

REPRESENTATIVE POLICY BOARD
SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT REGIONAL WATER AUTHORITY

PUBLIC HEARING

(Disposition of 56 Squantuck Road, Seymour, Connecticut)

JANUARY 23, 2025 AT 7:00 P.M.

TRANSCRIPTION

Peter:

Welcome to the public hearing. We will get started, it's 7:00 pm. I want to remind everyone that it's being recorded, and I will now read the Representative Policy Board of the South Central Regional Water Notice of Public Hearing. The Representative Policy Board of the South Central Regional Water District will hold a public hearing to consider South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority's application for the disposition of 4.98 acres unapproved Class III lands, located at 56 Squantuck Rd. Seymour, Connecticut, land unit SE 5. The public hearing will take place on Thursday, January 23, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. Members of the public may attend the meeting in-person, at the Seymour Town Hall, on 1st Street, Seymour, Connecticut, or via remote access.

For information attending the meeting via remote access and to view the application that accompanies this application, please visit RPB's website. The public hearing is being held pursuant to the Sections 10 and 18 of Special Act 77-98 as amended. All users of public water systems, residents of the Regional Water District, owners of properties served, or to be served, the other interested persons shall have an opportunity to be heard, concerning the matter under consideration.

Questions may be submitted in writing to the board of office by emailing jslubowski@rwater.com, or by calling 203-401-2515. R.E. Harvey, Chairman, Representative Policy Board of South Central Connecticut Regional Water District. 90 Sargent Drive, New Haven, Connecticut.

Okay. I'm not going to set any time limits, but if you get carried away, I will. Now I want to advise anyone wishing to offer testimony, they will be sworn in, they will be asked to state their names, residence and business affiliation, if any and may be subject to questioning by the presiding member of RPB. Advise members of the public that they will be given the opportunity to ask questions at the end of the public hearing and are not required to be sworn in.

Individuals testifying should identify themselves by their name and current address and organization, if any. Once they have done so, they should raise their right hand, and the presiding member will read the oath. Is there anyone that's going to be testifying tonight? Yes, anyone that's going to be offering testimony? Raise your right hand. I think that's everyone, right?

Do you solemnly and sincerely swear, or affirm and declare the evidence you shall give concerning the case now in question, shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, by the pains and penalties of perjury and false statements?

Group:

Yes, I do.

Bob:

Okay, we're going to begin the presentation. Thank you.

John Triana:

All right. Good evening, everyone. For the record, my name is John Triana and I'm the Real Estate Manager for the Regional Water Authority, here to present the disposition application, 56 Squantuck Road and we'll get on with the presentation here.

So, dispositions are referred to in Section 18 of Special Act 77-98. That's the enabling legislation for the Regional Water Authority. It requires RPB approval be given for all land dispositions. In this case, no Land Use Plan amendment is required, because this parcel has already been noted as non-water system land, in the last approved Land Use Plan. We required this during the BUI acquisition in 2008. It was noted as a potential tank site at that time.

When we went through the process of updating our Land Use Plan in 2015-2016, it was brought to the engineering staff and asked them, "Is this still needed for a tank?" Their determination was no. So that put it into the category of non-water system land, that is the bulk of the watershed and not needed for the public water supply anymore and could be so. The town inquired about the potential to acquire this parcel, in October 2023, for open space.

This is some of the information about the parcel. This is Land Unit SE 5 in our Land Use Plan and it's 4.98 acres, just under five. It is unimproved, raw land. It does have a driveway that goes to the Great Hill Reservoir Dam. So, this is all Class III land for us. It's not on any of that watershed. This disposition is part of the 2007 initiative for Land We Need For The Water We Use. This is to sell approximately 900 acres of non-water system land, Class III, in order to acquire 3,000 acres of Class I and Class II land.

Disposition objectives are to reduce PILOT and maintenance costs. That's about 600 or so dollars. Not that much, but it's all divergent of our resources. Minimizing future water rate increases, attributed to future borrowing. Generate funds for watershed purchases for that [inaudible 00:10:44] Program and to protect any outstanding natural areas and preserve important ecological functions.

