

CHAPTER 46A-11A

MEDIATION OF DRAINAGE DISPUTES

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46A-11A-1. Statewide mediation program to assist property owners in resolving disputes over surface or subsurface water drainage. The Department of Agriculture shall establish and administer a statewide mediation program to provide assistance to property owners who seek to use mediation as a method to resolve disputes over the surface or subsurface drainage of water.

The secretary of the Department of Agriculture shall promulgate rules pursuant to chapter 1-26 necessary for mediation, including the establishment of fees, training requirements for mediators, mediation request forms, mediation timeline, notification and intervention procedures, and any other mediation procedures as may be necessary for the mediation of drainage disputes. The parties to the mediation created under this chapter shall be limited to the person or parties that own or administer real property impacted by the planned drainage or drainage dispute.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 1.

46A-11A-2. Staff services provided by Department of Agriculture. All staff services required by the drainage mediation program shall be provided by the Department of Agriculture. The secretary of agriculture may employ agents and employees as the secretary deems necessary. The mediation services shall be administered under the direction and supervision of the Department of Agriculture. All expenses incurred in carrying on the work of the drainage mediation program, including the per diem and expenses of the staff, salaries, contract payments, department notice requirements, and any other items of expense shall be paid out of funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the farm mediation operating fund.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 2.

46A-11A-3. Fees--Farm mediation operating fund. Any fees incurred in the mediation process provided under this chapter and by rule shall be borne equally between the parties to the drainage dispute. The fees shall be deposited in the farm mediation operating fund. All money in the farm mediation operating fund is continuously appropriated for the purposes of administering the drainage mediation program. Any disbursements from the farm mediation operating fund shall be by authorization of the secretary of agriculture.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 3.

46A-11A-4. Contracts for mediation services. The Department of Agriculture, in the administration of this chapter, may contract with one or more governmental entities, nonprofit corporations, individuals, or other entities as determined by the Department of Agriculture to provide mediation services of drainage disputes.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 4.

46A-11A-5. Parties to drainage dispute, property owners, and governmental entities affected by drainage activity--Meeting notice--Publication of public notice. The requesting party shall promptly provide to the Department of Agriculture, upon the agreement of at least two parties to enter into the mediation program created under this chapter, a list of other parties to the drainage dispute and any property owner and any county, municipality, township, or any agency of state or federal government reasonably determined by the requesting party to be affected by the drainage activity. The Department of Agriculture shall send a mediation meeting notice to the identified parties, setting a time and place for an initial mediation meeting between the parties to the dispute and a mediator. This notice shall be in conjunction with a public notice of the mediation by the Department of Agriculture that shall be published once each week for two consecutive weeks in one of the official newspapers designated by the county or counties where the real property involved in the drainage dispute is located. The last publication shall be published before the initial mediation meeting. The unintentional failure to notify any party who may potentially be impacted by the drainage activity may not prevent the mediation from being scheduled or completed. No notice is necessary to any property owner within the boundaries of a municipality.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 5.

46A-11A-6. Written agreements. Any agreement reached between the parties to the drainage dispute as a result of mediation shall be drafted into a written agreement. If signed by the parties, the agreement constitutes a binding contract, and the mediator shall so certify.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 6.

46A-11A-7. Confidentiality of information. Information relating to the dispute between the parties to the drainage dispute which is disclosed to the mediator or which is created, collected, or maintained by the Department of Agriculture mediation program pursuant to the terms of this chapter is confidential to the extent agreed by the parties or provided by state law.

All mediation meetings, and all mediation activities provided by this chapter, are exempt from the provisions of chapter 1-27.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 7.

46A-11A-8. Immunity of mediators. Any person serving as a mediator pursuant to this chapter is immune from civil liability in any action brought in any court in this state on the basis of any act or omission resulting in damage or injury if the person was acting in good faith, in a reasonable and prudent manner, and within the scope of such person's official functions and duties as a mediator.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 8.

46A-11A-9. Intervention in mediation process. Any person or party that claims to be impacted by the planned drainage activities, upon timely notice, is allowed to intervene in the mediation process if the person's or party's claim of impact is supported by a claim that the person or party owns or administers real property impacted by the planned drainage. The request for intervention shall be supported by evidence that the intervention is necessary to protect the person's or party's property interests and that those interests will not be adequately represented by the existing parties. In considering the application for intervention, the mediator shall determine whether an applicant may intervene and whether the interest of the applicant presents a property, health, or safety issue impacted by the mediation and whether the interests of the potential interveners will not be protected by the existing parties.

Source: SL 2015, ch 226, § 9.

