

LMRLAC – December 6, 2012

LOWER MERRIMACK RIVER LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

December 6, 2012

Members:

- ✓ = present

Current:

- ✓ Kathryn Nelson (Chair) -- Nashua
- ✓ Michael Redding (Vice Chair) – Merrimack
- ✓ Karen Archambault (Secretary) – Nashua
- ✓ Michael Croteau - Litchfield
- ✓ Nelson Disco - Merrimack
- ✓ George May – Merrimack
- Bob Robbins – Hudson
- ✓ David Scaer – Hudson

Pending Renewal:

- Jim Barnes (Treasurer) – Hudson
- Glenn McKibben – Litchfield

Associate Members:

- Mildred Mugica – Nashua

Also in attendance:

- Matt Waitkins, Transportation Planner, Nashua Regional Planning Commission

The meeting was called to order at 7pm in the Music/Art/Media room of the Nashua Public Library by Chair Kath Nelson. Kath mentioned that Jim was unable to attend due to a Benson Park meeting.

604(b) Grant for River Continuity Assessment

Matt Waitkins distributed copies of the Merrimack River Continuity Assessment report and appendices for members to review. He summarized the process which led to the report – that culverts were identified in the four towns and then prioritized based on several criteria: distance from Merrimack River, accessibility, and ranking in Wildlife Action Plan tiers.

The culverts were identified with a letter designator corresponding to the town in which it's located and a number which identifies the culvert but does not imply a rank or priority. Of the 162 culverts identified in the four towns, field assessment was performed on 14 culverts: 2 in Hudson, 4 in Litchfield, 6 in Merrimack, and 2 in Nashua.

The report includes photographs of each of the assessed culverts and Appendix A includes screen shots of the database entries for each assessed culvert.

Matt explained that the data collection and analysis led to ratings in two categories: geomorphic compatibility and aquatic organism passage, and he pointed out that details of the ratings are also explained in Appendix A of the report. Matt highlighted two examples in the report, illustrating opposite ends of the ratings spectrum. The first culvert, M27 on Bedford Road in Merrimack, shows full geomorphic compatibility upstream and downstream and shows the potential for full aquatic organism passage. The second, M9 on Cramer Hill Road in Merrimack, is mostly incompatible with the stream and does not appear to allow passage of any aquatic organisms.

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Kath asked about the funding and design process for the Bedford Road culvert. Nelson explained that it was related to the new transfer station. The previously existing crossing wasn't rated for the size/weight of the expected truck loads, so Merrimack went to the State for funding assistance in improving the crossing. Nelson commented that Ed Chase was Merrimack Public Works Director at the time the project occurred.

Nelson asked what additional details would be useful. Kath indicated it would be good to know the project's engineering costs.

Nelson commented that he believes it likely costs more initially to install a 'nicer' culvert, but that it might save money in the long run in repairs. Members agreed in general that the best approach is to leave the stream alone, and build the culvert around the stream.

Kath pointed out that the State has developed stream crossing standards and asked what the impetus would be for an in-kind replacement of a stream crossing vs. following the new standards.

Members briefly discussed the M9 culvert as well, which is above and much narrower than the stream bed. This means the culvert does not appear to support fish passage or that of other aquatic life. George commented that it's a fairly new culvert and he and Nelson felt it was between 10-15 years old.

George commented that LMRLAC would not likely see an application for such a culvert, even within the corridor. Members pointed out that such a project would be seen by the Conservation Commission and may or may not be reviewed by the Planning Board, depending on the project. Kath agreed that LMRLAC would have to increase its interaction with local boards in order to participate in discussions about such projects.

George suggested there are no "fully incompatible" culverts because they would get washed out and fixed under an emergency permit. Kath suggested LMRLAC can use the report to try to avoid that circumstance. By highlighting the less compatible culverts on the assessment report, perhaps those culverts can bubble up in priority with the towns.

Matt pointed out that just 14 assessments took place under this grant due to funding, accessibility, and ownership – the fact that many crossings are located on private property. Matt mentioned some of the crossings are on Pennichuck property. Kath and Nelson both suggested that Pennichuck may be willing to work with LMRLAC on future assessment studies, potentially allowing access to assess some of those crossings.

Kath suggested that identifying whether a crossing was on private property would be useful information to have. She stated that the first crossing upstream of the Merrimack is an important one and suggested LMRLAC could approach the towns to make them aware of those crossings and their importance for possible future action.

A brief discussion followed on what season might be best for future assessments. Matt suggested the spring would be good, with less vegetation present. George commented that the water level would be higher in the spring and suggested fall might be a good time of year.

George asked if any organisms were collected during the assessments. Matt explained that observers made note of wildlife seen at each site during the assessment but no organisms were collected.

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Matt indicated that Jill had sought an additional grant to continue the study, but was not successful. Matt commented that he is looking for suggestions for improving the deliverables if other funding is lined up. Kath requested that the quarter-mile corridor be included on the large display map. Kath also commented that she would like to see the name of the water body at the culvert crossing. She suggested that this would make it easier to check the site against a critical wetlands list in each town in order to use that information to potentially raise the priority of the culvert site. Kath also said LMRLAC would review the report further and pass along questions to Jill.

David asked how the data would be used. Michael C. asked what the next steps might be, for example, should there be a survey of insects and wildlife at the culverts? Members asked Matt to find out what the State plans to do with the culvert assessment data.

