

Citizens Advisory Committee
Joint CAC/STAC EJ and Public Access ZOOM Online Meeting
Thursday, Sept. 10, 2020 – Meeting Summary



Welcome and Roll Call

- As a meeting warmup, attendees shared their observations and experiences with the Sound this summer, including jellyfish earlier in the year, a Mola mola, dolphins, and whale breaches. Others reported seeing increased plastic debris and masks and changes in water color. Jim O'Donnell (STAC CT co-chair, UCONN) shared recent dissolved oxygen level data, noting the area of hypoxia was smaller but more intense than average.
- Nancy Seligson (CAC NY co-chair, Town of Mamaroneck) called the meeting to order at 9am with a quorum of 24 CAC members present. Nancy introduced the STAC committee co-chairs Jim O'Donnell (UConn Marine Sciences) and Darcy Lonsdale (Stony Brook University) and welcomed the opportunity to co-host a joint meeting of the CAC and STAC.
- Nancy outlined the focus of the meeting; to identify opportunities to advance LIS environmental justice issues framed through the lens of the CCMP public access ecosystem target.
- David Miller (NYLCVEF) made a motion to approve the meeting summary of the June 11, 2020 CAC meeting; Carl Harvey (Menunkatuck Audubon Society) seconded; the motion carried.
- Carl Harvey sadly announced that former CAC member Allen Berrien passed away on April 30, 2020. Many expressed their sadness over the news and their appreciation for him, "a great guy and person to work with".

Long Island Sound Research RFP Update; Sylvain Deguise, CTSG Director, UCONN

- Sylvain Deguise provided an update on the RFP process for the LIS Research Grants. There were 36 pre-proposals submitted requesting a total of \$12 million, with an average proposal request of \$335,000.
- CTSG held a panel to discuss pre-proposals and 17 were chosen to submit full proposals. These 17 pre-proposals requested a total of 6.2 million dollars. Only about half of them can be funded, as \$3.1 million are available for the research topics. They are high quality proposals, include a broad distribution of topics and some are very wide in scope.
- Full proposals are due by the end of November and projects are set to begin March 1st, 2021.

Presentation: Public Access Ecosystem Target: What We Know and What We Don't Know

Jim Ammerman, LISS Science Coordinator, NEIWPCC Environmental Analyst

- Jim Ammerman presented [an overview](#) of the current status, tracking and implementation action progress related to the CCMP Public Access Ecosystem Target. To achieve the target 10% increase of public access points to the Sound by 2035, 33 additional points are needed to meet the target.
- CT DEEP maintains a statewide [Coastal Access Guide](#) interactive map and database. NY is working on a coastal access guide (not ready for release), and NYSDEC has a marine activities map and database of [boat launching sites](#).
- Implementation Action SC-37, promoting development of public access plans has seen limited progress. The 2020 CCMP update proposes replacing SC-37 with updated implementation actions SC-31 and SC-32. (See attached IA updates).
- Jim discussed several relevant articles highlighting local land use history and housing discrimination. The [Long Island Divided](#) Newsday article covered a 3-year investigation that found disparities in the way non-whites were treated in real estate agencies and the offers they received.
- “The Power Broker,” by Robert Caro covers Robert Moses and his racist, discriminatory patterns as a public official and city planner. Moses built low bridges around communities to keep buses that low-income people relied on out of the beaches and city. This infrastructure persists and low-income communities still suffer the consequences of this discrimination.

Discussion:

- Attendees discussed increased coastal access challenges as state beaches restrict capacity and municipalities close their beaches to non-residents as a COVID-19 measure.
- Tracy Brown (Save the Sound) asked about the role of local government in restricting beach access (open on paper) but no parking, high fees, etc.
- David Miller recommended reviewing the [1999 LIS Coastal Management Program document](#) prepared by the Coastal Commission to assess implementation progress toward identified public access projects.

