

**CRJC Wantastiquet Subcommittee
Minutes**

Thursday, August 18, 2022 at 6:00PM
Hybrid Meeting – Windham Regional Commission, 139 Main St, Brattleboro, VT

Attendees

Walpole	Samantha Loch	V	Westminster		
Walpole			Westminster	Jim Calchera	P
Westmoreland	Perry Sawyer	P	Putney		
Westmoreland			Putney		
Chesterfield	Roland Volbehr	X	Dummerston		
Chesterfield			Dummerston		
Hinsdale	Mike Darcy	X	Brattleboro	Kathy Urffer	P
Hinsdale			Brattleboro	Michael Fairchild	P
Vernon	Andy White	P			
Vernon					

Note: P = present in person; V = present over remote virtual platform; X = not present

Attending Virtually: Olivia Uyizeye (UVLSRPC Staff)

Attending In Person: Margo Ghia (Natural Resources Planner, Windham Regional Commission)

Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Sawyer called the meeting to order at 6PM.

2. Meeting Minutes from November for approval

The November minutes pass unanimously without edits by motion of White/Urffer.

3. Permit Reviews

a. Faith's Toyota Ford, For Operational Stormwater Discharges, Westminster, VT

See permit details at - <https://enb.vermont.gov/?id=18029>

Sawyer opens the permit for discussion. The permit relates to a proposed project to redesign a car dealership in Westminster VT, including expanded impervious surfaces and improved stormwater management plan.

Members discuss the following while viewing a map of the location. Calchera helps to orient other members to site features:

- Steep hill to the west, across a main road. Steep bank to the east, past the railroad tracks and down to the Connecticut River.
- There are three permits for the site related to stormwater runoff during construction, operational stormwater discharges, and a public water system source permit.
- Current sight drainage is largely driven by swales and would benefit from improvements required by more recent stormwater permit requirements.
- Drainage is passed from the site through a box culvert under the railroad.

- Calchera expresses concern for the maintenance required for proper functioning of the proposed stormwater system. There is a lot of maintenance for it to work the way it is intended. What's the enforcement because it is critical. Perhaps yearly reporting? What is the assurance?
- Calchera raises the question of whether there are chemicals in the ground from its use as an auto garage that may be disturbed and eroded during construction. Nothing in permit that addresses this. No further information is available on this issue at the time of the meeting.
- Uyizeye raises the question on the conversion of meadow land to grass. Calchera responds that this is for the purposes of the new stormwater system and infiltration needs.
- Ghia indicates that new stormwater system will be an improvement, especially as they are now under new Vermont stormwater permit requirement. So an upgrade, except for the expanded impervious surface should work well.
- Regarding potential flooding, Fairchild explains that the site runs below the Bellows Falls dam where it is shallow. Ghia adds that the farm north of the site does not flood but south does yearly. The area south of Westminster flat regularly floods. This area is indicated in the Hazard mitigation plan for Westminster.
- Loch highlights that the ditches along the main road fill completely during rain events. Sawyer asks how much road runoff enters the site system? Will this help or cause issues
- Urffer references the VT ANR atlas for topographic and hydrological context.
- Loch raises the question of what happens to water when vehicles are washed off as there might be chemicals regularly used. Carwashes can be the worst offenders with small cluster PFAS. Spraying the tires to make the tires look great on the show room. Special treatment for the wash water? Would this be treated? Calchera notes plans in the proposal for a 1,000 gallon tank for car washing. The chemicals are not full detailed.
- Urffer expresses that the proposal is not ideal. If it was to be done ecologically, would do more raingardens. The design is intended to get the water off the site. None of the stormwater is getting treated.
- Members note the separate septic tank.
- Members indicated interest to make a site visit to understand the landscape better.
- Loch asks about the 4 inches removed and used later for grading during the construction phase. How will that be stored? It could be an erosion concern if not addressed with silt fencing.
- Ghia notes a need to think about how these changes relate previous land use conditions.

