



MINUTES - Connecticut River Joint Commissions Meeting

Monday, November 21, 2011

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Norwich Public Library, 368 Main St, Norwich, VT

Present: Bob Ball, Dr. Robert Christie, Glenn English, Robert Harcke, Cleve Kapala, Joan Monroe, Chris Campany, Beverly Major, Tom Kennedy, Rick Hopkins, Brendan Whittaker, Gayle Ottman

Administrative Staff/Consultants: Rachel Ruppel and Yutian Zhang

Members of the Public: Marc White, Upper Valley River Subcommittee; Rick Walling, Riverbend Subcommittee; Staci Pomeroy, VT Agency of Natural Resources; Jacquie Colburn, Tara Johnson and Shane Csiki, NH Dept. of Environmental Services; Adair Mulligan, Hanover Conservancy; Bernie Folta, Claremont

Glenn English, Vice- President, called the meeting to order at 10:10 am.

Staci Pomeroy of VT Agency of Natural Resources made a presentation on post-Hurricane Irene river restoration in Vermont. Pomeroy showed many aerial photos taken in the days following the storm, which showed the scale of damage, how infrastructure is located next to river in narrow river valleys, and homes built near actively moving riverbeds. Pomeroy then led a discussion about how people were affected and what CRJC's role might be in assisting with recovery.

Ottman shared that members of her family were flooded out of their home and the lengthy, complicated process to rebuild. Pomeroy summarized the hazard mitigation buy-out program, where FEMA will help purchase property that is likely to experience repetitive flood losses. Kennedy noted that the intensity of storm events (4 inches in 40 minutes) is increasing and that culverts are not sized appropriately to handle such intense storms. Christie asked about whether there is river planning that anticipates the effects of more frequent high-intensity storms. Pomeroy noted that Gov. Shumlin started a Flood Initiative after the record spring floods in the Lake Champlain basin and that this has now expanded to cover flooding from Irene. She also explained that VT ANR is working with the VT Regional Planning Commissions to help communities assess damage and identify infrastructure that is susceptible for future damage. Walling noted that he was involved with a river erosion study for the Wells River and asked if that information was being used. Pomeroy responded that yes, fluvial erosion hazard studies have been ongoing in the State of Vermont, as inundation and erosion both play major threats.

Whittaker commented that he is active with the VT League of Cities and Towns on their Insurance Committee, and noted that 11 municipally-owned covered bridges were damaged or destroyed in the flooding, which has a significant cultural and tourism impact and commended VTANR for the speedy cleanup of sewer treatment plants following the flooding. He also noted that insurance (the price and the availability) will ultimately determine the siting of facilities and that the Irene disaster declaration is only one of 5 federally-declared disasters in the State of Vermont this year. Folta noted that there are other natural disasters, such as ice storms and drought, that affect our region; Pomeroy responded that communities need to address all hazards through their hazard mitigation plans, but that flood risks are

directly related to land use decisions. Kennedy remarked that this disaster has granted a small window of opportunity to educate communities on best practices for land use development near rivers.

Kapala noted that the 2008-2013 strategic plan for CRJC identifies land use and development as the priority issue identified in the stakeholder survey. This is not a new idea, but may gain more traction now. English remarked that a hurdle to sound land use decisions is personal property rights. Mulligan noted that the River Management Plans developed by the Local River Subcommittees have a lot of information about stormwater management, riparian buffers, floodplain management, etc. – the information is there, now it needs to be implemented. Walling noted that the Town of Bath, NH, is one of very few that has a floodplain ordinance, where one cannot rebuild in the floodplain.

Campany noted that FEMA seems to be primarily reimbursing only for replacing infrastructure, not the upgrade of culverts to sufficient capacity; federal, state and local governments need to decide how to invest their dollars wisely. Major stated her concern for long-term impacts of excavators in rivers and armoring of banks. Pomeroy replied that several emergency response actions did create longer-term issues - it is important to keep access to floodplains by reducing berms and to keep large rocks in the streambed for resiliency. Campany suggested that reforesting floodplains would also help to stabilize these areas.

