



## Connecticut River Joint Commissions

Monday, March 8, 2021

Virtual Meeting

Executive Committee – 12:30 – 1:30 PM

### Minutes

Virtual meeting requirement review:

The President of the Connecticut River Joint Commissions has found that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID – 19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor’s Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020–04, the CRJC and its Committees are authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting which was authorized pursuant to the Governor’s Emergency Order.

The CRJC is utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting. All members of the Commissions have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting as follows:

Upper Valley Lake Sunapee RPC is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: CRJC Executive Committee

CRJC / Upper Valley Lake Sunapee RPC is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: CRJC Executive Committee

Time: Mar 8, 2021 12:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

# Executive Committee Minutes

March 8, 2021 – 12:30 – 1:30 PM

## Zoom Meeting

*Present:*

*VT – Campany, Lembke, Caduto, Rasmussen.*

*NH – Chute, Griffin, Hastings,*

*Staff: Crocker & Butts*

### *12:30 – Convene*

#### Discussion – Vermont Funding for CRJC

Comm. Chute convened the meeting and made note of the remarks he made in his earlier email. (attached) Comm. Campany continued to lead the discussion reporting on the discussions and outcome of the meeting of CRWAC with Neil Kaman of VTANR. The challenge identified was that the CRJC funding was not coming through any particular agency but was a separate line item in the budget.

The VT Sunset Commission initially misunderstood the mission and function of the CRJC but were later more supportive of the organization. Several of the State Agencies met to learn about the CRJC. This led to looking at the RPC funding stream that comes through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

Among the suggestions was to advocate through the VT Legislature but this would take a great effort that the volunteer commissioners would have to undertake to achieve bridge funding. Without the prospect of funding from Vermont and in light of the reduction in funding from NH the question becomes whether CRJC can continue to operate under the conditions.

Commissioner Caduto recommend possibilities for funding as a clean water service provider but this would not come into play until FY 23. And this would be a conversation that CRJC could have over the next 12 to 18 months.

Comm. Chute noted his perspective that the CRWAC would be the recipient of the funds. He asked whether there were funds that would be set aside for the CRJC in the area of \$30,000 to fund the operation of the CRJC.

This was the only option of funding that Comm. Caduto could see. Comm. Lembke requested that this option be tabled until further discussion. The primary discussion should be whether CRJC can survive on only NH funding for the upcoming fiscal year.

Comm. Company noted that the other possibility is seeking funding from the Federal delegation as an option to pursue. There is a long history of having CRJC funded in this manner. This could be tied to the Long Island sound TMDL. Could the funds be divided among the 5 VT RPCs at \$6,000 per commission. Commissioner Company noted that the RPCs are contributing with funding staff to serve on the Joint Commissions. The RPCs could pass through funds to the CRJC but it would have to be a new source of funds and not within current budgets.

The source of funds for CRJC was a line item in the Governor's budget. CRJC could act as a project manager, but water quality and management are not the primary mission of CRJC.

Comm. Rasmussen noted there is no way to get basic organization funding for the coming fiscal year. The questions are whether UVLSRPC is still willing to manage CRJC at the current level of funding. Chute asked if there were any other ideas for funding. Lembke said that there was no time to have a viable plan for any resources in the short term. The major question is where CRJC will go in the next 12 months?

Meghan Butts was asked whether to keep CRJC going or folding. She explained that the concern is that the support CRJC needs will cost UVLSRPC as has occurred in the past. She explained that the member rate for work has risen

\$5.00 to \$65.00 which is a special member rate. Comm. Campany stated that this rate was a bargain. Key would be a commitment from CRJC to only use UVLSRPC support to the extent absolutely necessary.

Comm. Rasmussen thanked UVLSRPC for their support over the years. Comm. Chute questioned whether the Commission had any value to NH. Comm. Campany said the approach would be to work with staff to see what work can be accomplished with the budget at its current status. Chute continued to ask whether it made sense to continue. Comm. Chute noted that the individual State Commissions have been independent organizations. He further noted he felt that the way to a positive outcome is to get rid of the CRJC. He felt holding on to the CRJC for the sake of CRJC is an impediment to progress.

Comm. Rasmussen suggested that there should be a further discussion. Chute suggested that the focus and use of resources should be used to acquire additional funding to save CRJC financially. He is not advising that the CRJC fold but it should be considered and option. Comm. Lembke inquired whether the states saw value in having a bi-state commission?

Most commissions like the CRJC as joint commissions there is a value to interstate cooperation between two states. Comm. Campany suggested that the most logical resolution was to seek funding through the federal delegation to bring back CRJC to what it was when original created and was funded. Another full Commission meeting was scheduled for March 15 and Comm. Chute asked whether the next meeting should be held as scheduled. Comm. Rasmussen suggested that the CRJC continue for the next year and see what might be arranged. Comm. Hastings suggested that it might be worthwhile to talk with David Deen or Howard Dean to look into where VT funds might be to assist CRJC

Comm. Caduto suggested NEWPIC be reviewed as a possible support.

