

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- East Haven – Corresponded with property owner of 22+/- acres.
- Hamden, Preisner property – Marked boundaries.
- Cheshire, Bis/Bowman property – Inspected newly proposed property lines and removal of the farm dump materials. Notified by DEEP that we will receive a OSWLA grant for the property. Attended Governor’s press conference announcing the awards.
- North Branford, Beech St. and Poms La. properties (NB 4) – NBLCT updated their survey after DEEP surveyor’s comments.
- Seymour, Silver Mine Rd. (SE 9) – Emailed town staff that we were not interested in selling any of the Class III acres.

Rental houses:

- Woodbridge, 2040 Litchfield Tpk. – Met with owner and representative of Preservation Connecticut to discuss chimney in kitchen.
- Woodbridge, 115 Sperry Rd. – Responded to question from owner about history of the well.

Forestry Update

- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) – 75% complete.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – The harvest was halted in early June, and the logger pulled his equipment off the property on June 13th. It is uncertain at this point whether the buyer will continue with the salvage operation even if a market is found - 15% complete.
- Guilford - Menunketuc High-Grade Rehabilitation Cut and Conifer Release (GU12/12A) – 20% complete.
 - Trained Natural Resource Specialists in various field skills, including tree measurements, small equipment usage, tree care, and steam weeder deployment including safety practices associated with these activities.
 - Met with witch hazel harvester.
 - Worked with two maple tapers to explore transferring sugarbush from one to the other.
 - Met with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council’s Climate Smart Stewardship Coordinator to plan a forest adaptation workshop.
 - Met volunteers from the Native Plant Trust checking on population of cattail sedge and identifying new populations nearby.

Recreation

- Discussed access to Lake Chamberlain with Bethany Horsemen.
- Issued key to Bethany Horsemen for trail maintenance.

- Received DPH recreation activity permit renewals for Hammonasset, Saltonstall, Big Gulph, Sugarloaf, Genesee, and Pine Hill.
- Hosted six events for kids at Maltby Lakes: New Haven Police Activity League (3), Milford Boys & Girls Club (2), and Hamden Hall. Approximately 180 children attended events during July. Some fish caught at the events were donated to a bird habilitation facility.
- Recycled lead sinkers and plastic lures.
- The Water Wagon attended six events in July.

	July		June	
	2024	2023	2024	2023
Permit Holders	4,929	4,879	4,989	4,980

Special Activity Permits

- New Haven Bird Club (Patrick Leahy) – Fall Migrant and Foliage Walk to observe species that are nesting on Lake Chamberlain along the Sargent River, (10/15/24).
- New Haven Bird Club (Patrick Leahy) – Fall Migrant and Foliage Walk to observe fall birds and beautiful tree colors, Lake Dawson, (11/2/24).
- New Haven Bird Club (Patrick Leahy) – spring bird walk to observe species nesting on Lake Chamberlain, special emphasis on Bluebird/Tree swallow trail of bird houses, Lake Chamberlain, (5/21/25).
- New Haven Bird Club (Patrick Leahy) – spring bird walk to observe species nesting on Lake Watrous, special emphasis on Bluebird/Tree swallow trail of bird houses, Lake Watrous, (5/28/25).
- Western CT Orienteering Club – (Ms. Susan DeWitt and designees) – cross country race on foot, property near Ansonia Nature Center, 2000’ to the north of Nature Center with frontage on Rimmon Rd. (Rt. 313) in Seymour, 10/27/24.
- U. S. Geological Survey (Sydney Welch, Physical Scientist) - Take water level measurement of a monitoring well located on SCCRWA property-Middletown Avenue, North Branford (One short visit between (7/17/24-8/31/24)
- CT Forest & Park Assoc. (CFPA) (Elizabeth Merow) conduct tour of property, Master Woodland Manager Program, forestry ecology, Rt. 79 Madison-Nathan’s Pond, (9/21/24)