Christie noted that a lot of effort went into CRJC's plan, and that CRJC needs to do a better job with communicating the information and recommendations contained within that plan. Pomeroy remarked that she has been reading about the historic 1927 floods and that there was a 3-5 year recovery period; towns will continue to deal with the aftermath of Irene for several years, and may need to anticipate flooding events in the next few years. Pomeroy suggested that the CRJC can help to keep the topic on the table through education, supporting mitigation strategies, and helping to address the repetitive loss problem with undersized culverts. English noted that funding for infrastructure upgrade is an issue.

The CRJC thanked Pomeroy for her presentation and discussion.

Major moved to accept the minutes of 9/19/11, 8/1/11 and 6/21/11, seconded by Christie. The motion passed unanimously.

Zhang presented the financial report for the fiscal year to October 31, 2011. The Claremont Savings Bank account has been closed and funds transferred to Lake Sunapee Bank. CRJC still has an outstanding invoice to Field Geology Services for \$9,000 for work on the Ammonoosuc River assessment, which is waiting for payment from NH Department of Environmental Services. CRJC has received 25% of its annual contract from VT Agency of Natural Resources. New Hampshire's annual contract is scheduled for a vote on November 30th; English and Kapala plan to attend the Governor and Executive Council meeting where this contract will be approved. Zhang reported that CRJC currently has around \$12,000 in its bank account, which can cover its contractor costs and administrative costs. Kennedy moved to accept the October 31, 2011 financial report, seconded by Ottman. The motion passed unanimously.

Campany provided an update on three grant-funded projects. The Colebrook project has a non-federal match surplus, which will allow for \$1,650 to be paid from NHDES to CRJC and then to John Field to complete a final report for the project. Major asked what parts of the project were completed. English reported that the contractor installed rip-rap to armor the bank because the cost to install a better solution was too high. Whittaker added that the plant owner was not interested in the project, but that the public works director in Colebrook worked very hard to find a better solution to stabilize the

riverbank. Kapala opined that the plant was located in an unstable area of the river in an unsuitable location for development and felt that CRJC should re-focus its mission to encourage smarter development near rivers.

Company reported that the Ammonoosuc River assessment project is wrapping up. John Field has delivered the final report and is tying up a few loose ends to complete the project fully. Company has been in discussion with Steve Landry at NHDES about meeting the 40% non-federal match requirement. Right now, CRJC is looking at a match deficit of \$3,900 as the NH Charitable Foundation grant does not cover the full match requirement, but Landry has offered to help CRJC locate additional non-federal match that can be attributed to the project. This project must be closed out by December 31, 2011, so Ruppel asked that the CRJC be ready to contribute \$3,900 in match, if additional match cannot be found. Company confirmed with Zhang that there are sufficient funds in the CRJC account to contribute \$3,900 if it is needed. Kennedy moved to authorize the Executive Committee to spend up to \$3,900 by 12/31/11 to complete the Ammonoosuc River assessment project, seconded by Monroe. The motion passed unanimously.

Company reported that for the CT River Byway signs project, towns had agreed to install signs as part of the match to this project. Ruppel circulated a status sheet of town match; several towns have not installed their signs or have not submitted their match documentation. English remarked that in Haverhill, he had to settle an issue with NHDOT, as there had been no initial state Right-Of-Way clearance to install the signs. Ottman reported that Windsor has two signs left to install and that Nat Tripp is in touch with St. Johnsbury. Company reported that he has contacted Brattleboro. English remarked that the CT River Byway Council is struggling and may look for assistance from CRJC.

Company made a report from the last Executive Committee meeting, which covered the grant-funded project closeout, closing of Claremont Savings Bank, and a discussion about storage of CRJC's archives. Harcke has been storing CRJC's files in Hinsdale and will be moving the boxes of publications to CRJC's offices in Lebanon. Harcke remarked that CRJC could likely consolidate its remaining files substantially, as many files are likely no longer needed. Ottman asked whether the publications included any boating guides; Ruppel responded that she believes that these are out of print. Company also reported that the Executive Committee discussed the status of the Local River Subcommittees. Christie asked that the Subcommittee schedule and meeting minutes be sent to all Commissioners.