Presentation: Zoning for Community Resiliency; Sara Bronin, UCONN Law School & Desegregate CT

- Sara Bronin presented on the work of Desegregate CT, a coalition of people and institutions working to make Connecticut more inclusive by design and reduce the amount of racial segregation in the state through improved land use laws.
- Desegregate CT’s goals include:
 - Increase housing supply. Current expensive housing is often required by zoning density restrictions. Updating zoning will make it easier to convert existing development to create housing, or to build new housing.
 - Improve housing diversity. The current housing situation is dominated by single family units which are expensive and, for many, undesirable. Increasing flexibility could be accomplished through accessory dwelling units, which alleviates demand for housing without generating new buildings; by increasing housing density around train stops and requiring railroads to build lots around stops. Model zoning codes can help provide

- options like allowing duplexes and town houses around specific areas, such as commercial corridors, transit stations or capping the amount of parking available in order to drive down car usage.
- Process Improvement: Coded discrimination, abuses of the “process,” and high fees stop great housing from being built. Decisions need to be fair and better, for example modernizing traffic and sewer standards.
 - For more information about Desegregate CT’s work, see presentation recording [here](#) or visit [their website](#).

Discussion

- Paul Stacy asked about balancing the operating space for nature and people as people are leaving cities due to COVID-19 which may contribute to sprawl. Sara Bronin responded that this balance is part of what they are working to achieve by revisiting land use laws that are barriers to better housing management.
- Mark Tedesco asked Sara to comment on the short- and long-term effect of COVID 19 on housing density. Bronin discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront issues of housing inequality and zoning, and how the suburbs must be better integrated in order to make them more accessible for all.

Presentation: Coastlines, Access, and Resilience; John Truscinski, UCONN & CIRCA

- John Truscinski presented his work on the [Resilient CT Project](#). He also briefly discussed the book, [Free the Beaches](#), which described the work of an activist who campaigned to increase public beach access in CT in the 1960s and 1970s.
- All but 7 of the 253 miles of coast in CT were private or had very limited access by 1960s and 1970s; much of CT’s coast was not accessible to most residents of the state. This was due to an effort by state park commissions to preserve the coast.
- One case of public space vs. private property in Westport CT led to wealthy estate owners capitalizing on the tradition of home rule to restrict access to Sherwood Island state park for over a decade.
- The CT Supreme Court ruled in 2001 that Greenwich’s residents-only policy for beach access was unconstitutional. However, federal coastal protection programs are based on property value and thus benefit expensive properties more. There are also high parking fees and a lack of public transit to public beaches.
- Climate change and sea level rise will greatly increase the frequency and depth of flooding, without a large increase in floodplain area. Flood insurance rates are increasing as flooding frequency rises. We will need to renegotiate public vs. private coastal areas as the need for more public access, flood maintenance improvement, and coastal habitat preservation increases. Increased minority access should be coupled with increased resilience.

Discussion

Jim O'Donnell summarized the three presentations to highlight the links among them before breakouts:

- John's presentation showed a need to change how people live along the shoreline – moving inland to undeveloped areas or creating greater density in developed areas.
- Sara's presentation highlighted some of the regulatory obstacles to increasing density in some communities.
- Resilience along the shoreline, conserving shoreline and upland habitats and protecting water quality are all linked. They require making difficult choices about where new development will be located – either infilling existing developed areas or building develop in open spaces.
- Jim Ammerman's presentation suggested if we choose to adapt to increased risks to coastal property by retreating from the most vulnerable areas, it can provide an opportunity to increase public access for lower income residents that aren't able to afford the high cost of shoreline properties.

Breakout and Full Group Discussions

Following the presentations, meeting attendees were split into 13 break out groups of 3-5 and asked to discuss priority actions to advance the LIS CCMP public access target and environmental justice. Groups spent 40 minutes responding to the following questions:

1. *Have you ever experienced a time when you could not access the Sound or another coast? What were the circumstances and what did you do about it?*
2. *Based on the presentations and discussions today, what do you think is most important to consider about the 2020 CCMP IAs related to environmental justice (EJ)?*

Break out groups returned to the full group and shared highlights of their discussions. (See BREAK OUT GROUP Discussion Summaries attached).