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
 - Agricultural agreements – Spoke to potential farmer for fields on the west side. Renewed hay agreement for field with Wettemann (NB 5A).
 - Hamden, 14 Russell St. (HA 6B) – Signed agreement for fence along the property line.
 - Orange, 854 Greenway Rd. (OR 4) – Signed license agreement for lawn and cart path.
 - Hamden, 245 Ives St. (HA 39) – Signed license agreement for lawn.
 - West Haven, Hood Terrace (WH 8) – Verified that dumpsters have been removed from our property.
 - Hamden, 95 Booth Ter. (HA 22 & HA 22A) – Met with abutter to review the new pins that were set.
 - West Haven, Shingle Hill Tanks (WH 7) – Engineering staff stated Yale’s structural analysis was satisfactory. Reviewed red-lined version of the agreement and sent final comments to Murtha.
- Invasive plants – Treated or documented invasive plant populations in North Branford, Branford, and East Haven. Water chestnut harvest for 2024 was completed. Flew drone missions at Furnace Pond to document the pre- and post-harvest conditions. Showed water chestnut harvest to UConn staff. Used new steam weeder in the Christmas tree plantation other sites at Lake Gaillard.

Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac)	22 acres
Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH)	0.5 acres

- Deer hunt – Proficiency tests were conducted at Lake Gaillard. Nineteen hunters passed the test.
- West Haven, Allings Crossing Rd. (WH 6) – Continued corresponding with UI/Avangrid staff about a license agreement at the property. Engineering cleared us to sign the agreement.
- Orange, Baldwin Rd. utility pole – UI/Avangrid staff said they would forward a license agreement to use for the guy wire and anchor.
- Hamden, Lake Whitney access – Signed license agreement for access through UI/Avangrid property to the dam.
- Drone inspections – Flew drone missions documenting work at the Prospect Reservoir dam. Hosted a meeting to discuss drone models and uses with multiple parties in the natural resources industry.
- Water main easement encroachments – Met with others to discuss our approach to finding and dealing with encroachments over water main easements.

Attachments

- July 17, 2024 - Six Lakes Park’s Future Sought – New Haven Independent
- July 23, 2024 - Climate Change Drains Reservoirs in the U.S. – Circle of Blue website
- July 27, 2024 - Why a small but growing number of CT towns restrict lawn watering: 'Conserve as much as possible' – Danbury News-Times
- July 31, 2024 - Green acres: State awarding \$14.5 million for open space – Waterbury Republican-American

Upcoming Agenda Items

September 2024 - ?

Six Lakes Park's Future Sought

New Haven Independent - by Brian Slattery | Jul 17, 2024

Trails for wheelchairs and strollers. A pavilion for events and education programs. Kayaking and fishing.

All these ideas and more emerged from a meeting at Thornton Wilder Hall at Miller Library in Hamden, held by Six Lakes Park Coalition, as the coalition invited the public to submit input on what a future state park in the middle of Hamden might look like, and how it might best serve the community around it.

That most recent meeting took place on Saturday. The next Six Lakes community meeting will be held on Thursday at 6 p.m., at Whitneyville Cultural Commons, 1253 Whitney Ave.

Six Lakes refers to a 102-acre plot of land, also known as the Olin Pine Swamp and the Powder Farm, bordered by Dixwell Avenue, Putnam Street, Treadwell Street, and Leeder Hill Drive in Hamden. For decades, the Olin Corporation, which owned the Winchester firearms manufacturer, used the site to test weapons and to burn and dump hazardous materials. In 1966 the site went dormant after an order from Hamden's public health department. A 1986 consent order from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection requires Olin to remediate the site — an order that Olin is now complying with. It is currently conducting studies to determine the extent of the pollution on the site, and thus, to figure out how extensive a remediation effort will have to be.

In the meantime, the plot of land has been effectively reclaimed by nature; it's a thriving ecosystem of dense forest and ponds, full of wildlife. The Six Lakes Parks Coalition — with the support of town and state officials — has thus been working toward having the land become a state park, open to the public as a swath of natural habitat amid an otherwise developed place.

The question at hand: how much remediation will be necessary to make that state park a reality. The land is currently zoned as open space, with one acre zoned for industrial/commercial use. As owner of the property, Olin could satisfy the requirements of the 1986 consent order by remediating it for industrial and commercial use. Residential use requires a higher standard of remediation; it also happens to be the standard that would be best suited for parkland and recreational use. The level of remediation thus depends in part on what plans are in place for the land after remediation occurs.