The preliminary assessment that was done by John Hudak, it showed that this disposition will have no impact on our public water supply and also that means, "Hey, the land as open space will preserve and pull all the natural resources and values that are found at the site there."

So, for alternatives, there are not a lot of alternatives here, because the town and the state have right to first refusal and in this case, it's going to the town and it kind of gets rid of a lot of other alternatives that could happen, in other situations. The first alternative is that there'd be no action. In this case, there'd be no benefits realized to the authority. So, no cost savings or anything like that, so diversion of our attention to resources.

The other one would be sale to a private person, or organization, will either go through this disposition and then it would go into the [inaudible 00:11:36]. This is not really a viable alternative anyway, because as I said, the town and state have right to first refusal, with the town preceding the state. The town can always step in and kind of [inaudible 00:11:48] that we have and acquire the property that way. They've already told us that they're interested in open space, so that's where it's going to go, as we see it.

The minimum sale price is \$55,000. That was determined off of an appraisal from Mike Horbal. The parcel contains some wetlands and steep slopes, that's why it's got some issues with it, and it also has a storm water outflow pipe, that dumps into the property. Restriction on the deed will restate the intent that the parcel being sold for open space.

So this map, it shows you the location of the property. You can see the town and Seymour is outlined in black, with 56 Squantuck Road on the far western side of the town, close to the Housatonic River. Next slide, please.

Then, a little closer up, you see the shape of the parcel. It's about a diamond shape, with all the points pointing out in the cardinal directions. Squantuck Road is on the southeast-facing side. Squantuck Road is also Route 188. On this map, you can see the Great Hill Reservoir, just to the northeast.

I included a couple of photographs of the parcel, so you can see kind of what it looks like. The top left there is a shot looking to the northeast, or the northwest, on the access road that goes to the Great Hill Reservoir Dam. Then on the right is looking to the southeast and shows the basic contour, basic slope of the land. Squantuck Road is up to your left and then the stream down to the right.

The two last shots here are, the one on the lower right shows you that the topography gets increasingly steep, as you get closer and closer to the stream, down at the bottom of the valley. So, while it's slightly sloped up at the top, it gets pretty steep as you go downhill there, basically towards the northwest.

At the northwest side of that diamond shape if you remember, there is an old road there, I believe it has an abandoned water main that's underneath it, from [inaudible 00:14:08] and it's [inaudible 00:14:09] on it. It's not a legal trail, but people still traverse it today. Once this is conveyed to the town, then they can make it into a trail and it will be linking to that and just be part of the open space system, with a trail system [inaudible 00:14:26].

So in conclusion, the disposition is consistent of the goals of the Regional Water Authority. It will not impact the environment or public drinking water supply. The disposition is in the public interest. I'll take any questions you may have. Yes.

Tim:

I know there's no [inaudible 00:14:53] parking, but obviously [inaudible 00:14:58]. How much of the property is around [inaudible 00:15:02]?

John Triana:

How much of the property is around... [inaudible 00:15:05] the entire surrounding land is owned by the Town of Seymour.

Tim:

Oh, okay.

John Triana:

So, the town [inaudible 00:15:14], that we sold to the Town of Seymour, 94 acres, well actually BUI sold to the Town of Seymour, 94 acres in 1998. They also sold open space to the Town of [inaudible 00:15:26] on the other side, which is adjacent to this and then the Seymour Land Trust owns adjacent to the parcel on the left. So, it's one big block of open space and this is a little five-acre piece that's [inaudible 00:15:38] and reserved as a tank site. But we don't need it as a tank site now. The town has come to us, asking for it to include with the rest of the open space, okay, it makes all the sense.

Peter:

Okay. Before you go further, John, I want Attorney Donofrio to speak first and then we're going to open up to questions.

John Triana:

Oh, my bad.

Bob:

Jeffrey.

Jeff Donofrio:

Hi, good evening. Jeff Donofrio, Office of Consumer Affairs. As indicated in the memorandum that I submitted on the 16th of January in my management's presentation, this is just a little under five acres, Class III, unimproved land. As you just heard, the piece would complete the open space that the town had initially acquired from Birmingham some time ago. The property's not needed for water supply purposes. In the 2016 Land Use Plan, that was approved by the RPB. This subject property is identified as non-water system land, that can be sold or disposed of.

