



## WANTASTIQUET REGION RIVER SUBCOMMITTEE Minutes - April 15, 2009

PRESENT: Gordon Schofield, Hinsdale; Richard Schmidt, Westmoreland; J. B. Mack, Southwest Region Planning Commission; George Watkins, Bill Roberts, and Adair Mulligan, CRJC

ABSENT: Chesterfield, Dummerston, Vernon, Putney, Brattleboro, Westminster, Walpole

1. Housekeeping - Minutes of the meeting of February 26 could not be approved due to lack of Vermont members present. It was noted that Walpole was not represented at the meeting. CRJC is moving ahead with publication of the subcommittees' editions of the Water Resources Management Plan, thanks to a VT conservation license plate grant and a DES Water Quality Planning grant from federal economic stimulus funding. Plans will be published this summer. Unfortunately, there are no similar funds to publish the local recreation plan, although it is up on the web.
2. Transportation - JB reported that his office is working with Brattleboro's B Line to extend transit service to Hinsdale and Winchester for people working in Brattleboro. Such a bi-state effort was applauded.
3. Pharmaceuticals - The Cheshire County Farm's wastewater treatment system may receive \$450,000 in economic stimulus money and state revolving loans in order to improve the system's effectiveness in removing pharmaceuticals that move through this closed system. Could be a good model for other facilities. NH DES has set up a committee to look into pharmaceuticals and revised the disposal procedures.
4. Potential state reductions in river support - Vermont is heading toward eliminating the basin planners who have served the Connecticut River tributaries so well. A bill before the NH legislature may eliminate all non-regulatory commissions, possibly including CRJC and the local advisory committees for the Cold and Ashuelot Rivers. Current language may also apply to the regional planning commissions. Rivers Coordinator position may also be in jeopardy. CRJC is following the issue and has spoken with Sen. Odell.
5. Cersosimo gravel pit expansion - DES has examined revised application and given applicant a long list of questions to answer by June 15. As yet no response. Information has been shared with Chesterfield.
6. Middle Connecticut River Important Bird Area -
  - a. March 27 meeting for town officials in Walpole focused on how to encourage habitat benefits along the river for waterfowl and other birds. Fortunately, Peter Barrett attended to represent the interests of riverfront farmers. Among other things, the group will hold additional local meetings on weekends so more can attend, explore an agricultural landowner outreach program, create a communication network among stakeholders in the IBA, and identify potential pilot land protection projects.
  - b. The Hinsdale Farm was to be among these projects, but because of stiff competition for NAWCA funds, just missed a grant for \$75,000. Bill reported that the farm's landowner has been very accommodating and that the project is within \$40,000 of its goal; anticipate closing in May. LCHIP staff very helpful. Could apply for NAWCA funds again to help with stewardship costs. Land has been surveyed, and earlier deeds found that include Monkey Island. TransCanada now owns part; there is hope it will be donated.
7. Connecticut River Byway
  - a. CRJC hosts the Byway, an economic development initiative, whose mission is to balance the promotion, preservation, and enjoyment of the valley. Roads on both sides of the river were designated by the states in 1998 and by the Federal Highway Administration in 2007 as a National Scenic Byway. The hope is draw attention of residents to remaining historic buildings, beautiful views, rail history, and farming heritage of the valley, among other "assets," and give an economic reason to protect and preserve these features. Scenic Byway grants are available for land protection and historic building preservation.
  - b. Current CRJC activities: 15 heritage itineraries will be created, 10 for driving and 5 for bicycling, with printed guides that can also be downloaded from the web. Adair will check with members as they are being designed. Byway web site will be substantially upgraded. CRJC is preparing information for visitor center staff to help them answer traveler questions; Adair is drawing material from the subcommittee's recreation plan, such as boating laws and how to avoid spreading invasives. Map-Brochure is being updated.

- c. The regional planning commissions conducted an extensive study in 1998 of each byway town, inventorying tourism-related features and each town's capacity for protecting byway assets. Discussion ensued with reports from each town's representative about current historic preservation and land protection needs. Major concerns include closing of the Vilas Bridge (N. Walpole to Bellows Falls), and threats to views from riverside and ridgeline development, especially in Vermont. JB said that DOT is hiring a consultant to see what is needed to repair the bridge; repair schedule unknown. Towns such as Walpole, with an extensive inventory of historic buildings, do not have any protection for them. Members were interested in the concept of a heritage commission. JB suggested that a byway corridor management plan would be a good next step.
- d. Hinsdale has won a \$3000 recreational trail grant for the town land at the boat launch, to erect a sign board, fix parking area, add a picnic table, and do trail work.