Hence Six Lakes, and its community meetings. This meeting attracted about 20 participants; according to Kathy Czepiel of Save the Sound, a previous meeting at Keefe Community Center in Hamden drew about the same number.

"We have gotten this far from three years ago," said Elizabeth Hayes, a community activist who is also on the Democratic Town Committee in Hamden and on the town's wetlands commission. "I think this is a great opportunity for Hamden." Foreshadowing the event, she talked about the possibility of developing small businesses along the Six Lakes property where it connected to the Farmington Canal Trail, which in turn connected to points north and south. "We're looking at it from an economic standpoint, too," she said.

After remediation, Olin could sell the land to a private developer for housing or industry. But "our current goal is to see this be public recreational space," said Justin Farmer, representing the Six Lakes Park Coalition — a place where "people can go and rest, and be in community, and enjoy nature." Undeveloped land is now in very short supply so close to the coast in Connecticut. Six Lakes is "a gift that we should not throw away."

Farmer has been helping shepherd the process since serving on Hamden's town council; Saturday's meeting was about addressing a fundamental question. Much of the preliminary work has been between Olin, DEEP, and various town and state entities. "How do we get it back into the community's hands?" he asked. The timing was right to ask the question, as Olin was, after decades of inactivity, moving toward remediation.

"We want people to envision what could be on the property," Farmer said, to give "the state and Olin a better opportunity to meet us where we want to go."

"Think big. Think boldly," he added. "Hopefully it does come about."

Farmer then handed the meeting over to Elizabeth Torres, a community development advisor for Vita Nuova, a consulting firm specializing in rebuilding communities and redeveloping surplus industrial properties. Torres encouraged the participants to divide into four even groups, and to brainstorm with strangers. "If you're at a table where you know everybody, move to a different table," she said.

The groups quickly began discussing both their aspirations and their concerns about what Six Lakes might look like if it were a public park. Ideas began to go up on the boards, from murals and sculptures to bathrooms and boardwalks. They talked about trails and picnic spots, natural play spaces, public safety, wheelchair accessibility, the chance of cleaning up the ponds enough to go kayaking or fishing. They talked about how to create opportunities for local businesses without infringing on the natural beauty that was already there. They talked about sustainability, how to ensure that the park stayed in good shape over time at a reasonable cost.

With 10 minutes remaining for discussion, Torres encouraged them to focus. “If you could only recommend three or four different uses for the property, what would they be?” she said.

At the end of the discussion period, the four groups presented their results. Consensus among them emerged on a few key points. First was a desire to preserve the natural landscape that had come about from decades of nonuse; in short, they agreed with Farmer that a 100-acre parcel of essentially wild land in the middle of Hamden — a place that many people wouldn’t need a car to get to — was a gift that shouldn’t be squandered.

Many of the suggestions thus coalesced around the idea of having just enough infrastructure for people to be able to appreciate it fully, to “make it a place where people want to go — a destination,” Torres said. Parking was available in the lots on Dixwell Avenue and could perhaps be reserved by arrangement with their owners; a parking lot on site might also serve the double purpose of containing contaminants, “catching two fish with one net,” Farmer said. A few paved trails could make the park accessible to wheelchairs, strollers, and bicycles. A small pavilion could create a spot for events and education programs. Small businesses could provide a few amenities. Access and programming was key even to get people to know about the park’s existence. As Torres put it, “if people don’t know about it, no one’s going to come.”

The groups also agreed about the need for an ongoing organizing entity — such as what the state park system would allow, or a nonprofit — to keep the park in good shape once it was created. Torres agreed: “It’s one thing to build a beautiful place,” she said, and “another thing to keep it sustainable.” Public safety from pollution and crime was a prime concern, followed by concerns about picking up litter and maintaining the trails and facilities. Possibly a volunteer organization, akin to the Sleeping Giant Park Association, could be formed to do some of this work.

All of the suggestions, however, pointed to a common action, which was that the site would need to be remediated to the highest possible standard.

