

July 10, 2017

Errata

Re: Seaside State Park Master Plan Environmental Impact Evaluation
Waterford, CT

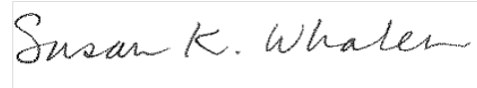
Dear Reviewer:

It has come to our attention that a public scoping comment letter was inadvertently omitted from Appendix A of the Seaside State Park Master Plan Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE) which was distributed for your review and comment on June 20, 2017. That letter was prepared on August 31, 2016 and received by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) within the public scoping period (8/1/16 - 9/1/16); therefore, it was reviewed during preparation of the EIE.

Nevertheless, and in order to ensure the public has adequate time to review this letter, the public comment period will be extended through August 25, 2017.

We apologize for this inconvenience.

Sincerely,



Susan K. Whalen
Deputy Commissioner
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

Attachment: August 31 Letter from Kathleen Jacques

August 31, 2016

**Sent via electronic mail to: DEEP.seasideEIE@ct.gov
and
Sent via facsimile to: (860) 424-4070**

David A. Kalafa
Policy Development Coordinator
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
State of Connecticut
79 Elm Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

RE: Comments on Environmental Impact Evaluation Scoping Meeting and Notice for Seaside State Park, Waterford, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Kalafa:

I would like to submit these comments for the record.

It is challenging to submit comments on the scope of factors, which address significant impacts in the preparation of the Environmental Impact Evaluation (“EIE”), for a conceptual state project consisting of multiple options outlined at the scoping meeting and in the notice. The options consist of three different park models including a more detailed development plan for a resort hotel, or a no action option. Since a resort hotel will likely have the most significant adverse impact and will likely require the highest level of evaluation, my comments are mostly directed to that option.

Section 22a-1b(c)(6) of the Connecticut General Statutes (“G.S.”) specifically requires that the EIE include an analysis of the short term and long term economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of the proposed action, and Section 22a-1b(c)(7), G.S. requires that the EIE consider the effect of the proposed action on the use and conservation of energy resources. For (c)(6), I recommend that the EIE contain a matrix of environmental and economic impacts for all alternative concepts; this will provide a better tool for a comprehensive comparison of the positive and adverse impacts of the various park models. The scope for (c)(7), particularly pertaining to the reuse use of the existing buildings – historic and non-historic - and any proposed new construction should provide a “life cycle net energy analysis” (cradle to grave) including the “embodied energy” in the existing structures to comprehensively examine the impact of the “preferred feasible and prudent alternative.”

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SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

It is also my assertion that the significant impacts on three different physical environments need to be individually examined. A complete EIE should consider the impacts on:

1. The 32 acre project site, currently known as Seaside State Park;
2. The residential neighborhood surrounding the site; and
3. The entire State of Connecticut park system.

The EIE for the residential neighborhood should include information regarding future plans for the four acre Department of Developmental Services (DDS) parcel that is attached to the site and borders residential property. It is reasonable to assume that this group home may be closed and its attachment to the park may create a future adverse impact; historically, the State has recognized the necessity to mitigate the impact of any development at Seaside on the character of the surrounding residential neighborhood, which is rural in nature. A recent zoning decision eliminated the consideration of commercial activities on the site. However, the costly challenge of preserving the historic buildings seems, once again, to be overriding these considerations.

And, since the expansion of lodging is being introduced as a revenue vehicle for the state park budget, the EIE should consider the full spectrum of impacts on the entire state park system. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) considers the proposed hotel to be an expansion of present lodging activity that it manages. If the proposed Master Plan for Seaside is an economic prototype, any and all state parks could be identified as properties where resort hotels could be constructed and operated. As a result, the scoping process should include long range ecological and energy impacts of such development(s).

INFORMATION FROM SPONSORING AGENCIES

The Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) details the issues that need to be examined during an EIE. Since the construction and operation of a waterfront hotel/resort is unexplored territory for DEEP, any related direct or indirect significant consequential impacts need to be more thoroughly surveyed by the consultant and

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added to this list. Other questions and comments I have regarding the information provided by the sponsoring agencies include:

A. The actions proposed in the scoping notice are very broad.

(1) Specifically, what does “do nothing” mean in this case? Continue the current level of activity – lawn mowing, minimum security, portable toilets -- or abandonment of the property?