The valuation is fair and reasonable, when you take into consideration a few of the limitations on the property. Certainly, the deed restriction, restricting use of the property as open space, causes it to have a lower value. Wetlands and the slopes as well, the property just doesn't have significant value. It really doesn't have any use for water, so unlike some of the other disposition applications that have been in front of the RPB over the years, that involve historical structure, a home that could be renovated and rented, a home that could be moved.

This one is fairly simple and fairly straightforward, and the reasons set forth by now, the OCA recommends approval of the application. The appropriate disposition on the land and if in fact the town acquires it and holds it for conservation purposes as open space, that's consistent with what our restrictions are, consistent with the report that sources [inaudible 00:18:15] as part of the application. [inaudible 00:18:22] property as open space, rather than [inaudible 00:18:26]. Thank you.

Peter:

Thank you, Jeff. All right, moving forward, are there any RPB members, or members of the public that would like to ask questions. State your names [inaudible 00:18:40], before you speak. Steve?

Steve:

Stephen Mongillo, Hamden representative. John, do you know why this was not appropriate for a tank site? I mean, what happens to the roadway [inaudible 00:18:56]? Who needs access? Does the town need access-

John Triana:

Yes.

Steve:

To the water [inaudible 00:19:00].

John Triana:

To answer your first question, I think part of the obsolescence is that we built the Derby tank. By 2015, we already had plans to do the Derby tank, so engineering would mean once the Derby tank comes in,

this has no utility for us in the [inaudible 00:19:21]. That answers the first question. The second one was about the road. Well also the town acquires, and it acquires a potential future title defend.

By that, what I mean is, when the BUI sold the rest of the property to Seymour, the driveway, the opening of the driveway, or most of it, before it makes that turn as you saw in the photograph, that's on our property and in the deed, there was no reservation for that. It was kind of ignored. I mean, I guess the town could still say, "Well, by prescriptive rights, you still can go down there, sure." But it's like if we were ever to try to sell to a private entity, that would come up. So this makes all the sense.

The people who have to get to the dam is the town, because they've got to maintain the dam, they've got to access the dam. They are the most likely people, they're the people who access it now. I should say also that, they're going to put a clause in the deed that restricts it for open space, we would not be adverse to something that supports open space, [inaudible 00:20:29] like the small parking area. Right now, I don't know if you can put that back up, Jamie, for a second? I'll just show you where in the picture with the driveway.

Yeah, that one. So, if you look at the driveway here, there's a little like very light area to the right. The driveway's pretty thin. When I've driven down there, I drive down and you don't want to back out into Squantuck Road. I go down there; I turn around and I come back out. That's the little space where like three or four cars could probably fit there. If the town would ever request that, or want to do that, that fits within the open space, the [inaudible 00:21:13] in the-

So and that goes along with what open space grants for the state doing it as well. You can do improvements to allow public access to use the open space. Did that answer your question?

Steve:

Yes, and the RWA does not maintain [inaudible 00:21:32].

John Triana:

Correct, we do not. It is completely owned by the Town of Seymour now. They've asked us for some plans or any information that we have, to try to help them as they go on to maintain it and we've given them everything that we have.

Steve:

Thank you.

Peter:

Tim, Cheshire.

Tim:

This may be just a crazy question, but this is a question, nonetheless. Obviously, \$55,000 is a very reasonable price.

Peter:

\$55,000.

Tim:

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\$55,000. My question is, I'm not trying to be [inaudible 00:22:12]. If this is going to be a public benefit being transferred from public benefiting the town, in a case like this, I understand covering costs of transferring the property, but this \$55,000 estimate exceeds that by a lot. Does it? I'm curious about how you arrive at a price and what it is. How did we get to that price?

John Triana:

Well, that's the appraiser's job.

Tim:

It's the appraiser's job.

John Triana:

Yes, right. So when-

Tim:

So it's up to the board to decide if it's a fair price and whether to do it, or not to do it, or?

John Triana:

Nothing, just his costs.

Tim:

I guess, I'm not trying to be Pollyanna and give away land, but this just seems like a public good thing, and I guess, I raise the question, just maybe for policy consideration.