Farmer informed the group that there will be one more public meeting to gather community input, on July 18, at 6 p.m., at Whitneyville Cultural Commons, 1253 Whitney Ave. In addition, Six Lakes has set up an online survey for people to fill out if they could not attend one of the in-person sessions. At the end of the summer, all the comments from the in-person sessions and online survey will be compiled into a report to submit to the state. Six Lakes hopes to get 2,000 signatures to file to state legislators by October “because we are envisioning it as a state park,” he said.

The last words, however, belonged to Hayes. “This is a process,” she said of Six Lakes’s community engagement. “If you have any suggestions to make this better ... we welcome your input, whatever it is.” Creating a park “can and should be a partnership” with the community; “it’s vital to getting this project where we want it to be.” By *we*, it was clear, Hayes meant not just the Six Lakes organization, but the greater New Haven community.

“Talk to your neighbors. Talk about Six Lakes,” Hayes said. “There’s an oasis that’s on the horizon.”

Climate Change Drains Reservoirs in the U.S.

Circle of Blue website - July 23, 2024 - by Zara Gounden

Reservoirs across the United States and globally are reporting significantly higher evaporation rates. Within the first three weeks of July’s record-breaking temperatures, for example, California’s largest reservoir, Shasta Lake, lost an estimated 4.1 billion gallons of water, due to evaporation.

During July, with temperatures consistently exceeding 100 degrees, Trinity Lake and New Melones Lake in California also experienced significant water losses. Millions of gallons evaporated from these lakes, far surpassing the water-loss rates recorded over the past five years.

Climate change has led to an increase in higher temperatures leading to more evaporation. Warmer air holds more moisture, increasing the rate at which water is converted from liquid to vapor. Reduced rainfall and higher temperatures cause more water to be drawn from reservoirs to meet increased agricultural and urban demand, exacerbating water loss.

A study in 2022 found that over the past 33 years, evaporative water loss from reservoirs has been increasing annually by 5.4%, exceeding the global trend of 2.1% for all lakes.

In order to combat water evaporation, methods have included the use of shade structures, floating covers, chemical treatments, and vegetation around water bodies to provide shade and reduce wind speed. However, these methods need to be implemented in conjunction with efforts to reduce the effects of climate change, as rising temperatures and changing weather patterns continue to exacerbate water loss.

Why a small but growing number of CT towns restrict lawn watering: 'Conserve as much as possible'

Danbury News-Times | By Michael Gagne | July 27, 2024

Frank Camelliti says he, like other Danbury residents, was caught off-guard when city leaders asked residents to immediately stop watering their lawns in late June.

"Initially there was no real explanation. It was a blurb to the community. It was a little bit of a shock, because there was no drought," Camelliti said.

There was a heat wave at the time. The initial announcement, made in a Facebook post on the city's website and press release to local news media, stated the request was due to high demands placed on the city's water system.

Since then, Danbury leaders moved forward with a new watering schedule, allowing residents to water their lawns twice a week on new schedules that are based on their addresses.

Since the initial announcement, city leaders explained that excessive watering, particularly in the city's growing west end, where Camelliti resides, strained the system.

By enacting the restrictions, Danbury joins a gradually growing number of Connecticut cities and towns where seasonal mandatory water irrigation restrictions are now in place. Officials say these restrictions are needed in certain, often wealthier, communities where water usage is high in the summer.

For example, Bridgeport-based water utility provider Aquarion Water Company now has seasonal two-day-a-week irrigation schedules in 18 of the 59 communities it serves. An Aquarion spokesman said those measures have yielded positive results since their introduction in a small number of communities in 2017.

Meanwhile, another provider, Connecticut Water, which provides water to 107,000 customers in another 60 towns across the state, has not implemented any mandatory schedules to date, according to that company's spokesman.

In 2016, following severe drought conditions and the declaration of a public water supply emergency in Greenwich, Stamford, New Canaan and Darien, Aquarion banned outdoor watering devices in those communities. The company had identified the communities as high outdoor water users.

According to Aquarion spokesman Peter Fazekas, conversations around reducing irrigation began with the state Department of Public Health after that 2016 drought. The conclusion, he said, was "putting in an annual schedule to reduce water waste would be beneficial."

