



Mount Ascutney River Subcommittee

New Hampshire – Plainfield, Cornish, Claremont, Charlestown

Vermont – Hartland, Windsor, Weathersfield, Springfield, Rockingham

Connecticut River Joint Commissions Mt Ascutney River Subcommittee

Tuesday, November 10, 2015

Windsor Welcome Center, 3 Railroad Ave, Windsor Vermont

Draft Minutes

Present:

Doree Russell, Claremont

John Bruno, Charlestown

Judy Howland, Hartland

Gilbert Whitemore, Weathersfield

Nancy Heatley, Weathersfield

Kelly Stettner, Springfield

Thomas Hernon, Rockingham

Margaret Perry, Rockingham

Tara Bamford, North Country Council, staff

Walter Martone, Springfield, guest

Jim Barker, Cornish, guest

1. The meeting was called to order by Chair Kelly Stettner at 7:00 PM. Doree announced that it will be her last meeting but she is happy to stay on the contact list for information.
2. The minutes of September 8, 2015 were approved by motion of Howland/Hernon with the typo in "Heatley" corrected in item #2, and the word "new" stricken from the phrase "... there is a new company in Randolph..." in item #4.
3. Permit Reviews
 - a. There was no permit activity between meetings. By consensus it was agreed that when there is, information will be sent out to members to enable them to provide any input they have to the chair and staff, who will then decide whether to forward the comments to DES or call a meeting if there are substantial concerns. The chair will make a special effort to reach out to the subcommittee representative(s) where the project is located.

b. NPS Blow Me Down Dam - Jim Barker is Chair of the Cornish Conservation Commission. He conducted a site visit for the Commission and the Commission followed up by signing the application for an expedited NH Wetlands Permit for repairs to the dam. Undercutting is damaging the historic mill. By motion of Bruno/Russell it was voted to write in support of this permit.

4. Conte Refuge - The Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan was discussed. The following issues and concerns were identified:

- There has been a lack of outreach and education to the general public in the past and it does not appear to be a focus of the plan for the future either.
- Stewardship on private lands was to be a focus of the refuge and it is not a focus of the draft.
- TransCanada should be a partner on outreach.
- They should do a better job of getting the key points out to the general public.
- Outreach might include help to towns, e.g., to incorporate habitat protection information in town planning and zoning.
- They could distill key points into 1 page that can go on community bulletin boards.
- Most watershed residents do not know they live in the refuge; a lot could be accomplished by giving people a sense of ownership and pride.
- Outreach to landowners is lacking; need to get landowners on board unless they are planning to buy all of the land.
- Visits to Selectboard meetings would help get on towns' radar, including re meetings on public access tv.
- Webinars would be another way to reach a broader audience, esp. if online where, e.g., school groups and conservation commissions could view together.
- There needs to be emphasis on education of owners of private habitat lands. In general they are not aware of Conte or of habitat management BMPs.
- Partners should include CRJC and BRAT.
- Emphasis should be on conservation easements, not purchasing more land. This would have less federal cost - more habitat could be protected for the same dollar - and more local revenue, e.g., from property taxes and income generation such as timber.
- It was noted that there really wasn't a no action alternative since the alternative identified that way included substantially more land to be purchased.

The purchase of shoreline/floodplain forest along the entire main stem and major tributaries (Quonotuck CFA) was discussed as it relates to shoreline erosion. John Bruno discussed TransCanada's erosion studies which are being conducted as part of the FERC relicensing. He noted that a year is too short a time to measure erosion b/c conditions vary year to year; most transects in the study did not show any erosion. They have not really studied it in re fluctuating water levels. John also noted that the process for commenting on the studies is difficult; Tara will provide help with the submission.

It was voted by motion of Heatley/Bruno to submit a letter on the draft Conte Plan summarizing the main issues discussed tonight. Tara will draft the letter and send a draft to each member for comment individually first.

5. Follow-up on September 26 Septic Workshop - There were 12 members of the public in addition to the 8 Subcommittee members and 3 presenters. All of the feedback has been positive. There was a wide range of homeowners.

Nancy Heatley is going through the video to condense it down to highlights. The plan is to submit it to public access cable TV in Claremont, Ludlow, and Springfield. An even shorter version can be posted to Youtube and linked to the CRJC website. It was agreed that the handouts should be uploaded as well. Kelly will give Nancy the contact info to get those.

It was agreed that Saturday morning from 9 - 12 in late Sept. is the best time for these workshops. The informal approach resulted in ample Q & A so that people could ask questions about their specific concerns; people felt part of a conversation vs being talked at. It was agreed that it might be helpful to let people send in questions in advance so the speakers can have that in mind when preparing. It was also agreed that it is best to keep it free with donations for food.

6. Water Resources Plan - Options for working on the document together were discussed such as Google Docs or Dropbox. CRJC is working on getting the plan to Tara in Word format. Tara will send it to Kelly when she does and Kelly will send it to Thomas next. Reviewers will identify data that need to be updated, and think about the relevancy of existing information to see if it should be updated or deleted. New laws should be included as well.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Tara Bamford.