

**Long Island Sound Study
Citizens Advisory Committee
Thursday, June 11, 2015
Housatonic Community College, Bridgeport, CT
Meeting Summary**

Welcome, Housekeeping & Logistics

At 9:46 Curt Johnson, *CT Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound*, and the *CT CAC Co-chair*, began the meeting by welcoming guests and prospective new CAC members George and Maria Hoffman from the *Setauket Harbor Task Force* (N.Y.), and Sarah Crosby and co-worker Josh Cooper from the *Harbor Watch program at Earthplace* (CT). Roll call was taken, with 13 CAC members in attendance.

Not in attendance, but expressing interest in joining the CAC, is Katie Cubina from the Mystic Aquarium, CT. Prospective members in attendance were asked to leave the room, whereupon the CAC voted on new membership. George Hoffman, Sarah Crosby, and Katie Cubina were unanimously elected by a show of hands to join the CAC.

Nancy Seligson, *Town of Mamaroneck* and the *NY Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Co-chair*, announced that CAC member Sandy Breslin has left Audubon *Connecticut*, and asked the CAC for a letter to be sent to the executive Director of Audubon extolling Sandy's virtues as "incredible problem-solver and hostess in Washington" among other things. Nancy also requested that at the next CAC meeting, Sandy be invited to receive a small thank you gift in honor of her contributions to the CAC. All indicated by a show of hands support for both suggestions.

Nancy announced a change in the agenda to have the Policy Committee address the release of the LIS Report Card in the past week; have *LISS NOAA Liaison* Jason Krumholz report about the recent discoveries of dead fish and turtles in LIS/Peconics, and in the absence of having a final copy of the public summary of the CCMP, to minimize that agenda item.

Policy Committee Update: Trip to Washington, D.C.

Maureen Dolan-Murphy, *Citizens Campaign for the Environment* and Nathan Frohling, *The Nature Conservancy CT*, reported about the April 30th trip to Washington to meet with legislators, including New York representatives Israel and Zeldin, CEQ and OMB, about LIS funding and authorization, Plum Island, and discussion about water quality and the economic values of LIS. The group included Sean Mahar, *Audubon New York*, Adrienne Esposito, *Citizens Campaign for the Environment*, Eric Swenson, *Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor*, Tyler Archer, *CT Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound*, and Nancy Seligson. Maureen and Nathan initiated a discussion with the CAC about potential federal partnerships to leverage funding for LIS (a big take away from the Washington trip). Discussion included the idea that the Management Committee could reach out to LISS members that are absent, such as the Army Corps, who have funds for restoration. Curt suggested engaging Denise Savageau, *Town of Greenwich Conservation Department*, who successfully raised \$10 million through NRCS for a RCPP and has been instrumental in hiring the past two CT state conservationists for NRCS. Other partners discussed included: US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, the Coast Guard, NOAA (and researcher Lisa Suatoni, *Natural Resources Defense Council*, who is working on the relationship between hypoxia and ocean acidification), NOAA has also been instrumental with sea floor mapping and spatial planning, Catherine Smith with *CT State Economic Development Department*, USGS, FEMA (mixed reaction to this idea), and additional coordination with our CT and NY Marine Trades Associations.

The Chesapeake Bay Program was cited as a program with broad support. The importance of approaching those people who are in charge of budgets was also pointed out, as well as the importance of exploring existing overlaps -- not asking partners to take on new projects. The CAC could be potential allies to these partners. Maureen spoke of inviting congressional staff to CAC meetings (as was done in the past). Next steps: ask the Policy and Legislative Committee to prioritize agencies to be invited, seek help in inviting one set of agency representatives to each CAC meeting over the next year, and involve Congressional offices in this effort. The CCMP will provide a new opportunity to reach partners. Policy Committee will look at whom to target as a next step.

Maureen Dolan-Murphy reported on the National Estuary renewal bill. The money from this bill is to be divided across all NEP's; the new bill places a 5% cap on administration of the program and includes a competitive grant

program (which would require more, not less, administration). Interest was expressed in knowing where other NEP's are on this issue. Another issue for the Policy Committee.

LIS Report Card Discussion: Maureen also referenced the recent release of the LIS Report Card and stressed the importance of using social media to talk about this and other LIS issues; she encouraged CAC member organizations to share information on Facebook, especially the jetty image page that includes a link to the report. : "Do you agree" is a good way to get people talking. Lou Burch, *Citizens Campaign for the Environment*, stressed the importance of social media as the "single largest marketing tool and one that elected officials are very keyed into." Carol DiPaulo, *Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor*, voiced concern about the use of social media because it doesn't allow people to get needed information, particularly on nitrogen pollution.

A discussion ensued about the challenges raised by the Report Card, including the way complex information is oversimplified for public consumption, the limitation of the parameters used to give a more full picture of the health of the embayments, that pathogens and bacteria were not part of the parameters and that grades can be erratic from year to year, with challenging implications for organizations on the ground (i.e. a "high" score can influence money available for water quality work). The public didn't understand that the Report Card was a report on the health of the ecosystem rather than whether the Sound is safe for humans. Discussion underscored the challenges of messaging science to the public, as well as the pollution issues unique to embayments. Questions were raised about the future of the Report Card. Discussion returned to the need for adequate funds for water quality monitoring in LIS embayments, and the importance of accurate and consistent data.

