



MINUTES - Connecticut River Joint Commissions Meeting

Tuesday, January 17, 2012

9:30 am - 12:30 pm

Kilton Library, 80 Main St, West Lebanon, NH

Present: Bob Ball, Glenn English, Robert Harcke, Cleve Kapala, Joan Monroe, Mary Sloat, Chris Company, Peter Gregory, Gary Moore, Michaela Stickney, Rick Hopkins, Brendan Whittaker

Administrative Staff/Consultants: Rachel Ruppel and Yutian Zhang

Members of the Public: Rebecca Brown, Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust

Chris Company, President, called the meeting to order at 9:45 am.

Executive Committee report - Company reported that the Mohawk/Colebrook and Ammonoosuc River projects have been closed out and CRJC is waiting for payment from NHDES. Ruppel will post the final reports for these projects on the website. The only remaining open grant-funded project is the Scenic Byway signs grant. Company reported that all publications have been moved from CRJC's storage at Bob Harcke's facility to the CRJC offices; CRJC will do a workday in the spring to sort through and archive the remaining materials. Harcke noted that Sharon Francis would be willing to help with this sorting effort. Company reported that Tom Kennedy may have a buyer for the photocopier, which is the last office equipment that CRJC owns. Company asked CRJC members to review their files to locate the 2006 financial audit.

Financial Report: Zhang presented the December financial report. CRJC has billed NHDES for the \$25,725 currently owed to Field Geology Services; CRJC will receive full reimbursement for this expense. Stickney noted that Vermont has not been billed for its state contract recently; Zhang explained that the two advance payments from NH and VT have sustained the CRJC thus far, but he will bill VT and NH this month. Gregory noted that CRJC has billed monthly in the past. English moved to accept the December financial report, with a second by Moore. The motion passed unanimously. Zhang distributed copies of the FY2011 year-end compilation from Larry Reed.

Minutes: Company presented the minutes from 11/21/11. He asked that the minutes be amended to reflect that FEMA "seems to be primarily reimbursing only for replacing infrastructure..." on page 2. English moved to accept the minutes from 11/21/11 as amended, with a second by Harcke. The motion passed unanimously. Whittaker noted that it can be a problem for towns receiving FEMA funds when years later, there is an audit on the project. Gregory stated that VT RPCs are educating towns on proper procurement practices and maintaining the necessary paper trail.

Members discussed the need to share lessons that VT has learned from Hurricane Irene. Stickney added that there will be flood conferences in Quebec, New York and Vermont in the coming year. She will send out more information via email. Stickney added that towns are overwhelmed with FEMA paperwork and did not respond well to a call for proposals for the VT Better Backroads Program; they plan to re-advertise the call for proposals.

Company suspended the CRJC meeting to allow the NH caucus to convene.

English called the NH caucus to order. He reported that he is not seeking reappointment and asked for nominations for a Chair and Vice Chair for the NH caucus to serve from February through the annual meeting in June. Mary Sloat nominated Cleve Kapala for Chair. Harcke moved that Kapala serve as Chair through to the annual meeting, with a second by Sloat. The motion passed unanimously. Bob Harcke was nominated for Vice Chair. Sloat moved that Harcke serve as Vice Chair through to the annual meeting, with a second by Ball. The motion passed unanimously. Sloat moved to adjourn the NH caucus, with a second by Ball. The motion passed unanimously.

Company reconvened the CRJC meeting. Company thanked English for his service and leadership. Gregory thanked English for his leadership through the most turbulent times of CRJC's existence. Whittaker thanked English for helping to change CRJC to who we are, and also noted his ability to move through an agenda. English stated that he wanted to emphasize that the Board has the responsibility to run the organization.

