



CRJC Mount Ascutney Local River Subcommittee

Tuesday, May 8th, 2018

Windsor Welcome Center

7:00PM

Meeting Minutes

Present:

Bill Gallagher (Cornish)

Colleen O'Neil (Cornish)

Judy Howland (Hartland)

Bill Manner (Springfield)

Kelly Stettner (Springfield)

David Taylor (Plainfield)

Margaret Perry (Rockingham)

Tom Hernon (Rockingham)

Nancy Heatley (Chair, Weathersfield)

John Bruno (guest, Hartland)

Kathy Urffer (Connecticut River Conservancy)

Alex Belenz (staff, North Country Council)

1. Nancy Heatley opened the meeting at 7:02 and introductions were made.
2. Minutes: the minutes of the January 9th meeting were approved as written by motion of Manner/Taylor. The summary of the March 27th meeting (no quorum) was approved as written by motion of Stettner/Howland.

Nancy provided a summary of the March 27th meeting for members who were not present, and noted that the document was a good summary of the working session on the Water Resources Chapter. Tracie Sales from NHDES Rivers attended and provide some good insights into how to make the new plan more actionable for the subcommittee and have it be a "living document." Tom noted that, under recommendations for mercury contamination, while reducing mercury contamination may be too large scale an issue for the subcommittee, there are opportunities to do outreach and education on mercury in the river. He was told about a group of Cambodian residents in Lebanon who were catching fish out of the river every day – groups like this should be warned about fish consumption. Kelly has discussed mercury issues in the CT River with Celia Chen at Dartmouth – contamination in fish can be traced back to dragonfly larvae, which have high levels of mercury. Kelly can follow up with Celia to see if any outreach is being done. Tom added that the information had come to him through Steve Halleran (Plainfield Town Administrator). Alex can follow up with the Upper Valley subcommittee as well. Nancy agreed that outreach/education on mercury contamination is something the subcommittee can tackle. Colleen asked if this was something the subcommittee could do a press release on – Nancy replied that there are a number of options (flyers, outreach to towns, etc). John added that Jim McClammer has previously expressed concerns over mercury levels building up as the result of water level fluctuations in impoundments above hydrodams.

3. Kathy provided an update on the FERC relicensing process for CT River hydropower dams. CRC has been active in the river recreation aspect of the relicensing. In fall 2017, CRC did a survey and a series of public forums on CT River recreation. The survey listed all access sites along the river. Questions were posed to see what improvements were needed at access points, what respondents did on the river, and where it would be beneficial to have additional

boat launches and/or other recreational facilities. CRC is developing a report that combines the results of the survey, CRJC recreation plans, an AMC survey, and municipal input. Great River Hydro has completed their own recreation study, and is probably working on the required recreation plan. CRC's plan is to reach out directly to GRH to see if there is an opportunity to discuss their findings.

The earliest that GRH could submit a revised final application to FERC is June – however, they haven't finished the required in-stream flow study, so that is unlikely. They might be pacing themselves to match the application process for FirstLight (owners of Massachusetts hydropower dams). CRC is engaging congressional delegations to put pressure on FERC to come up and do a site visit and thorough study of bank erosion. CRC is also pushing for erosion monitoring and streambank projects as a condition of the license. FERC will likely not let a 15 Mile Falls situation happen again, where a large mitigation fund was established. Nancy added that one of the downsides of the mitigation fund is that you have to pay someone to manage it. CRC is pushing for strategic, specific projects and monitoring instead (e.g., a comprehensive streambank management plan). Since it is a 40-50 year license, CRC wants agreements for erosion monitoring, bank stabilization, etc., in addition to one-off projects. Nancy asked if there had been any discussion of an educational component – outreach to homeowners, businesses, etc – Kathy said that it hasn't come up yet. Bill added that government in general has been less inclined to fund educational projects in recent years. John added that it would make more sense for GRH to pay a royalty to riverfront towns since they are generating additional value from a public resource.

Nancy noted that she has heard that GRH is not interested in being dam owners for very long, which may make them less inclined to engage in mitigation efforts. Kathy noted that it's a trend that more hydropower facilities are being traded like assets, however, GRH has retained the same employees who have worked at these facilities for a long time – much better than FirstLight.

