

SoRLAC-Online

September 17, 2020

Chair Ritz called the meeting, conducted via online meeting, to order at 7:00 PM under the emergency provisions of RSA 91-A, New Hampshire's Right-to-Know law, as allowed by Emergency Order 11 under Executive Order 2020-04 in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. Secretary Dudley conducted a roll call.

In attendance were members Cory Ritz (New Ipswich), Celeste Barr (Milford), Rob Clemens (Amherst), Kleta Dudley (New Ipswich), Marshall Buttrick (Greenville), George May (Merrimack), Rich Hart (Amherst), and Peter Howd, (Wilton), Nelson Disco (Merrimack.)

Approval of Minutes from August 2020 -Approved after some discussion about cement barriers at the bridge in Merrimack. Nelson explained that the barriers had some historical significance. They were artifacts from a previous industrial past and the historical society felt they should stay.

Business

Milford WWTP- The Milford RTC appreciated and replied to our comments. Cory had sent this along in an email dated Sept. 4th, 2020. Jim Taylor had noted to Cory that their model was based on zero phosphorus and there is phosphorus. As a result of this, they will be using a model from 2007, which takes this into account. They will also alter mass base limit as well. There is not a response on lack or testing for PFAS. They are working on something but will have nothing any time soon. Might have something for this by end of 2021. Cory was satisfied with responses and the fact that they acknowledged the points that Jim and Cory made and that they made changes accordingly.

604(b) Water Quality Planning Grant- Cory reached out to Nashua Regional Planning Commission. They are interested in putting together a proposal for upgrading our Management Plan. Tracie Sales (DES) said that our project was not too competitive but there are not too many applications so we might have a good chance at receiving the grant. Discussion followed on what we thought needed to be addressed. The deadline for the grant was September 18th. The following is an email that Cory sent out to us Thursday evening after the meeting

at which these minutes were based. I thought it best to include it in these minutes as it is a synopsis of the ideas that were put forward at the meeting.

Here is the final list Jay and I worked up. I added two more last night before I sent including mapping invasive species and changes to fishing due to the abandoned salmon program. Also provided Jay a letter of support from SoRLAC. Jay will be submitting the grant request letter later today.

- Cory

- Water quality impairments and threats exist on the Souhegan River, its tributaries, and other water bodies within the watershed. NHDES has categorized the Souhegan River as in need of protection and restoration with a high level of recovery potential. Water quality concerns identified for the Souhegan River and its watershed include elevated bacteria counts, elevated levels of pH, aluminum, copper, chlorophyll-a, low dissolved oxygen, and chloride.
 - Several hazardous waste disposal and brownfields sites (including two Superfund sites) are located within the watershed and near or adjacent to the Souhegan River. Remedial actions have been completed at some sites, are ongoing at others, or remain to be addressed. The updated plan would identify each site, update its status and identify potential water quality threats.
 - Climate change impacts including actual and potential impacts of droughts, floods and changing water levels. Climate change was not addressed in the 2006 plan.
 - An assessment of the flood resiliency in watershed towns as well as an inventory of culverts, bridges, especially those that may not meet upcoming changes.
 - Assessment of the changes in the landcover and land-use. There has been significant development activity in the watershed over the past 14 years.
 - Changes in water withdrawals; particularly in Wilton and Milford as well as other municipalities and commercial uses (e.g. golf course).
 - Review the most recent Souhegan Riverbank erosion assessment/inventory [\[CR1\]](#) identify any know changes and specific to the Souhegan River geology and land-use, assess best recommended practices for municipalities, developers and other stakeholders to restoring these areas.
 - Stream access mapping and best practices for maintaining access for the public use. There have multiple examples of issues of public access in recent years (especially in 2020) including Watson Park in Merrimack where a fence is planned to restrict river access, the closing of Wildcat Falls also in Merrimack, Garwin Falls in Wilton and other sites. The intent would be to map these areas and develop a long-term vision for municipalities to maintain access to the river while balancing safety, trash, overuse etc.
 - Mapping the extent of noxious and damaging invasive plant species such as Japanese knotweed to know where to focus efforts.
 - Salmon restoration has been suspended. Assessing the status of fish and fishing ecosystems services.
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Watson Park in Merrimack-Nelson reported that the Town Council of Merrimack has voted to spend \$26,000 to install a black 8' chain link fence (with a gate) cutting off access to Watson Park. This is due to a huge increase in crowd usage during the recent overly warm summer and the Covid crisis which resulted in other swimming areas being closed. This increase in usage caused a lot of garbage to be generated, parking was an issue and erosion to the site was a problem. The access to the water and beach were a safety issue. There was also some confrontation with the police. Many of the folks visiting were from out of state. As the park was created using federal funds, it cannot be operated just for the benefit of the local population. In an email response to a letter that Cory had written the town council stated the location was never intended as a beach but as a scenic overlook. The park is closed and will not reopen until the fence is in place. SoRLAC feels this action is challenging the public's access to the river.