Additional full group discussion topics included:

- Marty Garrell (Adelphi University) raised the need for a conference or series of workshops to increase awareness of coastal access challenges.
- Mickey Weiss (Project Oceanology) raised the need for more social science data and a follow-up to the 2006 public perception survey. Sylvain Deguise said they received some social science proposals, but they are not the majority and suggested it can be difficult and intimidating for social scientists to apply to grants that usually fund natural science projects.
- Vicky O'Neill (NYS DEC) said LISS should highlight current access information while also learning from communities and EJ groups about needs and preferences for access. Nancy Seligson agreed LISS needs to publicize available access resources.
- Dave Kozak (CTDEEP) mentioned the importance of providing information both online and through local signage to increase visibility of public access sites and reach more audiences.
- Tracy Brown noted that Save the Sound has relaunched its Sound Health Explorer of beach monitoring with a new access filter. Datasets with locations for public access on the Sound are requested: email tbrown@savethesound.org

Summary Recommendations: Based on the discussion, the CAC co-chairs sorted the responses and recommendations into the following five major categories and ranked them according to the number of times they were mentioned* by individuals or in breakout reports. (*This exercise was done after the meeting before all break out session notes had been submitted; thus, the number of mentions provide a general idea but may be greater than reported below).

1. **Define “public access”** (10 mentions) and assess current status, quantity and quality in CT and NY to effectively measure progress (13 mentions) (23 total)
 - a. Definition should include different access categories (e.g. hiking, walking, swimming, boating, cartop boating, fishing, scenic vistas etc.)
 - b. Quality factors should consider:
 - i. Physical barriers: Transportation, parking restroom facilities, ADA accessibility,
 - ii. Policy or practice barriers: inequitable patrolling/policing, safety, etc.
 - iii. Affordability barriers: (entrance fees, cost of equipment, etc.)
 - iv. Geographic and demographic representation
2. **Conduct a public access needs assessment:** engage EJ leaders, communities and young people in identifying needs, barriers and opportunities to increase quantity and quality of access points and categories. (14 mentions)
3. **Identify and share mechanisms for increased public access** (i.e. improved policies and practices, funding streams, review other states’ – CA and HI - approach to public access, etc.) (14 mentions)
4. **Conduct research** to assess opportunities for managed retreat, shoreline restoration and public access. (14 mentions)
5. **Increase visibility and awareness** of existing public access opportunities through multiple channels (social media, online guide for NYS, signage, etc.) (10 mentions)

2020 CCMP Update Mark Tedesco, LISS Director, LISS EPA Office

Mark Tedesco provided a short update on the CCMP update process. LISS’s objective is to present the 2020 update actions to the Management Committee (MC) at its October 15th meeting. The full list of Implementation Actions (IAs) and a list of highlighted EJ related IAs was circulated to the CAC prior to this meeting for their revision. Members should contact Mark Tedesco (tedesco.mark@epa.gov), Cayla Sullivan (Sullivan.cayla@epa.gov), or Nikki Tachiki (tachiki.nicole@epa.gov) with input. The IAs will be presented at the MC meeting on October 15th, which will complete the 2020 CCMP update process.

Policy Subcommittee Update

Tracy Brown, Save the Sound & Adrienne Esposito, Citizen’s Campaign for the Environment

- Tracy provided an update on the Town Board approval of zoning for the Plum Island ferry operation, which allows the creation of a small museum at the site. The [Envision Plum Island report](#) was released this summer, a congressional briefing for a 2 year plan of what

could be done and how we'd like to see it managed as a preserve. It is not expected that the Plum Island sale language will be repealed yet and the Coalition is still working on strategies related to prevent the commercial sale of Plum Island.

- The CAC sent letters to elected representatives requesting green infrastructure and water quality infrastructure be included in an infrastructure stimulus package. Living Shoreline Act has bi-partisan support but is unlikely to be passed before the election.
- The subcommittee recommended postponing in-person or virtual congressional visits until after the election.
- Adrienne Esposito (Citizen's Campaign for the Environment) reported President Trump signed an executive order allowing commercial fishing in the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument and that the site will be open to trawlers, long-line fishers, etc. Local groups will be putting together a plan to get that order rescinded to protect this important ecological area.
- NY anticipated getting the Environmental Bond Act on the ballot this year, but NY Governor Cuomo has withdrawn and postponed the vote given the state's expected budget deficits due to the Coronavirus.
- Subcommittee will advocate in NY to preserve existing environmental funding. A letter will be circulated to NY CAC members.
- The state of New York won the lawsuit against the plastic bag ban, meaning the ban on plastic bags will soon go into effect again. Local groups should help provide information on this to stakeholders and the public.

Other Announcements

- Robert Burg (LISS/NEIWPC) reminded attendees about the upcoming Community-Based Social Marketing workshop happening Sept 21-24.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30pm. The next CAC Meeting will be on December 10, 2020.