(2) What is the definition of a “Destination Park?” The concept as outlined in the feasibility study or any other alternatives or expansions of this concept?

(3) What is the risk that the property would once more be considered surplus and sold? Any EIE that supports a commercial activity in conflict with local zoning regulations could have unintended adverse consequences on future uses of the property and neighboring properties as well.

B. Criteria for selecting a resort hotel.

(1) Since the primary subject site of this project is already known, what are the criteria for creating a resort hotel inside any State Park? The example cited in the feasibility study has over five thousand acres.

(2) Why is the Seaside parcel considered to be an appropriate place for a private resort hotel of this magnitude?

(3) Why does the desire to adapt the buildings override the need to “least impact the neighborhood?”

(4) What will mitigate proximity issues where there is an absence of reasonable buffers between the parcels and several abutting properties?

(5) What about the local zoning regulations? Even if the State is statutorily exempt from local zoning rules, does that mean the Agencies should disregard the determination by the local zoning board that commercial activity is not desirable for this property?

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(6) What is the justification to define a private resort hotel as something other than a commercial establishment?

C. Other sites.

(1) Are there other potential sites for the proposed action? If a private resort hotel inside a park is a new model for the State Park Program, then a list of potential sites could be any and all State Parks.

D. Current regulations.

(1) What are the current regulations that govern a hotel managed by a private agency on a State Park property?

(2) What new or modified regulations are being proposed?

(3) What legislative action(s) governing the plans will be subject to public participation? To ensure transparency of the Park planning process, the public needs to have the opportunity to be engaged in any related regulatory and legislative processes that might affect any new or existing State Parks or any agreements to lease land or engage private management companies.

SPECIAL CONCERNS

If a private/public option is determined to be the best solution for the goals outlined in the EIE document, why are alternative options, such as schools, business parks, non-profit operations, research facilities, etc., not being considered? I have attached a letter that was provided in response to the Master Plan meeting that very astutely describes alternative and enhanced utilization of the park grounds. What other alternatives have been submitted or considered?

In addition to the comprehensive factors outlined in CEPA, there are special concerns in regard to development on this particular site, any combination of which will significantly impact the site and its immediate environs, which include, but are not limited to:

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- A. The amount of greenhouse gases created by construction, hotel operations, and vehicle traffic;
- B. Safety issues and noise caused by above;
- C. Runoff of pesticides and fertilizer in the low basin/stream on the property causing nitrogen loading in Long Island Sound;
- D. Loss of mature trees currently on the parcel;
- E. Loss of vistas due to new construction;
- F. Vermin/pests relocating to surrounding residences during construction;
- G. The water and utility demands for the proposed hotel;
- H. The impact of mooring boats and launching personal watercraft on the waterfront;
- I. Creation of light pollution;
- J. Loss or limitations of access by neighbors and park patrons;
- K. Increased traffic and trespass onto neighboring roads and properties;
- L. Security of neighborhood;
- M. Construction noise and dirt;
- N. Mechanical noise after construction (Landscaping, HVAC, compressors, air conditioners, etc);
- O. Lack of buffers on boundary lines;
- P. The number and location of parking facilities for hotel guests and park patrons;

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- Q. Accommodations for commercial trucking;
- R. Location of garbage dumpsters;
- S. Security of public access areas;
- T. Security and parking on neighboring streets;
- U. Water safety issues for boaters, swimmers, fishermen;
- V. Loss of quiet enjoyment of abutters;
- W. Loss of property values to surrounding properties;
- X. Expansion of proposed lodging model facilities, indoors and out;
and
- Y. Disruption caused by event activities.

I anticipate that other informed and interested agencies and community members will be submitting comments and questions about the long range impact of these proposed activities on this sensitive Long Island Sound waterfront parcel designated as Seaside State Park. Other parties have shared copies of correspondence that was sent in reply to Master Park Planning sessions. Many of these formal letters and emails suggest alternative recommendations and should be explored in the EIE.