John Triana:

Right, I mean it's also part of protecting our consumers, our customers, is to make sure that we can bring down as low as possible, so that this is all-

Tim:

This is all part of that?

John Triana:

It's all part of it, yes.

Tim:

I appreciate that and I just wanted to present the question, just for, really it's a public benefit all the way around, I guess and you've explained that. That's [inaudible 00:23:30].

Peter:

Any other questions? Okay are anyone offer public offer and testimony to provide comments now?
Peter. State your name and affiliation, if any.

Peter Rzasa:

Peter Rzasa. Woodcrest Road in Seymour, Connecticut. I'm also a member of the Seymour Historical Society. They've asked me to hire a group to do an environmental study for that area and [inaudible 00:24:22]. I was contacted to provide some historical information for them, because my wife and I have been hiking this trail for over 15 years and I'm actually buying a book about [inaudible 00:24:37] of the Naugatuck Valley. [inaudible 00:24:48], Keith Mitchell [inaudible 00:24:48], but I recommend strongly that this land be sold to Seymour. Right now, we have a few tracts there in Keith Mitchell. One is the area around the reservoir that John talked about and the road that goes down there.

You can access that road, and you travel, I guess it's towards the Housatonic River from there and you come across the five acres of the Regional Water Authority land there and that land goes from Squantuck, all the way down to almost the stream. There's no way you can go from that area by the dam and cross over the Regional Water without trespassing on it, to access the road for Keith Mitchell Forest, which was also bought by BUI many years ago. That leads down to the [inaudible 00:25:44].

So it's like part of the [inaudible 00:25:49] land is owned by someone else. So, we need to get it back to where we're not illegally accessing our [inaudible 00:25:59] but RWA may want to [inaudible 00:26:01] and they would prevent access to two tracts of land.

There is a lot of historical information or history down in the Keith Mitchell area. Nick Bellantoni was an archeologist [inaudible 00:26:26] there. He just came out with a new book for the hiking trails and archeological sites in Connecticut and Keith Mitchell is one of them and the one on the other side is also known [inaudible 00:26:37]. He was very impressed with this area and the history and artifacts that we found there.

This land was originally Native American and there was a village here somewhere, but it's been so much destroyed and everything [inaudible 00:26:59], but we can't find any of this settlement. In 1680, Native Americans are moving there from [inaudible 00:27:06] and over by Keith Mitchell, they made their last reservation down there, because [inaudible 00:27:18] are moving out closer to where they were and they kept driving them [inaudible 00:27:23] away.

Eventually, they move out, totally out of Squantuck in 1687 and they went up to Canada, the [inaudible 00:27:32], the tribe up there. Then one of the first areas in Seymour to be settled was the Great Hill area. There was [inaudible 00:27:41] stream up there and water source and needed to have mills, needed to grind their wheat and cut their wood. But the only stream they had was the Fourmile Brook, which is the one that goes through the land.

So, I found four old dams down there from 1850. We don't know how old they are. There's one down there that's curved and Bellantoni and we saw that and just couldn't understand how it was being used. Doing some research, I think they did away with the water wheel, and they went with steam. But end-to-end, it's almost 400 feet long and that's the one you see going up the hill where 188 is.

Then you cruise around and then there's another [inaudible 00:28:27], or dam race, which would displace water from the stream to the mill there and into a mill pond. There's still evidence there. You can find the metal pipes that are stuck in the ground, where the trough had been for the race. There's one dam [inaudible 00:28:46], at the Tomlinson Saw Mill. It's in pristine condition. People can't get to it, because you have to access it through 188 and it's [inaudible 00:28:56] and it's steep on the other side, so it's in pristine condition. It's one of the best sites of a mill in Connecticut that there are.

Beyond that, there's historic [inaudible 00:29:10] there, but we don't know what they are. We called in industrial archeologists from UConn. I call them my dam friends. But they couldn't understand some of the configurations of the dams. So, the dams are another thing and up at the end of the reservoir, the reservoir dam has to be taken down, because the DEEP says that it's not safe. But the town, it would

cost about five million dollars to take it down. So, I think they're just going to let the water out and hopefully, there'll still be some water.