Michael R recommended LMRLAC write a letter about the report and its results and submit it to each town. Kath suggested LMRLAC plan to visit boards in each town with a 'road show' discussing the report. Kath stated that presenting the report would be an opportunity for education and outreach to each town. She stated that the towns will be focused on flooding, and suggested LMRLAC can point out the ratings for each culvert to get it on a list of planned upgrades in the town. She also suggested that LMRLAC find out whether the crossing is planned for an upgrade under the stream crossing guidelines, and to lobby for using the guidelines.

Kath mentioned that 319 grants often follow from 604b grants, and Michael R. suggested a 319 grant could help fund improvements to problem culverts.

Members discussed what the road show presentation could cover. Among the recommendations were to provide information on why LMRLAC chose to do the project, why this information is important, why the culverts should be in the town's Capital Improvements Plan, and the connection with Trout Unlimited and fish passage.

Matt suggested the DES trainer (Shane Csiki) would be a good resource, and suggested LMRLAC contact him to explain the bigger picture.

Michael R. asked if this was the final report and Matt replied that it is. George asked that LMRLAC be notified when the report is available on the NRPC Web site.

Kath asked about the size of the files used to produce the report and asked for a copy of the files to be able to make a presentation from the report maps and photographs.

Nelson asked whether the full list of culverts was available, and Matt replied they are in the GIS database. Nelson asked how best to keep track of which culverts had been assessed, and Matt suggested adding an attribute to indicate assessment status.

Matt suggested that an evaluation of the accessibility of remaining culverts would be useful. Kath suggested one way to conduct an initial accessibility evaluation would be a windshield survey with photographs.

Members discussed the 'road show' some more. Nelson pointed out that, with turnover on town boards, it's useful for LMRLAC to reintroduce itself and to spread the word on what LMRLAC is doing.

Members agreed that the assessment and report are a good first step, based on the limited funding, limited sample size, and learning curve, and thanked Matt for coming in to brief the report. Matt complimented Jill on the work she did to prepare the report.

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Minutes

The minutes from the meeting of September 27 were approved.

Shoreland Permit Application – Manchester Wastewater Treatment Facility

Kath pointed out that LMRLAC had received notification of a shoreland permit application in Manchester, which is out of LMRLAC's jurisdiction. Kath asked Michael R. to take a brief look at the application to decide whether it warranted any comment.

Michael R. summarized that the application was to upgrade equipment in buildings within the quarter-mile corridor, that the changes were internal to the building, and had nothing that required comment.

George commented that Manchester is not currently in CSO compliance and suggested a comment encouraging Manchester to work toward CSO compliance. Michael R. suggested a shoreland permit application might not be the right audience for such a comment. Kath will craft and submit a comment which relates the two.

Alteration of Terrain Permit Application – 20121113-147

Shoreland Expedited Permit Application – 2012-03149

Merrimack Commerce Park, Tax Map 6E, Lot 3-5

Michael R. and Nelson met with representatives for this project on Tuesday, December 4. The site is on the east side of the Daniel Webster Highway, across from the bowling alley, between the Saint-Gobain building and the railroad. The project proposes construction of a 120,000 square foot warehouse.

Michael R. described that the roof infiltration will occur on-site and the rest of the stormwater flow goes to a detention basin, and eventually to an existing discharge pipe to the river. He explained that Merrimack has flooding standards but not treatment standards, but said he hopes to discuss treatment options with the applicant.

Kath asked whether the application meets Alteration of Terrain standards and Michael R. replied it does. George suggested LMRLAC can still recommend improvements.

George asked whether the building would be visible from the river. He explained that this stretch of the Merrimack River is aesthetically pleasing, and suggested adding a comment about planting vegetation to obstruct the view if the building would be visible. He later commented that the Saint-Gobain building is not visible from the river and it is taller than the proposed new warehouse, but is also set back further from the river.

Nelson commented that this is the first building on this property, which will eventually see further development. George agreed that LMRLAC should comment that this plan sets precedent for the rest of the site.

Michael R. pointed out that the proposed basin is oversized, apparently to compensate for future development. Members suggested that the basin appears to be a design similar to what might have been seen in developments from 20 or 30 years ago. They suggested a comment on considering other opportunities for infiltration on-site and catching floatables and solids.

George suggested adding a comment about not allowing hazardous waste on site; Michael R. countered by suggesting LMRLAC recommend there be a spill protection plan for the site and that the Merrimack Fire Department review it.

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Members discussed where to send any comments, and decided to send them to the Planning Board, the developer, and to DES. Kath asked for a Merrimack contact and Nelson recommended Tim Thompson, the Community Development Director in Merrimack.

Members briefly discussed again how to connect with town boards to get connected to local site walks. Nelson commented that there was no site walk for this application, because the site is visible and familiar to the Merrimack Planning Board.

George and Michael R. pointed out an easement on the plans, and Nelson commented that the site formerly had a railroad spur for the (at that time) General Electric plant, which is now a walking trail.

Michael R. will draft comments for members to review and Kath will submit them. Kath thanked Michael R. for his efforts in reviewing the two applications.

Bank Account/Treasurer's Report

Kath summarized Jim's work to identify and retrieve the funds which had been turned over to the State as an abandoned account, and Jim's work to establish an account for the recovered funds (\$3000.00). Kath suggested members think about ways to use some of the funds – for example, to fund NRPC to put together a presentation on the culvert assessment project that LMRLAC could use to meet with the towns. Members praised Jim for his hard work in retrieving the funds.

Upcoming Meetings

Kath asked whether members wanted to cancel the January meeting if there was nothing time critical on the agenda. Members expressed an interest in meeting in January to further discuss the culvert assessment report and next steps to take.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Next LMRLAC Meeting

The next LMRLAC meeting is currently scheduled for Thursday, January 24, at 7:00 pm at the Nashua Public Library.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Archambault
secretary