



## CRJC Mount Ascutney Local River Subcommittee

Tuesday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Windsor Welcome Center

7:00PM

### Meeting Summary

Present:

Bill Gallagher (Cornish)

Cordelia Merritt (Hartland)

Judy Howland

Kelly Stettner (Springfield)

Bill Manner (Springfield)

Nancy Heatley (Weathersfield, Chair)

Tracie Sales (NHDES Rivers Program)

Jim McClammer (CRJC)

Alex Belenz (staff, North Country Council)

1. Nancy Heatley opened the meeting at 7:04 and introductions were made.
2. Minutes: no quorum was present, so the approval of minutes was tabled until the May 8<sup>th</sup> meeting.
3. Q&A with Tracie Sales, NHDES Rivers Program. Nancy thanked Tracie for attending, and gave an overview of the subcommittee's work on updating the Water Resources Chapter and why it was great that Tracie was in attendance. While there are solid recommendations contained in the 2009 plan, a lot of them are not actionable or achievable for the subcommittee. One of the priorities for the update will be to develop recommendations that serve as a blueprint for future subcommittee activities. Nancy thanked Bill M and Kelly for sending in comments/edits on the 2009 plan recommendations.

Tracie provided some general thoughts on the effort to update the Water Resources Chapter. Her role is not to make any recommendations herself, but she can certainly provide feedback and assistance to the subcommittee. The 2009 Water Resources Chapter contains an ambitious list of issues to address. Her biggest concern with river corridor management plans is that they get written and then sit on a shelf. The updated plan should be a useful, living document that helps identify priorities along the river and in the adjacent communities. Some questions to consider when developing the plan are: 1) what are the questions/concerns that subcommittee members hear from their towns? 2) how can the subcommittee help residents learn about river issues and act on them? Once the priorities are identified, then members can identify items that are "tackable" as a subcommittee, in addition to larger-scale issues. Tracie also recommended contacting other LAC's to see how they've tackled issues and projects. LAC's sometimes work together on projects as well. Nancy noted that this would be a good strategy for addressing larger-scale issues and projects.

Nancy posed several questions to members to frame the discussion of recommendations: 1) how do we prioritize issues and recommendations? 2) who is the primary audience (homeowners, towns, etc)? 3) do we break out issues/recommendations by local-level vs. state-level (or other)? 4) is the document geared towards large-scale regional initiatives or should it be tailored to local solutions? Tracie added that members should focus on what they think is most critical and what is achievable for the subcommittee. For example, combined sewer overflows are a big

issue for Connecticut River towns, but is probably too large of an issue for the subcommittee to tackle. Kelly suggested that the subcommittee could engage in outreach/education efforts related to larger-scale issues. Nancy noted that water quality monitoring would be an example of a project that is more achievable for the subcommittee. Tracie suggested that the subcommittee could look for gaps in water quality data along the Connecticut River. The NH Volunteer Rivers Assessment Program (VRAP) can help leverage volunteers for data collection. Tracie can help with coordination of data collection efforts, and may be able to use DES interns.

Jim noted that the road reconstruction project on NH 12 in Charlestown and Walpole will start this spring or summer – there is a good opportunity for water quality monitoring before and after the reconstruction. Construction could begin as early as May. Kelly could loan out BRAT's Oakton meter for April or May. Tracie noted that Cold River LAC members might be able to assist with sampling, and DES interns might be able to assist as well. Antioch University is a good source of interns as well. Bill asked if anyone was doing monitoring on the Sugar River, Kelly replied that it hadn't been done in a long time. Judy asked if DES interns could help out with sampling on VT tributaries to the Connecticut River – Tracie indicated that they could, but only if there was a direct nexus to water quality in the river.

4. Water Resources Chapter Working Session. Nancy led members through the key recommendations of the 2009 plan. The goal is to identify which recommendations should be prioritized, and how to make them “actionable” for the subcommittee.
  - “Discourage development too close to the river” – Tracie noted that there are opportunities for the subcommittee to do outreach to towns regarding local development ordinances and/or engage regional planning commissions to assist in this effort.
  - “Pay more attention to soil conditions, including varves, and to erosion” – Jim noted that it would be useful to identify specific areas of erosion. Nancy agreed, and also noted that the subcommittee should revisit areas that were identified in the 2009 plan.
  - “Retain, protect, and enhance riparian buffers” – Nancy noted that the main issue is outreach and education for private landowners. There are many benefits to buffer maintenance/restoration and many resources available to assist landowners. Kelly added that outreach to towns is important as well. The subcommittee can serve as a liaison between landowners and the federal government agencies who administer these programs. Bill M noted that VT's Trees for Streams Program is not going to have continued funding. Ottauquechee NRCDC currently uses a lot of that funding. Tracie added that engaging with schools can be a good means for getting plantings done. Cordie added that the Student Conservation Association may have crews available as well.
  - “Continue and enhance good river stewardship by TransCanada” – Nancy noted that this now refers to Great River Hydro. Jim noted that GRH will likely be a short-term dam owner, so they may not have much interest in being a good steward for the river. So far, they have not been very open to discussions, despite a large windfall from the recent corporate tax cut.
  - “Examine culverts to ensure proper drainage” – Alex noted that NH regional planning commissions have done a lot of work on culvert assessments, and have money available from DOT to fund the work. Nancy added that VT has made grant funding available and prioritizes culvert projects through the Tactical Basin planning process. Jim noted that Aquatic Resource Mitigation fund money from the NH RT 12 reconstruction project could be used for culvert replacements. Nancy noted that it was important to highlight the culvert issue, despite the size and expense of culvert projects. Jim suggested that the language be changed to “stream crossings” to include problematic bridges.
  - “Improve stormwater management” – Nancy asked where this recommendation fit in in terms of what the subcommittee could accomplish. Bill M noted that most stormwater regulations apply to new development, so it can be difficult to address existing problems. Kelly added that rain gardens are an effective, small-scale project that the subcommittee can advocate for. The subcommittee could reach out to towns as part of the Master Planning process. Tracie spoke about the NH Soak Up the Rain Program – will send outreach

