

Wantastiquet Subcommittee
of the Connecticut River Joint Commissions
Tuesday, May 6, 2019
Windham Region Commission Office, Brattleboro, VT
Minutes

Attendees

Walpole			Westminster	Paul Harlow	
Walpole			Westminster	Jim Calchera	X
Westmoreland	Perry Sawyer	X	Putney	Joe Grutta	X
Westmoreland			Putney		
Chesterfield	Roland Volbehrr		Dummerston	Daniel Marx	
Chesterfield			Dummerston	Jack Lilly	X
Hinsdale	Joe Conroy		Brattleboro	Kathy Urffer	X
Hinsdale			Brattleboro	Michael Fairchild	X
Vernon	Andy White				
Vernon					

Staff: Emily Davis (Planner, Windham Regional Commission)

Tracie Sales (NH DES, Rivers Program)

Laurie Callahan (Brattleboro Conservation Commission)

1. Welcome and Introductions:

- The meeting began at 5:31 pm.
- Introductions were made.

2. Approve of Meeting Minutes:

- *Action: November 1, 2018 minutes were approved with a motion by J. Calchera, second by K. Urffer. The motion passed with one abstention.*
- *Action: February 4, 2019 minutes were approved with a motion by J. Grutta, second by J. Calchera. The motion passed with two abstentions.*

3. Aquatic Invasive Species Update – Laurie Callahan:

Laurie Callahan gave a presentation and update on the Southeastern Vermont Aquatic Invasive Species Project. She presented a spotter that was on display with at the recent Herricks Cove Wildlife Festival.

Three aquatic invasive plants were found: water chestnut (most recent, found 2012), Eurasian water-milfoil, European naiad, and Curly-leaf pondweed. There was no zebra mussels or Asian clams found.

Grant funds were used to control the spread of the most recently found water chestnut. Callahan reported that since they've begun to pull rosettes out of the River, there has been significant and visible progress.

She distributed a list of the sites that they have planned for AIS control, and invites people to join in the planned activities to learn how to identify these species, and help with their management. She also distributed a summary report of the Hinsdale water chestnut site, and described the trends over time. She explained that they are trying to encourage conservation organizations to “adopt” a boat launch site, and help provide outreach to boaters to help spread awareness and talk to people about AIS concerns.

Callahan encouraged the LRS members, if interested, to join in a planned management activity during the summer, or volunteer time at a boat launch over the summer (especially in July), to simply talk with boaters about that site and AIS on the Connecticut River.

Jack Lilly asked about fines associated with not cleaning your boat. It was discussed that in both VT and NH, the fines were about \$250, but the exact amount was unclear.

4. West Chesterfield Shoreland Permit Review:

Emily Davis reiterated the role of the LRS committees in reviewing the permits, which is to neither approve or deny a permit, but to assist the NHDES in providing comment on the permits that come in.

Tracie sales added that NHDES really relies on the review of these permits, since there is more local knowledge about a particular site that is valuable knowledge. She also said that NHDES cannot ask a permittee anything that is not required by law, but an LRS can ask for, or make a recommendation for, a specific BMP that would be more environmentally friendly.

Michael Fairchild commented on the tax map, looking at the narrow sizes of the lots along the river, and the banks are very steep towards the bank. Although, there are other homes in the area on narrower lots, with the same amount of infrastructure on those lots (septic and well). Presumably, if those developments are approved, there may not be a pressing issue with this proposed home.

It was noted that the septic system appears to be as far away as possible in the permit design. There are also concerns about the stormwater runoff during construction, wherein the standard BMP’s may be sufficient.

The Subcommittee didn’t have any additional comments or requests of the permit, and encouraged the construction contractors to operate with the typical and conventional stormwater run-off best management practices for these kinds of projects.

There was some question about enforcement post-construction. Tracie Sales said that generally, enforcement does not have the capacity to check all projects. But, she encouraged local folks and the local LAC to mention something to NHDES if something is observed.

5. Chair Election

None of the members were interested and/or available to step into the Chair role of this CRJC subcommittee.

6. Review of Subcommittee Priorities

a. Hinsdale – Brattleboro Bridge Construction

Emily Davis said that she spoke with Marion major, the new Transportation Planner at the Windham Regional Commission who is working with JB Mack at the Southwest RPC in NH on the Hinsdale –

Brattleboro Bridge. She said that the timeline for construction has been moved from fall 2019 to the fall 2020, due to right of way concerns on the VT side.

She gave the Subcommittee a trail connections map around the Hinsdale-Brattleboro bridge, as a way to begin the conversation among stakeholders about how this project links into regional connections.

She also reported on the general project flow, and the opportunity for the public to provide comment on the design of the new bridge (before the design phase, during the preliminary design phase, and during the final design).

Kathy Urffer and Michael Fairchild said that they thought they that were connected to the Existing Bridge Subcommittee, which would help inform the design of this site, but their connection seems to have been lost. Emily said that she would follow up with making sure the communications are still in tact within that group, between staff changes.

Urffer mentioned that there was energy in Brattleboro around using this opportunity as a strong economic development tool, especially around recreation, trail connectivity, and access to the Connecticut River. There was some discussion of the railway line, and how some of the intersections or areas around the Amtrak lines are dangerous.

Action: Motion by K. Urffer to add the Wantastiquet Subcommittee as a whole as a member to the Existing Bridges Subcommittee and receive regular project updates, or as deemed appropriate by both the Wantastiquet Subcommittee and the Brattleboro-Hinsdale Existing Bridges Subcommittee. The motion was seconded by M. Fairchild, and passed unanimously.

b. CRJC Commissioner Focus on Water Quality

This item was a follow-up on the survey, discussed at the last meeting, on how the Commissioners would treat and address water quality, and what work was already being done.

Kathy Urffer said that one obvious way to dig into the water quality testing would be to be aware of the (volunteer river assessment program) VRAP program. Tracie said that no one is doing the VRAP program on the Connecticut River, perhaps because it is so challenging on a River that is so large, and at such a big scale.

Joe Grutta said that with so many schools along the River, that may be a good opportunity to get more water samples collected.

Urffer said that she would follow up on the issues of doing a more comprehensive sampling program on the Connecticut River, and would report back in the next meeting. She said that the Connecticut River Conservancy sometimes gets inquiries from people wanting to test the River but no good program exists for plugging them in. NHDES can likely provide some support for some partnership like that.

c. Discuss Meeting Schedule

Currently, meetings are quarterly, and Kathy Urffer thought that it means that the group loses working momentum.

There was some discussion of the benefits of having six meetings over the course of the year, as opposed to four.

Action: Motion by Jim Calchera to increase the number of meetings annually, from quarterly to every other month. The motion was seconded by M. Fairchild, and passed unanimously.

d. Consider Other Priorities

Member Recruitment-

The LRS commented that adding more members to these meetings was of priority. There was a question of these CRJC meetings are becoming less relevant, considering other groups and programs that exist to assist in that program.

There was some discussion around what would be effective in recruiting volunteers and members onto the subcommittee. As a way to help recruit more members, meeting locations should rotate through the member towns. This way, the municipal Selectboard and Conservation Commissioner would be invited to the CRJC LRS meeting, and/or have an opportunity to learn more about the topics of discussion. Conservation Commission members would be a good target outreach, and notice that municipal legislative bodies of these meetings.

7. Other / New Business

There was no new business.

8. Adjournment

Action: Motion to adjourn from P. Sawyer, second by Michael Fairchild.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:31 pm.

DRAFT