But the people do fish in there, they do ice fishing. I've seen boats in there and so on. It's kind of sad that we'll lose this beautiful site. At the end of there, at the traffic circle, we found [inaudible 00:30:05]. There was a tannery there and there was an apple mill there, a cider mill. There was a distillery [inaudible 00:30:15] and I think a [inaudible 00:30:26] mill. The DEEP and [inaudible 00:30:27] know about this area of the dam. So, we don't know where that went. So that's there.

Then, in 1783, most people haven't heard about Woodbury Path. It ran from East Derby Landing, all the way up to [inaudible 00:30:42] and it went all the way up to Woodbury. People would bring their crops from Woodbury down Woodbury Path and [inaudible 00:30:55] right at the end of that reservoir. They went up Great Hill and there are still parts of it [inaudible 00:30:59] and they would bring all of their crops to Derby to be shipped out and they'd be [inaudible 00:31:07] to all over the world. The Mediterranean and Europe and New York, Boston.

So there are still parts of that. But in 1783, Derby wanted to make a road [inaudible 00:31:20] traffic, leading up to Milford and [inaudible 00:31:26] and they wanted to have a road that went up to Squantuck and [inaudible 00:31:32] at the traffic circle to [inaudible 00:31:33], so people that way can go up to Oxford if they needed to. So that road is still there. That road is the one that goes along the river, all the way over to the Keith Mitchell Forest. Maybe a mile, but it's in those five acres, that road [inaudible 00:31:55] 1783.

There's a map where I've seen where it crosses, where the reservoir, before the reservoir, it went up to [inaudible 00:32:06]. So there is a lot of history there. I'd like to see it preserved. When we purchase this land hopefully, [inaudible 00:32:14] land for a parking lot in there. There seems to be an old dirt road that can come down, without causing too much harm or damage to the old trails there [inaudible 00:32:25].

We also have a [inaudible 00:32:37] John and Mr. [inaudible 00:32:43] and the guys up in North Madison, [inaudible 00:32:47] charcoal mounds up there, [inaudible 00:32:52]. So yeah. People used to [inaudible 00:32:58] Seymour and people [inaudible 00:33:04], when they were doing [inaudible 00:33:08], so people were always fishing. So [inaudible 00:33:11], hate to see that [inaudible 00:33:12] destruction after these storms and obviously, because of the way [inaudible 00:33:21].

So, I'm very much in favor of buying this land, preserving it, putting some restrictions on it, so that it can't be used for ball fields, or anything [inaudible 00:33:33], like dirt bikes and so on. So that's it.

Peter:

Thank you.

Unidentified Board Members:

Thank you.

Peter Rzasa:

Thank you.

Peter:

State your name, please.

Jeff Baryla:

Jeff Baryla, trails manager for the Seymour Trails Committee and Conservation Commission here in Seymour. I don't think I can really top Pete, [inaudible 00:34:11], I was going to say, but he already covered it. So again, I'm trail manager for the town. So, there is part of that old [inaudible 00:34:20] road that's there. People do use it, illegally. They're crossing over your property right now and by selling it to the town, I think it's a good thing.

We can get in there. I'd like to work with Joe Lanier, over at the YCC in Oxford. He does the Youth Conservation Commission up there. We'd like to come up with a network of trail systems, across both Oxford and Seymour, but the only way to do that is to get the 4.98, we're about up to five, but 4.98 acres. I think that's about it.

Group:

Thank you.

Peter:

Becky Phillips, please.

Becky Philips:

Hi. My name is Becky Phillips. I'm a Seymour resident from [inaudible 00:35:17] Street. I also don't know that I can follow, but [inaudible 00:35:17]. I just wanted to say that I strongly support the town acquisition of this land. I am a hiker and mountain biker. I'm a member of the New England Mountain Biking Association and the [inaudible 00:35:27] areas have been designation areas for trail use and there are folks that come from all over Connecticut, to access those trails. So being able to allow legal access, to connect all of Keith Mitchell with [inaudible 00:35:41], I'm strongly in favor.

Group:

Thank you.

Peter:

Thank you very much for everyone's testimony. Any RPB questions, at this moment? One more question and I apologize for not reading all the [inaudible 00:35:56] notes, I guess. Have there been any things put in, any stipulations put in the sale agreement that would conclude them from [inaudible 00:36:07]? Is there anything like that? If John can answer it.