Comm. Chute suggested that CRJC decide its highest priorities are and focus on these.

Comm. Griffin noted that it is important to look at a new budget and note that they are going to run out of hours as they have almost every year.

*Other Business – None*

*Adjourn: the meeting adjourned at 1:45 PM.*

Minutes adopted: 4/19/21

*Link to Google Drive Audio File:*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RGHNgCpjOboUpnUGNzDJgeGvHYQ9Ajrj/view?usp=sharing>

**From:** Lionel Chute <LChute@sullivancountynh.gov>

**Sent:** Monday, March 08, 2021 11:34 AM

**To:** Steve Lembke <slembkevt@gmail.com>; Ken Hastings <ospreynh@gmail.com>; Jennifer Griffin <jgriffin@greatriverhydro.com>; Chris Company <cccompany@windhamregional.org>; Marie.Caduto@vermont.gov; Jason <jrasmussen@swcrpc.org>

**Cc:** Pat Crocker <pcrocker@uvlsrpc.org>; Olivia Uyizeye <ouyizeye@uvlsrpc.org>; Meghan Butts <mbutts@uvlsrpc.org>

**Subject:** some considerations for today's meeting

Hello Everyone,

As UVLSPRC's appointed representative and the current Chair of the NH Connecticut River Valley Resource Commission and President of the CRJC, please allow me to share a few considerations in advance of today's 12:30 meeting:

- In my view, CRJC has been in a slow decline for many years, most critically in terms of its membership. Both the NH Connecticut River Valley Resource Commission and the VT Connecticut River Watershed Advisory Commission are minimally functioning with just a fraction of the 15 members each are required ("shall") by statute to be represented by. According to the CRJC's website, NH has 5 of its 15 members and VT has 7, but even this is generous in that some of the members that are listed rarely (if ever) attend CRJC meetings. Neither state organization holds regular meetings, nor do they conduct much if any business outside of appointing executives. And neither organization has diverse representation: the NH group is lacking

(g) A representative of a recognized statewide conservation organization.

(h) A representative of the commercial tourism industry.

(i) A representative of the agricultural industry who shall be actively engaged in farming, and

(j) A representative of the forest product industry or a timberland owner.

Similarly, the Vermont Commission lacks representatives of

forestry, tourism, fishing, boating, and land preservation and historic preservation. One or more members shall be actively farming land they own bordering the Connecticut River or its tributaries.

At best, CRJC is functioning with only 40% of its required membership (12/30), but in reality it is much less. With the exception of the 6 Executive Committee members and perhaps 2 other individuals, Commissioners contribute little time and energy to the CRJC other than occasionally attending meetings.

Along these lines, in reviewing the statutes I also discovered (to my surprise) that I can no longer serve as either a Commissioner of the CRJC or member of the NH Connecticut River Valley Resource Commission because all members of the NH Connecticut River Valley Resource Commission are required to be New Hampshire residents. Since my move to Vermont nearly 4 years ago my membership on the CRJC has been in violation of state law(!) So, in consultation

with UVLSRPC ED Meghan Butts, I will therefore be resigning as the UVLSRPC appointee at the end of our fiscal year (July1) and will no longer be a member of the CRJC. I'm sorry for this news and wish it were otherwise.

- CRJC's funding situation is also a serious issue in my opinion. With the multi-year loss of any support from Vermont, the CRJC is being supported entirely with NH funding. This funding went up briefly to \$35k but is otherwise holding (for the time being) at \$30,000/year. This amount of money is not enough for CRJC to both cover its administrative and operational needs, let alone actively seek grants or other funding to allow it to grow or do projects. In my view, it is also unfair and runs counter to the spirit and purpose of CRJC for one state to supply all of the funding to a supposed "joint" commission.

- The strategic plan offers a path forward for the organization, but its action items largely remain undone. I do not get the sense that the Executive Committee is fully engaged in realizing the goals of its strategic plan. I think this is mainly due to the fact that most of us already have full-time jobs and simply don't have the time needed to do this work, but in the absence of real movement and accomplishments I do not see how CRJC can emerge from the hole that we find ourselves in.

- the area of most activity currently in the CRJC is around convening a webinar or webinars on the topic of "climate migration". While I agree that this is an emerging issue, I personally don't think our efforts to do outreach on it will meaningfully reverse the attrition of our members nor improve our shrinking budget. I also have concerns that the current scope of this work, which seeks to address "racial and gender fairness, equity, and justice including structural and systemic racism" while making any mention of climate change impacts to water quality, ecological systems, or other concerns that in my mind are more germane to the mission of the CRJC, will be too narrow to meet the needs of state agencies or our broad constituency. I have already expressed these concerns to those coordinating this work, but as my input didn't resonate I let it go. The bottom line is that I don't think this one project can make up for the structural and financial weaknesses that currently challenge our organization.

thank you,  
Lionel