Fall Meeting Discussion: Joint CAC/STAC meeting

Nathan Frohling reported that the Blue Plan legislation passed in CT and suggested that this could be discussed at the next CAC meeting; Maureen suggested inviting NYS DOS. Nancy acknowledged the request by the Peconic Estuary Program (PEP) to have a joint meeting with the CAC, and after discussion suggested that this be delayed until the spring, or perhaps have a special meeting with the PEP. Mark Tedesco, *EPA Long Island Sound Office*, suggested that the chair and co-chair of PEP be invited to the STAC/CAC meeting. For the STAC/CAC agenda, it was suggested that a review of the 15 embayments research (including DO, pH & acidification) be presented, to allow for reflection by both groups on this topic. Carol recommended that the CAC decide what next steps are needed for the Report Card, before meeting with the STAC. Curt would like to invite the LIS Funders Group to the CAC to provide an update. Nancy would like the STAC to suggest what the latest research is telling us about the most critical issues for LIS.

CCMP Final Report Update and Public Summary

Nancy provided an update about the public summary and questioned if it was truly a public document. Mark reported that the final document is still awaiting NY DEC sign off.

LISS Budget Summary

Mark handed out the 2015 Budget Summary, reporting that most programs are at level funding. The NOAA liaison position was not recommended for continuation because of the increasing emphasis by NOAA on fisheries stocks. This is not a reflection of current liaison Jason Krumholz's performance. The Budget proposes establishing a new LISS Scientist position. Fish and Wildlife added another year to the liaison position. An interstate science coordinator position was discussed with a proposal funded for 2 years with the hope to continue. DEC's position that is occupied by Cassie Bauer is now funded through NY State.

On the Ground CAC Action: Engaging Municipal Officials

CAC member Fred Grimsey, *Save the River/Save the Hills*, provided the CAC with a colorful narrative of the efforts to protect a significant piece of land abutting the Niantic River in East Lyme, CT (Oswegatchie Hills). His story was part personal history and journey from growing up "like Huck Finn" in Brooklyn, NY, exploring Jamaica Bay, and a testimony to the steps and relationships needed at the local level to shepherd the land protection and public education process forward. Fred stressed the importance of personal communications versus pounding fists – a realization that he came to over time. Oswegatchie Hills contains a mile of undeveloped shoreline along the Niantic River; 240 acres is threatened by a proposal for 840 condos and 1700 parking spaces. The protection effort has been ongoing for 12 years. Fred encouraged advocates to "keep your fist unclenched" in the effort to protect important coastal lands.

Update Nitrogen Reduction Action; LIS Research Awards

Jason Krumholz, *NOAA Liaison to the Long Island Sound Study*, reported on the recent fish kills that have captured considerable attention from the press and public. He explained the cause of “common and natural” fish kills as predatory fish that drive smaller fish (Menhaden, Bunker) into shallower water, where they consume oxygen panicking and trying to escape. The Menhaden/Bunker numbers are high this year. The Peconics event was beyond normal, however, and was likely the result of a massive harmful algal bloom (red tide) that drew down oxygen, and that was exacerbated by human nitrogen loading preceding the kill. There is also some consideration that “whirling virus” was responsible for some of the Sound’s smaller kills. The diamondback terrapin kill (100+ animals) were likely the result of saxitoxin released from this same dense toxic algae bloom, again exacerbated by human nitrogen loading. The saxitoxin paralyzes the muscles and causes the turtles to drown. The ecological consequences of this turtle die-off event are likely much more significant than the fish kills.

Jason updated the CAC on two recent research grants: *UConn Marine Sciences* Jamie Vaudrey’s work analyzing 110 LIS embayments looking at the sources of nitrogen, and a study by the Steven’s Institute employing a large scale climate model (histogram) with implications for the protection and management of LIS by basin.

Update: Nitrogen Petition Status

Curt provided an update on the status of the nitrogen petition that is calling for action to reduce nitrogen inputs to the Sound, noting that high level agency discussions were proceeding on the need for a new set of comprehensive, meaningful and enforceable nitrogen reductions affecting both the western Sound as well as hypoxia affected embayments. He requested support from those in attendance for he and Nancy to advocate and send out a draft CAC letter for review by the CAC to highlight the need for setting and attaining new nitrogen reductions moving forward within the CCMP summary where this issue needs to be stressed. All in attendance (6) showed support, with no one opposed.

Announcements: LIS Report Card, Modeling Workshop, Bi-state Legislative Meeting

Nancy announced that the bi-state legislative meeting has been postponed.

Judy Preston (LISS/CTSG) shared the draft social media plan for the CCMP, due out this summer, with the request for CAC members to share their social media point person contact information and join the LISS in getting the word out about the CCMP.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40pm.

2015 CAC Meetings September 10 (NY) and December 10 (CT)

For meeting minutes and other information, visit:

<http://longislandsoundstudy.net/about/committees/citizens-advisory-committee/>