So in 2017, the company began rolling out permanent twice weekly irrigation schedules, during which homeowners with even-numbered addresses are allowed to water their lawns on Sundays and Wednesdays, and those with odd-numbered addresses are allowed to water on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Watering would be allowed between midnight and 10 a.m. and between 6 p.m. to midnight. The schedule runs April 1 through Oct. 31.

"That is what started that schedule," Fazekas said. "We had a small number of towns that were high outdoor water users. There's a substantial amount of water being used in the summer period on irrigation — a lot of over watering. "That was the focus. It had some positive results, reducing that waste," he said, adding that July and August are when the company sees its highest demands for outdoor water usage.

Fazekas explained that maintaining the schedule allows the company to strike a balance between conserving resources and meeting its customers' irrigation needs. Meanwhile, weather patterns can be unpredictable.

"We don't know when it's going to rain. We don't want to be wasteful of the resources we have," he said. "It just makes sense: a schedule that balances the need of irrigation without over watering."

Danbury leaders said that by enacting their restrictions, the city is no longer seeing excessive water usage and its water tanks were "back to normal levels" capacity-wise.

Enforcing mandatory schedules

Aquarion enforces its irrigation schedules through observation by its crews and sending reminders to customers that are included with their water bills.

Fazekas said crew members know based on the period of time during the day and week, when customers should be watering.

"If someone is watering in the middle of the day it's noticeable. If we see somebody [who is watering], we could put them into our system, which generates a friendly automated letter, educating our customer on why it's important to conserve water," Fazekas.

"We never shut off anybody's water," he said. "Usually a friendly reminder works quite well. We see the results. Over the years we saved millions of gallons of water."

Furthermore, Fazekas said, customers see savings on their water bills as the result of using less for irrigation.

There are other benefits as well, he said.

“Just in general, it’s just beneficial to use less water for irrigation. That allows the roots of grass to grow deeper and become drought tolerant,” Fazekas said.

In Stamford, former mayor David Martin said the 2016 drought spurred discussions between city leaders and with Aquarion leaders about increased summer water usage.

Martin said the increase “was much more pronounced in the wealthier cities.

“Their numbers would significantly increase during the summer,” Martin said, citing Greenwich as an example.

He said data shared during meetings at that time showed that Greenwich had about half the water usage of Stamford during winter months. Usage rates changed in the summer, Martin said.

“During the summer not only did Greenwich reach Stamford’s level. They had actually higher water usage than Stamford,” Martin said, noting that Stamford’s population is more than two times that of Greenwich.

Martin is not an opponent of using irrigation systems, noting that he uses one for his lawn. He changes the irrigation levels, based on outdoor temperatures and precipitation levels.

Another provider, Connecticut Water, which does not impose mandatory schedules, “continuously monitors our water capacity and usage levels,” said its spokesman Richie Rathsack. “We have not experienced the need to implement mandatory irrigation schedules.”

Still, that company encourages its customers to be conscientious of water usage and waste.

“By adopting simple practices in our daily lives like fixing leaky faucets, using efficient appliances, and practicing responsible landscaping, we can all contribute towards ensuring a sustainable water future for our community,” reads a statement on Connecticut Water’s website.

Introducing changes

Fazekas said when the company adds a town to Aquarion’s mandatory irrigation list, leaders try to communicate the changes.

“When we’re adding a town, we try to give presentations to community groups, at Board of Selectmen meetings, to educate our customers, why we’re adding the annual schedule,” he said.

“In general it’s positive. Customers don’t want to waste water. It’s a simple thing to do. There are no restrictions on using a handheld device, drip irrigation or water hoses,” Fazekas said.

Fazekas said the reception to the changes is “generally positive,” although, every once in a while the company receives criticism for the measures.

In Norwalk, Eleanor Militana, general manager First Taxing District Water Department, said the utility introduced its even-odd schedule in 2021. Residents have generally complied.

“Our goal is to conserve as much as possible,” Militana said, noting the waste is mostly seen among users with new irrigation systems.

Militana said the issue when it comes to implementing mandatory schedules is her agency has “no enforcement authority.”

“We’re a water company. We are what’s called a taxing district,” she said. Like Aquarion, the First Taxing District alerts customers in their water bills to the fact that “it’s important to conserve,” Militana said.