materials. New rain garden designs use mostly grass and are cheaper and easier to maintain. The UNH Stormwater Center is doing a lot of good work on rain gardens.

- “Ensure that farm operations help protect water quality” – Bill M noted that conservation districts have been working with farmers – there are now mandatory Best Management Practices (BMPs) based on the size of the farm. Most of the large Windsor County farms are on board, but many farms don’t qualify if they are too small or seasonal. Judy added that there are still a lot of non-qualifying farms that use lime, fertilizer, etc. Jim added that there are now issues with manure storage due to new regulations preventing early or late-season spreading. Bill noted that there is federal money for these issues, but there is also a lack of trust between landowners and the feds. This is an important recommendation to keep in the plan due to the Long Island Sound Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements – the Connecticut River is non-attainment for nitrogen, so minimizing fertilizer runoff is important. Tracie added that the subcommittee should keep an eye for opportunities, and can work to build trust between farmers and the government agencies with resources to address some of these issues.
- “Reduce mercury contamination” – Nancy noted that this is probably too large-scale of an issue for the subcommittee to tackle. Jim noted that dam operations and ramping rates are probably contributing to mercury levels in the Connecticut River. Nancy added that this might be an effort for CRJC to take up.

Nancy then led members through a discussion of the invasive aquatic species recommendations from the 2009 plan.

- Members agreed that the recommendations regarding Didymo would need to be changed now that it’s known to be native.
- Members discussed potential recommendations for boat washes at put-ins. Bill M noted that the subcommittee had hoped that funds would become available through Great River Hydro as part of the FERC relicensing process. Kelly added there are grant opportunities, but many of them require volunteer support, which is very difficult to achieve on a consistent basis.
- Members agreed that the recommendation for town conservation commissions doing public education regarding invasive species was achievable. Kelly suggested a garlic mustard pulling festival as a means of fighting invasives and educating the public.

Members agreed that recommendations for gages were largely beyond the scope of the subcommittee. Members felt similarly about recommendations for flow and flood control, though Jim noted that the subcommittee could do outreach to towns regarding ordinances for developments in floodplains. Notifications regarding ice jams and dam releases are important too. Dam releases used to be scheduled, now they are based on electricity generation/revenue.

Tracie suggested that members identify priorities for remaining recommendations, so that a list of priorities/actionable items could be narrowed down. Tracie also suggested developing an action plan for when members observe or are made aware of environmental infractions, such as filling in wetlands. This could include notifying conservation commissions and/or NHDES.

Alex suggested that members develop a list of priority issues – regardless of scale. These types of river corridor management plans are often referenced by applicants for grant funds (such as the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund). Identifying larger-scale priorities in the plan can then translate into larger-scale, grant-funded projects. Tracie added that FERC is required to consult these river corridor plans during relicensing.

5. Permit Review. A permit from Great River Hydro for a replacement boat ramp in Charlestown was received; however, since there was no quorum, the permit was not reviewed.

6. Updates. Tracie noted that the ARM fund grant round is open, and that the subcommittee can apply for funds if they have a project. Final proposals are due at the end of August. In September, DES will invite LAC's to review proposals for projects in their region to see if the proposals dovetail with the priorities of the subcommittee. The LAC's will be able to make recommendations for improving the proposals as well.

Tracie noted that DES wetland rules are being re-written. One big proposed change is that applications would be required to consult with LAC's and conservation commissions before submitting applications to NHDES. There is an open comment period which ends on April 20<sup>th</sup>. The draft rules can be accessed at <https://www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wetlands/process-improvement.htm>. Alex will circulate Tracie's draft comments on the new rules.

Jim asked about RSA 91A requirements (public meeting rules) – they sometimes make it difficult to coordinate permit reviews. Tracie noted that permit reviewers can send comments individually without a meeting, but must make it clear that they are not official LAC comments. LAC's can also develop a list of pre-approved positions on various topics/issues, and grant authority to a reviewer to issue comments on behalf of the LAC when they see those issues in a permit application.

Jim provided an update on the FERC relicensing process for the GRH dams. GRH held a public meeting on March 8<sup>th</sup> to discuss the various studies (e.g., erosion, shad, etc). Jim, speaking individually and not on behalf of CRJC, encouraged members to send in letters to FERC on the relicensing (or encourage residents to do so), and circulated examples of letters that were already sent. Anyone sending letters should copy VT and NH federal delegations (e.g., Senator Shaheen).

7. The next meeting will be held on May 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM at the Windsor Welcome Center. Meeting adjourned at 8:47.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Alex Belenz.