Urffer makes motion to draft a letter that includes member comments on stormwater system maintenance, carwash chemicals and treatment. White seconds the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

b. GRH-FERC Fish Passage Settlement Agreement - Opportunity to comment until Sept 2.

Urffer shares her understanding of the agreement based on her reading to date. In 2020, GRH agreed to expand their fish passage season as there is not always water in the fish ladder and is set for Atlantic Salmon. The expanded timeline is intended in allow passage of Walleye, American Shad, Sea Lamprey, and American Eel. Since 2020, fisheries biologists have been in confidential negotiations. The agreement sets out a timeline to make improvements for downstream (DS) and upstream (US) passage at each facility – Vernon, Bellows Falls, and Wilder. The documentation provides a matrix of when improvements would take place.

White adds that the salmon window is small, so expansion to April until July could be the change. It is great they are settling on some agreements.

Urffer explains that there are differences for each dam. The fish get damaged on their way down. The agreement asks to do a hydraulic study first. Need to worry about sea lamprey for the babies. American eel and Shad are getting chopped through Vernon. The schedule for improvements will start at the southernmost Vernon Dam with downstream passage addressed first then upstream before moving on to the next dam further north. The schedule goes out to 16 years when Wilder gets fixed.

Urffer explains the agreement on what is called the salmon dam, part of the Bellows Falls dam. The dam was put there in the 1980s for Atlantic salmon to be directed to the ladder where they can pass. Now that other species are set as a priority, the salmon dam needs to be removed. The agreement put forth that GRH will not obstruct removal of the salmon dam and will not pay for the removal.

White asks how species will be directed to the ladder vs the turbine. Concern for dams in MA.

Urffer indicates that she is drafting comments on this as part of CRC. CRC comments are likely to include not waiting until license starts for hydraulic study to be done. Also, it is not the responsibility of the public to pay for the removal of the salmon dam. In general, the timeline for improvements is too long. Urffer emphasizes that the license is taking a long time to finalize to begin with, plus this timeline on top.

Loch asks about conversations with indigenous community leaders. Urffer responds that there is a separate process, engaged with native artifacts or traditional cultural property.

Fairchild asks about the viable solutions.

Urffer – so much detail to it. For almost every other issue it is over at end of license. Structure of this agreement is to guide communication/interaction with fisheries biologist for the next years that this license covers. Eel passage for other hydro dams, baffles that you can put in around turbines that would deter the fish to go into that area they are being sucked into. Physical and acoustic disturbance. Part of it is to study where those fish are aggregating so baffles can be installed in the correct locations. As for costs, the agreements indicates an assumed cost for these improvements, and GRH would still be required to make these improvements even if it goes over. Urffer expresses that the agreement is good and could be better.

Loch asks if any consideration is taken for host species in regards for freshwater muscles. Urffer responds that there is no trigger for host fish of endangered species, only migratory fish.

A motion passes by Sawyer/White to submit a comment letter that includes praise for the progress made on the agreement and ask for the timeline to be sped up. The motion passes unanimously. Urffer abstains.

4. Updates & Other Business

Sawyer opens up conversation for recommendations on potential speakers for the Wantastiquet social event on Oct 1, rain date Oct 8. Potential speakers include divers, Rich Holschuh, Peter Ghee, or a Connecticut River farmer. Loch and Uyizeye agree to reach out to potential speakers.

Fairchild updates members on changes underway at the Putney rowing club. The site is between Walker farm and the state park in Dummerston. It is meant to allow more secluded access to the river for the club. No permitting required for the work. It is a tight spot where they had to cut a gash to the river. The structure is up sitting on a concrete pad. A lot more needs to be developed there to handle the drainage. Fairchild encourages folks to visit the site.

5. Adjourn

The meeting is adjourned by motion of Sawyer/White.

Next Meeting

November 17, 2022 @ 6pm – tentative

Minutes respectfully submitted by Olivia Uyizeye.