George and Cory had offered to meet with the town council to try and work out an alternative. Cory feels that our position should be to protect the river and the public's access to the river. There is \$20,000 available to do a river walk and now George says, it will be a walk along a fence. Rob and Celeste both felt the combination of hot weather and the Covid crisis were to blame for unique circumstances and that the decision to build a fence should be put on hold.

SoRLAC will write a letter asking the town to reconsider a more holistic approach toward the river corridor as a whole and consider upgrading other access sites as well. The letter will offer suggestions, looking to increase access to the river and not be confrontational. George asked that Severn's Bridge be mentioned in the letter as a site that needs to be opened.

Wildcat Falls is another swimming hole that has been closed. Limited parking is the issue there.

Rob suggested that each town's representatives identify public access points to the river within their own towns and what steps need to be taken to make these sites more accessible to the public for swimming, canoeing, kayak, fishing, etc. Cory wants to come up with a template for

determining public access points. Cory asked Rob to put together a list of ideas which Cory then will put on an Excel spread sheet.

Upcoming Events- George will be conducting a walking tour on Saturday (Sept 19) at 10:00 at Thornton's Ferry Crossing on the Merrimack River.

Other- Cory will be sending out Souhegan River Instream Flow Notification.

Local Updates

Souhegan Watershed Association- Blue Water Canoe trail will give access for putting in and out and provide parking. George asked Rich to look at Website, apparently there are some problems that need fixing. Rich will check it out and share some contacts with George.

New Ipswich- Nothing to report-

Temple- Nothing to report

Greenville-Nothing to report

Wilton-Bill is on the mend. River Walk proposal moving forward. Jennifer Beck was before the Planning Board Wednesday Sept. 16th to present a conceptual outline of the 2nd phase construction. This will extend from the Town's Memorial Park up to, but not quite reaching the disputed lot line between TDS and the Wilton House of Pizza. Granite Engineering has been retained to help with design and documentation of stormwater mitigation elements of both the construction and post-construction phases of the project, and to make sure that this segment of Riverwalk doesn't interfere with the stormwater mitigation plan they just completed for the new TDS building site. The next regulatory steps for the project are a DES shorelands permit application near the end of September or early October and a return visit to the Wilton Planning Board on October 7.

George asked about closing off canal and pond behind Label Art and decommissioning the dam. Peter hadn't heard anything about this but figured Label Arts would love that should it happen as he's heard they are subject to DES inspections. Peter also added there would be significant regulatory work

needed to remove a dam and fill or somehow rehab the existing wetlands and pond habitats.

Milford- The Director of Community Development went to view work done at the Hayward Property to better understand what had been done. He was told by the owner that he, the owner, intended to use the property for farming purposes. We find that odd as the land had been used successfully for years for farming prior to the "timber harvest" and the cut trees were buried in the fields. Seems the cut was unnecessary and harmful to the shoreline.

Additional water conservation measure were supposed to be announced, but Celeste hasn't heard anything. Short discussion on the low water levels in Wilton and Milford. Wilton also is supposed to issue water emergency plans

Merrimack- Previously discussed under Watson Park.

Amherst-Nothing to do with river but there is a lot of residential development going on.

Next Meeting, Oct. 15th, probably online

Submitted by Kleta Dudley, sec. Sept. 20, 2020