

February 20, 2018

Mr. Jonathan Seem, Chairman
Ridgefield Charter Revision Commission

Dear Mr. Seem and fellow commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of the Norwalk River Watershed Association (NRWA) to voice our support for the separation of the Inlands Wetlands Commission from the Planning and Zoning Commission as part of the Charter Revision underway currently. NRWA is a non-profit membership organization whose mission is to improve the water quality and fish and wildlife habitats of the Norwalk River watershed.

As you may know, the primary source of pollution to our waterways is storm-water runoff, or non-point source pollution. Addressing this problem requires working to reduce or prevent runoff at its sources and also repairing and protecting riparian buffers, the vegetative areas bordering wetlands, rivers, and streams. A strong and independent Inlands Wetlands Commission could make a huge difference in Ridgefield by devoting its full focus to the challenge of ensuring that new development be done in a way that protects water quality and other natural resources.

An Inland Wetlands Commission with the resources and time to carefully consider how best to balance economic development with protections to the environment would have more time to consider and weigh issues that affect the river such as 1) Erosion during construction and after--sediment that washes into the wetlands and waterways is damaging to the aquatic life and to the amphibians that inhabit the wetlands. 2) Storm-water runoff--imperious surfaces and fertilized lawns add damaging nutrients to the river including phosphorous, nitrogen, oils, gasoline, salts, and pesticides. 3) Increase in water temperatures--the removal of shade trees and the addition of paved surfaces increase water temperature in rivers and aquifers, which adversely affects aquatic life and water quality.

Most people who move to this area do so because of the natural beauty and open space. Many do not realize that the Norwalk River is impaired. Nor do they realize that the Great Swamp in Ridgefield, which is the source of the Norwalk River, is impaired. Many may also not know that organizations such as NRWA, Harbor Watch, and RACE have been working for over two decades to improve water quality. In fact, in 2014, the EPA removed two sections of the Norwalk River, one at Stonehenge in Ridgefield, from the list of impaired waterways citing the work of groups like ours to reduce non-point source pollution and to educate people about proper septic care. Please help us build on the work our community has been doing to improve water quality by joining the majority of other towns in the state that maintain separate and independent Inland Wetland Commissions.

An independent Inland Wetlands Commission would have more time to apply for grants, such as 319 grants from CT DEEP, to help mitigate the problem of storm-water runoff. NRWA has as a priority for the coming year a focus on applying for funding for remediation at the Great Swamp to help protect the wetlands from the pressures of development in the area. We would welcome the chance to work alongside the Ridgefield Inland Wetland Commission on projects to help improve water quality at the source of our river.

Sincerely,

Louise Washer, President
Norwalk River Watershed Association