

Connecticut River Joint Commissions Wantastiquet Local River Subcommittee

April 11, 2017
Brattleboro Town Hall
Minutes

Present:

Liz Mccloughlin, Brattleboro
Perry Sawyer, Westmoreland
John Lukin, Westmoreland
Elaine Levlocke, Chesterfield
Paul Harlow, Westminster
Jim Calchera, Westminster
Stephen Skibniowsky, Vernon
Tara Bamford, CRJC, staff

1. The meeting was called to order at 4:30 by Chair Liz McLoughlin and introductions made.
2. The minutes of April 11, 2016 were approved by motion of Levlocke/Harlow.
3. Election of officers - Liz informed the group of her intention to resign from the subcommittee. All thanked her for her years of service as chair. Elaine Levlocke was nominated to be Chair by motion of Sawyer/Harlow. John Lukin was nominated to be Vice-Chair by motion of Levlocke/McLoughlin. Steve moved to vote on the slate of officers. All voted in favor.
4. Permit Reviews – The application for the NH 119 borings was reviewed and no concerns identified.
5. Connecticut River Watershed Council Executive Director Andy Fisk - Andy announced the new name for the organization – Connecticut River Conservancy, and then gave an update on the Bellows Falls and Vernon Dam relicensing. He explained that the last 3 years of the process has been studies conducted by the owner’s consultants and provided to FERC. They looked at such things as erosion and habitat. He expects a few more months of studies and then a draft permit in Sept/Oct. The sale to Great River Hydro has been approved. Scott Hall has been out meeting people on behalf of the new owners. The question is whether they are going to continue to operate as in the past, or do the habitat and erosion studies indicate a moderation of the peaking. CRC has had a consultant doing peer review of some of the studies. Mitigation is being sought toward the miles of bank erosion, lost agricultural acreage, and damaged municipal infrastructure.

Paul said his farm in Putney has a 1/4 mile of slumping bank. NRCS did plantings. Farms with riparian buffers seem to hold up better. It was agreed that shoreline stabilization as mitigation would be a big benefit. Steve said his farm in Vernon suffers from the pumped storage facility downstream as well; at times the river flows north. There is up to a 9 ft. change in water levels. Vernon has lost large pieces of farmland, trees and all. Liz said her concern is that FERC will just rubber stamp the plans without local and state pressure. Andy said one of the best opportunities for that is the 401 water quality certificate that will be issued by each state. FERC has to incorporate conditions from the permits including habitat impacts of flows. It was agreed that the new VANR DEC and NHDES Commissioners need to be included in the conversation right away.

Andy reported that the company will want to know what recreation priorities are desired and what projects are in plans. CRC convenes stakeholder meetings to compile lists to be prepared for 2018 settlement discussions. Liz suggested this may be an opportunity to develop recreation on the island with the NH 119 bridge that is being replaced. The old bridge is being kept for foot traffic. The Vermont regional planning commissions are compiling lists of potential recreation projects.

The subject of Vilas Bridge came up. Perry said Walpole doesn't care about it except for the sewer line.

Andy will make sure Tara and Elaine are both on the list for stakeholder meetings to share with the group. Tara noted that the Subcommittee could also submit comments.

Andy also reported on more citizen science work, monitoring for bacteria once a week, May-Oct. Their lab in Greenfield is doing the testing. The project provides an opportunity for collaboration. They have also done some invasives work in the past. Andy welcomed the Subcommittee to collaborate in any of this.

In regard to the Source to Sea Clean-up, Liz observed that it is hard to identify clean-up spots in the fall when weeds are tall, plus the area is very clean now. Andy said they are happy to work together to identify needed sites.

6. Next meeting – it was agreed that Tara should do a Doodle poll for a summer meeting date.

The meeting adjourned at 5:40.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Tara Bamford.