Local River Subcommittees (LRS) : Ruppel reported that all LRS are now meeting regularly. Mount Ascutney subcommittee is reconvening, and several subcommittees are seeking new membership. Whittaker stated that the support provided to the Local River Subcommittees, particularly Tara Bamford in the north, is very important, as the subcommittees are the heart and soul of the organization. Ruppel noted that it is a common misconception that towns appoint members of the LRS; the NH state law that established LRS stipulates that towns nominate representatives who are then appointed by CRJC and that LRS members serve 3-year terms. She stated that following this method will help keep track of current LRS members, vacancies and reappointments.

Commissioners' Comments:

Sloat reported on the Upper Connecticut River Watershed Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA). She will send their report to Rachel for distribution via email. Sloat recommended that CRJC sign on as a partner to this effort, and noted that there may be a more southerly CISMA as well. She also informed the group that Sharon Plum at VT Nature Conservancy is collecting any mapped data about invasive species to put into GIS. Monroe suggested that Plan-Link, a NH listserv for town planning boards and staff, may be a good way to request this data.

Moore noted that Vermont's archivist had offered to take the Connecticut River Flood Commission's archives. He stated that both NH and VT should be contacted about storing archives from CRJC.

Whittaker reported that rip-rap has been installed at the Colebrook Business Park, but that this area remains a problem. English noted that CRJC was unable to complete a grant project to install better erosion protection measures because the contractor bid exceeded the funds available. Gregory stated that this is a reminder of the impacts of land use decisions and the importance of educating local boards. Company reported that he attended a meeting in Wilmington that helped to disseminate information about river science; he echoed Gregory's concern that more outreach is necessary on fluvial erosion hazards and flood hazards.

Gregory asked about the process for getting new VT Commissioners. Stickney stated that CRJC needs to contact non-participatory members to inform them of their impending replacement. Company will contact the non-participatory members.

Public Comments:

Brown reported that Conservation NH has put together a list of its Dirty Dozen bills. They include reducing permit fees for Shoreland applications, preempting public access to non-posted land, gutting renewable energy standards, relaxing requirements to replace failed septic systems, and several bills related to the work on Conservation Commissions. English added that there is also a bill to abolish NH regional planning commissions and noted that there is a trend to dismantle regulatory oversight. Brown stated that the full Dirty Dozen list as well as a list of bills that would protect the environment can be found on the Conservation NH website: <http://conservationnh.org/>

Company stated that the next meeting will be held on March 19, 2012. Sloat asked if the May meeting could be rescheduled to May 14, 2012. Hearing no opposition, the May meeting will be moved to May 14.

Strategic Planning:

The CRJC participated in a wide-ranging strategic planning session to discuss the future roles and projects of the CRJC, which is summarized by content below.

On Funding and the Current Strategic Plan:

Ball asked whether CRJC can feasibly accomplish all the items listed in the current Strategic Plan. Ruppel responded no – the CRJC and Local River Subcommittees (LRS) will need to prioritize their efforts, considering the current funding and staffing levels. Kapala noted that achieving the mission takes money, and that CRJC is no longer a funder of on-the-ground projects, but should support partners who are doing this work.

Harcke noted that CRJC's current budget is \$60,000/year and asked if there is enough money to sustain the organization. Kapala stated that CRJC should focus on its strengths and past accomplishments, such as education, and not projects that it does not have the capacity for, such as on-the-ground construction. Ball asked about whether there is enough funding to accomplish the work of the CRJC. Ruppel stated that a large part of CRJC's annual funding from NH and VT is going to support the LRS. Company stated that CRJC has enough funding to cover its work now, but may need to seek funding for special projects ; he also noted that he does not expect an outpouring of grant funding, given the current economic climate. Kapala stated that there is no shortage of funding for good projects.

Ball noted that the Strategic Plan refers to "Implement the Water Resources/Recreation Plans", which is not the appropriate word to describe CRJC's role. Kapala suggested that "Facilitate" is a better word.

On Communication between LRS and CRJC:

Whittaker asked that communication between the CRJC and LRS be improved, with more details provided back and forth about activities and issues. English stated that subcontracting to RPCs to support LRS is an effective model and engages RPCs as CRJC's partners. Sloat voiced her approval of contracting with RPCs and stated that LRS should have one unifying project that all LRS work on.