There was some discussion of a list of projects and priorities that was developed and submitted to TransCanada by some of the riverfront towns in 2017. 14 towns participated, and there were write-ups in local newspapers about it, but there has been no update since. Kathy indicated that the list was likely developed in anticipation of settlement discussions with TransCanada. Now that GRH is the dam owner, there has been no indication of settlement discussions yet, which may be why there has been no update. Kathy indicated that she would follow up with Andy Fisk to learn more.

4. Working session on Water Resources Chapter. Nancy provided a brief overview of what was done so far. The process has been to go through each of the recommendations from the 2009 plan and see what needs to be updated, what is actionable, etc.
 - Recommendations for forests. Kathy asked about the recommendation for riparian buffers – the new VT Clean Water rules address these. Is the goal to reflect current legislation, or go beyond? Nancy – depends on what is being discussed.
 - Recommendations for airborne pollutants. Members agreed these were mostly large-scale, and beyond what is actionable for the subcommittee.
 - Recommendations for erosion. Nancy noted that many of these are macro-level, but there are some recommendations for landowners. Kathy suggested a recommendation regarding dam operations, members agreed. Nancy added a recommendation for reviewing dam operation effects on erosion.

Once all recommendations were reviewed, Nancy asked subcommittee members to come to the next meeting with 2-3 projects and/or issues to highlight in the plan. The subcommittee can then work on prioritizing these issues/projects in the plan. Members should send their projects/issues to Nancy at least 1 week prior to the next

meeting (July 10th). Kathy added that highlighting larger scale projects/issues can be important because this is a state planning document that will be referenced by FERC and others.

5. Updates. Kelly reported that the Herrick's Cove Wildlife Festival went very well. There 1,200 attendees despite poor weather. Kelly met Gary Dickerman (Claremont CC chair), who invited her to discuss BRAT's river cleanups at a meeting in Claremont. Kelly let him know that Claremont needs representatives on the subcommittee.

On June 23rd, BRAT is co-hosting an aquatic invasive species workshop, with a paddle on Echo Lake to look for invasives, as part of the Vermont Invasive Patrollers (VIP) initiative. They are looking for non-profit partners to co-host. Alex will follow up with CRJC to see if they can co-host. Ottauquechee NRCDC can be a fallback. Kathy said CRC could potentially co-host too.

Kelly sent around a BRAT BioBlitz flyer and asked members to please distribute. Kelly will send to Alex to distribute as well. The goal is to get people engaged as citizen scientists. Butler's Bus will be donating a shuttle bus. If anyone knows of anyone who knows a lot about trees, bats, mammals, reptiles, etc who would be interested in leading an outing – let Kelly know. Audobon Society will be leading birding.

Nancy noted that it will soon be time to plan the Septic Smart Workshop for September. The event was held in NH last year, so they will look to hold it in VT this year. It will be held on the 2nd or 3rd Saturday of September. Colleen suggested Windsor for a location. Bill suggested the Hartland Library, which has a decent amount of space. Judy will check to see if those weekends are available at the library. Tom indicated that HB Plumbing could likely sponsor the event again.

Nancy is applying to be a CRJC commissioner and a member of the Communications committee – still waiting governor approval.

Kathy alerted members to two upcoming CRC events:

- There will be a lantern paddle on the Connecticut River on May 25th, starting at the marina in Brattleboro. Details and registration: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/confluence-paddle-registration-44334849729>
- CRC will be having its annual River Celebration on June 16th at the Retreat Farm in Brattleboro: <https://www.ctriver.org/news-events/annual-meeting/>

Kathy remarked on how great the subcommittee is – impressed with the work they've taken on and members' enthusiasm.

Judy attended a presentation by Adair Mulligan (Hanover Conservancy) in Plainfield on the Connecticut River. There may be more presentations scheduled in the future.

6. Membership outreach. Alex listed vacancies for subcommittee membership spots: Plainfield (1), Claremont (2), Charlestown (2), Windsor (1), and Weathersfield (1). Having the two towns with no members makes it more difficult to get a quorum. If members are aware of residents of those towns that may be interested, you can put them in touch with Alex. Alex will circulate an example recruitment letter.
7. The next meeting will be held on July 10th at 7:00 PM at the Windsor Welcome Center. Meeting adjourned by motion of Taylor/Howland at 8:46 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Alex Belenz.