MITIGATION OF IMPACTS

How will these impacts be mitigated? What is the baseline standard that will be established for evaluating such impacts? Impact studies should not be based on data from when the institution was in operation, which is no longer relevant to the character of the neighborhood.

MASTER PLAN FEASIBILITY STUDY

According to the Master Plan Feasibility Study, the operation of a destination resort hotel in a residential community will have a profound and significant impact in the location in which it is proposed. The EIE should avoid a comparison of proposed activity from a past time when Seaside was an operating agency. Essentially, this has

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been an abandoned site, and more recently a state park. Any discussion of more intense use requires a mitigation plan for any more intensive use than is currently in existence.

In fact, there has been little justification for considering the resort plan as “preferred” when it clearly is incompatible with the surrounding environment. I have cited some additional information contained in the feasibility study supporting this conclusion that need to be addressed in the EIE:

1. Section iii-1 claims that “Due to the proposed hotel’s location proximate to residential homes and a quiet local neighborhood, the hotel design and operation will be sensitive to the needs of these residents.” But there is no discussion of how this will be accomplished or what needs have been identified, or how they will be mitigated;
2. The study estimates the costs to prepare the buildings for the resort, but does not explicitly identify the party responsible to develop the Park grounds, parking and waterfront, beach, seawall restoration. Construction, maintenance and management costs of both activities – resort and park - need to be enumerated and justified; and
3. Further observation of the site’s location in the study provides evidence that a Park and Hotel combination are not compatible in this geographic location for the following reasons:

“As the subject buildings are located on a state park, we have researched several park lodges in the Northeast and Western United States. The majority of these park lodges are located on either State or National Parks of substantial acreage, much greater than the 32 acres of the subject site. These parks generate their own overnight visitation due to their vast acreage, which often lends itself to a variety of activities including skiing, hiking, biking, camping, boating, rock climbing, ice fishing, etc. While we believe Seaside State Park to be an important feature of the subject site, we do not expect this park to be the primary reason of visitation. Thus, we do not recommend a park lodge product, but instead recommend that the hotel integrate the park and its available activities into its operation.
(Emphasis added.)

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PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

One of DEEP's stated goals for the Master Planning process and EIE is to "engage the public." The initial two planning meetings were very informative, but did not incorporate interactive group questions and answers, or public comments. Survey questions were provided and post-meeting comments were encouraged. But, at the third planning meeting, when the preferred plan was rolled out, no survey or opinion poll was conducted; despite the fact that 65% of the prior survey respondents found that a small inn was an inappropriate use for Seaside State Park (see attachment 3, pg6). It is an erroneous conclusion that the "preferred plan" best represents the public's input. A more transparent effort should be made to gauge public opinion for a privately managed resort hotel; this model goes well beyond the level of development that the public anticipated. Engagement does not equal inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

It is reasonable to conclude that the preferred alternative will result in the establishment of Seaside State Park as a subordinate activity to the operation of a private hotel operation and its elite clientele; and park patrons will be competing with hotel guests for access, parking, admission, and park services. Therefore, the EIE needs to provide a substantial in-depth exploration into DEEP's selection of the construction of a private, profit-making hotel operation inside a waterfront State Park as a "preferred plan."

RECOMMENDATIONS

I strongly urge the sponsoring agencies to preserve the primary mission of providing recreational enjoyment that is accessible to all the people of Connecticut. While I prefer the ecological model, I also think a passive model is a good choice for Seaside Park.

Efforts that direct attention away from recreation, conservation, environmental research, conservation, and energy alternatives are an opportunity cost that the State of Connecticut simply cannot afford, and funds should not be spent for a speculative resort venture that is based on potential economic returns. The Seaside State Park is too valuable a resource to squander due to primarily economic considerations.

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Thank you for your consideration of these matters. I look forward to reviewing the Environment Impact Evaluation study when it becomes available.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen F. Jacques
10 Magonk Point Road
Waterford, CT 06385
kathyjacques@sbcglobal.net

Attachments:

1. Correspondence sent by email from Eileen Grant
2. Correspondence to Commissioner Klee from Vincent Long
3. 6 pages of survey results graphs from
http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/stateparks/seaside/Seaside_State_Park_Master_Plan_Open_House_2_.pdf