

Public Hearing – February 16, 2021
Commerce Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Katie Dykes

Senate Bill 167 – An Act Concerning the Disposition of the Former Seaside Sanatorium Facility

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Senate Bill 167, regarding Seaside State Park in Waterford.

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill. In 2014, the former Seaside Regional Center was designated as Seaside State Park, the first oceanfront state park to be created in the State in fifty years. Since that time, DEEP has had full custody and control of the park and has welcomed thousands of visitors who enjoy walking, biking, picnicking, fishing, scuba diving, and birdwatching.

DEEP has been committed to improving Seaside State Park since its designation as such in 2014. DEEP has engaged in a master planning process involving thousands of citizens in an effort to determine the best plan to manage the park and find an adaptive re-use for the National Register listed buildings, designed by famed architect Cass Gilbert. The master planning process and [environmental impact study](#) concluded that the park could support a range of different types of development, from a “passive park,” with limited development and open shoreline space for the public, to a more intensively developed, “destination park,” with a State Park Lodge developed as a public-private partnership and through the rehabilitation of the existing buildings. DEEP subsequently issued an RFP process to seek proposals for a State Park Lodge development utilizing one or more of the existing buildings on the site, but the process did not yield actionable proposals.¹

Connecticut has the second largest outdoor recreation economy in New England. Demand for Connecticut State Parks is at records highs as people seek the outdoors in the midst of a pandemic. The State’s shoreline parks are among the most popular of our state park system, and along with other shoreline parks, Seaside contributes to providing equitable access to the beauty and recreational opportunities of Long Island Sound.

DEEP recognizes the importance of Seaside State Park to the local community in Waterford, as well as to the broader public, and our Department continues to see great promise for improving the park for all to enjoy. With modest enhancements consistent with a “passive park” approach, Seaside State Park will ensure continued full public access and increased public recreation opportunities such as swimming and paddling. DEEP would welcome the opportunity to engage with the bill’s proponents on DEEP’s efforts to improve Seaside State Park in a way that is supportive of the community and provides coastal access and associated outdoor recreation opportunities for the public to enjoy for generations to come.

¹ More detail information regarding the master planning process and the RFP can be found at [this DEEP webpage](#).

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. If you have any questions, please contact James Albis at James.Albis@ct.gov.