John Triana:

Yes, so first off, the sale agreement has not been drafted yet. That will not occur until after this process is approved. Once we have that, we will meet next month and that's when the vote will take place. So, there's a 45-day appeal period. At that point, then we can do the purchase and sale agreement. The purchase and sale... Excuse me. In the purchase and sale, it will stipulate that the property's being sold for open space purposes.

Peter:

Right.

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John Triana:

If they needed some specific [inaudible 00:36:51] a parking lot would be requested, or hoped for in the future, but we would accept.

Peter:

Yes, it just seems like, [inaudible 00:37:01] sale agreement.

John Triana:

We'll put that specific in there, it would still be [inaudible 00:37:08].

Peter:

Thank you. Any other questions from RPB? Any other questions from the public? Okay. Making it easy for me. All right. At this moment, we're going to... Jamie Mowat will read these exhibits, because they're public record.

Jamie:

Thank you. The exhibits for the 2025 rate application are as follows.

Bob:

Oh, wait. Rate application?

Jamie:

Just the heading is wrong on here. All right. I'm going to mark it and I'm going to change it to match what we have on the front here, the Seymour property disposition application of 56 Squantuck Road. Now, we'll go exhibits. Exhibit A, application for the disposition of 56 Squantuck Road, Seymour, SE 5, dated October 28, 2024, which was the application. Exhibit B, managements responses. Dated November 1, 2024. The questions raised at the Authority meeting, to approve the application for recommendation to the RPB. Exhibit C, notice of public hearing. Published on December 23, 2024, in the Connecticut Post and in New Haven Register.

Exhibit D, the OCA memorandum, dated January 16, 2025, recommending approval of the application and Exhibit E, application presentation, January 23, 2025. Let me just ask Mr. Rzasa, were you submitting your document as an Exhibit to be on record, or was it just for-

Peter Rzasa:

I wanted to, but [inaudible 00:39:19]. I just brought it in case people wanted to see the picture-

Unidentified Board Members:

It was very interesting.

Peter:

Is it more informational, or does it got to go on record. I don't know exactly what the question is. Is it more history of the area.

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Jamie:

Okay. So it's reference material. It's not meant to be an exhibit.

Peter Rzasa:

[inaudible 00:39:34].

Jamie:

Thank you for bringing that, for our information. Then, I close the exhibits.

Peter Rzasa:

Okay, thank you.

Peter:

Thank you, Jamie. All right. Before we close the public hearing, are there any more questions, or comments, before the public? Go ahead.

Peter Rzasa:

Can I make one more comment?

Peter:

Sure.

Peter Rzasa:

People talk about mountain bikes and so on, but I think you have to be very careful about some of these sensitive sites there, such as the mills and things. I know they've gone over old cellar holes and things and [inaudible 00:40:16]. I think you have to be very, very careful not to disturb any of those archeological sites there, because it's the history of Seymour.

We had a flood come here in '55 and it wiped out a lot of our history and now we've got something still there and we need to preserve it. So that's very important that the trails do not go and disturb and make unnecessary access to some of these mills there, because they are in pristine condition. Thank you.

Peter:

Thank you, Peter.

Tom:

If I could say, I've seen Peter and his wife on the Pine Hill Trail. Peter and his wife are not only historians, but they're also advocates and activists, because you have your hiking paths and it's good to see both of you out there on the trails.

Peter Rzasa:

[inaudible 00:41:14], huh?

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Tom:

Yes.

Peter:

That's great. That's great. Any more comments, questions [inaudible 00:41:24].

Mark (Public Member):

Hi, my name's Mark [inaudible 00:41:26] from [inaudible 00:41:28] in Seymour and I just want to say that I think this is an excellent idea. I'm a mountain biker myself, along with Becky and I use some of the land, especially with Joe Lanier over in Oxford, make sure that nothing gets destroyed in the process of riding. We enjoy hiking, as well. We like to have good relationships with the hikers and I just [inaudible 00:41:57] very, very good thing. Thank you.

Peter:

Thank you. Anyone else? Going once, twice. We can close the public hearing. Thank you very much.

Group:

Thank you.