On Roles of the CRJC:

English stated that a good role for CRJC is in outreach and education to town and cities. Towns and cities are the entities that implement projects and regulations, so CRJC should transmit the science and best practices to local authorities. English noted that having Planning Board or Conservation Commission members on LRS is key to successful engagement with communities.

Monroe emphasized the high-quality publications and educational materials that CRJC has produced. She brought forth two ideas for LRS – that LRS members bring a CRJC educational display to community events, and that LRS and CRJC be engaged in fun events. She suggested ideas like dragonboats, Rubber Duck races, RiverFest, and a costume day. She recommended that CRJC seek funding to produce outreach materials.

Stickney provided an example of the Lake Champlain Basin Program whose steering committee focuses on education and providing a clearinghouse on research and information about the basin. She suggested that this could be a good role for CRJC to play.

Moore asked about vacancies on the LRS near Bradford, where he lives; he noted that he could likely suggest a new representative or assist with contacting the towns. Whittaker asked for a new directory of Commissioners. Monroe suggested that new members could be recruited through town newsletters. Stickney also suggested the Front Porch Forum in Vermont.

Sloat recommended that CRJC re-print the boating guide, which could be distributed by the LRS to riverfront towns.

On Roles of the LRS:

Brown stated that CRJC has developed an excellent resource with the Water Resources Management Plan . She utilizes the Plan to assist with project development at Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust. She recommended that LRS and CRJC should track progress on how the plans are being implemented.

Gregory stated that CRJC needs to identify the role of the LRS. English recommended that the CRJC convene a riverwide subcommittee conference to allow the LRS members to really discuss what their role is within the organization. Gregory and Ruppel questioned how effective a riverwide meeting might be, or if it would be better to meet individually with LRS. Stickney and Gregory suggested a North and South regional LRS meeting.

Hopkins asked whether LRS should be empowered to apply for their own funding for projects, or whether LRS could partner with RPC or Natural Resource Conservation Districts to apply for grants on their behalf. Kapala noted that utilizing partners that have expertise in on-the-ground implementation would be useful. Whittaker recommended that the RPCs be consulted on this idea. Monroe noted that there may be a conflict of interest between grant seeking and permit review, as on-the-ground projects may involve both grant funding and permits.

Sloat recommended that the strength of LRS is the power of individuals to advance the mission of CRJC in their own towns. LRS members should serve as a liaison between the towns and CRJC. She also recommended that CRJC use the recent memory of flooding to open dialogue about development in the floodplain. Company agreed that the LRS should be active to keeping CRJC's management plans in front of the towns.

Company suggested that CRJC should provide some riverwide project with a common purpose and common execution for the LRS to work on. Brown recommended that LRS members could undertake a project this year to re-familiarize themselves with their plans, note where they have seen successes and where more work needs to be done, and to create a work plan of priority projects.

Sloat noted that past practice has been that LRS cannot speak for or represent the entire CRJC; however the LRS may speak on its own behalf and/or request that CRJC respond to a specific issue.

Company summarized that the CRJC has thus far discussed the following LRS roles:

- 1) Regulatory review/ permit review
- 2) Education and outreach
- 3) Advocate for implementing the River Management Plan
- 4) Documenting progress towards implementation of the Plan (i.e. keeping a scorecard of progress)

On Partnerships with Regional Planning Commissions (RPC):

Kapala suggested that the RPCs could be good partners for future projects. Whittaker asked if all RPCs are engaged in CRJC. Ruppel responded that three of seven RPCs are directly contracted with CRJC to provide administrative support, and that all RPCs except NVDA have active representation on the CRJC board.

Company summarized the next steps to be taken for strategic planning:

- 1) Review the roles of the LRS with the LRS members.
- 2) Work with the LRS on a scorecard.
- 3) Ask the LRS for input on the FY13 workplan.
- 4) Ask the LRS about the idea of a North and South regional convening.

Meeting adjourned at 12:25 pm.