In Danbury, Camelliti, who is a community leader in the city’s fast growing Reserve neighborhood, said the city’s new outdoor water restrictions received a mixed reception from residents.

“It had some pushback and some people who are in support,” Camelliti said. “In general, I think it’s worked out OK.”

And that overreaction to the changes that he saw in the beginning has since died off.

“Now it’s being looked at in a positive light by some people, negatively by other people. I kind of think in an expanding Danbury — it’s a city that’s expanding — changes need to take place for the politicians to accommodate all the people coming in. I understand why there’s a resistance when these things are introduced,” Camelliti said.

Green acres: State awarding \$14.5 million for open space

Waterbury Republican-American | By Paul Hughes | July 31, 2024

WINDSOR – The state government is awarding \$14.5 million to towns, land trusts and water companies to acquire and preserve another 2,600 acres of land from development in the largest round of open-space grants in more than a decade.

The total acreage among the 17 properties being preserved through the grant awards announced Wednesday also represents the largest amount of lands to be acquired and preserved in more than 10 years.

“This is an extraordinary milestone,” said Katie Dykes, commissioner of the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Open space projects in Connecticut

The largest award is the nearly \$3.6 million grant to Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy to preserve Milde Farm straddling Litchfield and Torrington. The 650-acre historic farm is one of the largest undeveloped parcels remaining in Northwest Connecticut.

Grants totaling more than \$5.5 million are going to Litchfield Land Trust, Winchester Land Trust, Aton Forest, Salisbury Association Land Trust, Southbury Land Trust and Warren Land Trust to preserve properties totaling more than 1,100 acres.

Thomaston is receiving a \$65,175 grant for its Seth Thomas Park revitalization project, and South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority is getting a \$188,500 grant to preserve 70 acres along West Rock Ridge in Cheshire.

Dykes and Gov. Ned Lamont on Wednesday announced the 26th round of funding through the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program at a former 18-hole golf course that the town of Windsor purchased in 2018 with the help of state funding.

The former Traditions Golf Course is now Mill Brook Open Space, 95 acres of rolling meadows, forest, shrub wetlands and winding trails traversed by a 3,700-foot stretch of Mill Brook in one of the most densely settled parts of Windsor within sight and earshot of Interstate 91.

In the early 2000s, a developer received zoning approvals to build a large-scale apartment and condominium complex on the property, but the project was abandoned following the financial crisis of 2007-08. It went back on the market in 2014.

Windsor and the Trust for Public Land partnered to acquire the property in 2018 using a nearly \$1.1 million open space grant and \$1 million in local funding, said Windsor Mayor Nuchette Black-Burke and Town Manager Peter Souza. The Trust for Public Land acquired the property and deeded it to the town with restrictions that it remain open space in perpetuity.

Dykes said the partnership between Windsor and the Trust for Public Land is what was envisioned when state leaders in the 1990s set a goal of preserving 21% of Connecticut's nearly 3.6 million acres as open spaces by 2023.

The 2,626 additional acres being preserved through the latest round of \$14.5 million in open-space grants brings the state within 156,000 acres of achieving its goal of preserving 673,210 from development.

“We know they're not making any more open space and we've got to do everything we can to preserve open space,” Lamont said.

But progress in achieving the state's goal has been slow. In 2016, 74.5% of the overall preservation target had been reached. The acquisitions of the last eight years have bumped up the running total to 76.8%.

“I think we have found since the implementation of that goal many, many years ago there are certain limiting factors other than just money, which the governor and the legislature have been incredibly generous with,” said Andrew Hoskins, DEEP's chief of staff.

He said the availability of land for sale is one of the biggest limitations and variables.

Since 1998, the state has provided more than \$161 million to municipalities, nonprofit land conservation organizations and water companies to assist in the purchase of more than 43,000 acres of publicly accessible land.

The state goal calls for towns, land trusts and water companies to preserve 352,634 acres, and they held 253,682 acres between them in 2023. The remaining 320,576 acres are to be preserved by DEEP, which held 263,528 acres at the end of last year through the state's system of parks, forests, fisheries and natural resource management areas.