English called the New Hampshire caucus to recess to allow the Vermont caucus to discuss its business. Company convened the Vermont caucus. The caucus discussed the nomination of one of its members to the at-large position on the Executive Committee. Major moved to appoint Peter Gregory was appointed to the Executive Committee as an interim at-large member of the Executive Committee, seconded by Whittaker. The motion passed unanimously.

Kennedy asked about the status of the Vermont membership and recommended that CRJC send a letter to all members who have missed meetings asking if they would like to continue as Commissioners.

English re-convened the full CRJC.

Company Ruppel reported on the work and meetings of the Local River Subcommittees – the Wantastiquet subcommittee will meet 12/7, the Mt. Ascutney subcommittee will meet 12/13, the Upper Valley subcommittee will meet tonight (11/21), the Riverbend subcommittee will meet 12/15, and the Headwaters subcommittee will meet in January. Walling, the Riverbend subcommittee chair,

reported that he would like to see a VT Commissioner attend his subcommittee's meetings and that the September meeting was poorly attend and they are working on member recruitment. Whittaker reported on the Headwaters subcommittee and noted that the Northern Pass is a very divisive issue for their area. Whittaker confirmed that CRJC had sent in a comment letter regarding the Northern Pass.

English asked the CRJC for comments on its strategic plan update and the existing 2008-2013 strategic plan. Major stated that the current mission statement looks good, that all goals relative to the CT River Byway should be removed from the plan, and the CRJC should focus on improving its communications with the public. Kapala stated that all of the priority goals (except those for the Byway) are still relevant, and he remarked that Hurricane Irene gives us some direction of where to focus our attention. Kennedy asked whether CRJC might be eligible to apply for Hazard Mitigation planning funds to assist with floodplain development planning. Kapala noted that the Vermont Community Foundation has established a Sudden and Urgent Need Fund to assist with Irene recovery efforts; this is open only until the end of the year. Kennedy asked if it would be most efficient to cover the strategic plan update at a dedicated meeting(s) of the CRJC; the consensus of the group was to schedule a strategic planning sessions at the January CRJC meeting. English recommended that the meeting on Tuesday 1/17/2012 should be held for 3 hours (either 9-12 or 10-1), with a snow date of Monday 1/23/2012.

English noted the following correction to the FY12 meeting schedule - May 21, 2012 not April 16, 2012.

Commissioners' Comments:

Major asked about the federal Blueways initiative for the Connecticut River. Ottman stated that there is not a funding program, rather this is a recognition program for water-based recreation.

Ottman reported that there was a Vermont Byway summit recently. VT Agency of Transportation is working to partner with VT Tourism. The next grant round has been announced and Two Rivers Ottaquechee Regional Commission is seeking to apply for a corridor management plan for the CT River Byway. Kennedy added that the CT River Byway Council may be interested in working with CRJC for the Byway's administration.

Whittaker inquired about Rebecca Brown's appointment. English reported that this is moving forward. Hopkins stated that there is a federal initiative called America's Great Outdoors; he will look into this further and provide information to the CRJC.

Public Comments:

Walling stated that there is a Keep It Growing Initiative in the North Country to support local agriculture. Rebecca Brown is involved in this project and has received Strengthening Economic Ties (SET) funding.

Folta remarked that as part of its strategic planning process, CRJC might want to investigate having a membership-supported organization. Folta also reported that the NH Regional Planning Commissions' have just been awarded a statewide Regional Planning Grant for \$3.3 million.

Monroe commented that she would not like to see a duplication of efforts between CRJC and the CT River Watershed Council, which is a membership-supported organization. English noted that David Deen may be a good contact on this issue.

Whittaker moved to adjourn the meeting, with a second by Ottman. Motion approved unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.