

DRAFT

Minutes of Connecticut River Assembly Meeting

**Wethersfield Town Hall
505 Silas Deane Highway
Wethersfield, CT 06109**

December 10, 2009

Attendance:

Members

Joseph Smith, Chairman	Wethersfield
William B. Garner	Enfield
Philip H. Benoit	Rocky Hill
Raul DeBrigard	MRPA
Mark Quinlan	Governor's Representative
Bill Flagg	South Windsor
Richard Frawley	Windsor Locks

Others

Mary Ellen Kowalewski	CRCOG
Stephen Sorrow	Suffield

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Adoption of Minutes: October 8, 2009

Philip Benoit made and William Garner seconded a motion to adopt the minutes of the October 8, 2009 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion of Grant to Study Creation of a

Lower Connecticut River (MA/CT) Joint Commission

Several months ago, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) contacted the Capitol Region Council of Governments and the Midstate Regional Planning Agency to inform us that PVPC had successfully secured a federal budget earmark to develop a blueprint for creating a new bi-state Lower Connecticut River Joint Commission serving Massachusetts and Connecticut. PVPC is the Regional Planning Organization serving the greater Springfield MA area. The three RPOs in Connecticut--CRCOG, MRPA, and the Connecticut River Estuary RPA--agreed to participate in the project. This project is now under contract with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the project funder, and PVPC ready to begin work in early 2010.

PVPC has developed a project scope which had been provided to CRA members. Key tasks include: 1) conducting stakeholder meetings or a survey to establish bi-state goals; 2) evaluating possible establishment of a bi-state commission; 3) establishing a pilot small grants program for river enhancement; and 4) conducting public education for river recreational access, which may include creation of a map. PVPC has included a role for each of the four RPOs along the Connecticut River in Massachusetts and Connecticut in this project, specifically to assist in Tasks #1, 2 and 4. They have also

included \$5,500 in the budget for each of the four RPOs to support this work. One of the tasks in this project is to develop a website and maps which will highlight river access points, river hazards, and walking and hiking trails. This public education activity relates well to the CRA's work on creating a Special Features Map for the Conservation Zone Area.

Ms. Kowalewski then asked for input on three questions to be discussed at a project kick-off meeting in early January:

- What do you see as the major bi-state issues affecting the Connecticut River?
- What are appropriate goals for addressing these issues?
- What are the opportunities for cooperation between regions and states?

Key issues, goals and opportunities expressed by CRA members included the following:

- Concern for status of MA reductions in combined sewer overflows associated with multiple municipal sewage treatment plants—and the perception that CT has made more progress on this issue than MA.
- A key goal of a bi-state effort should be to promote the recreational potential of the river, and to extend recreational opportunities on and off the river.
- The project should promote improved river access for people and boats.
- There will be differences between urban and rural needs and opportunities.
- Education is needed to address the perception that river water quality is unsafe for recreational use by people, and fishing—separate real from false concerns.
- Education is needed to promote the importance of natural buffers along the river to help naturally treat contaminated runoff from urban development and agriculture.
- It would be good to have better historical and cultural linkages along the river corridor.
- It would be helpful to reduce the red tape associated with making recreational improvements along the river, such as creation of boat launches.
- Need better connections across rail lines to the river.
- There are no functioning dams in CT, but when the Holyoke Dam closes, flow reduction impacts are felt in Enfield and Suffield.
- Would like more information on dams in this part of the river: what are they used for now, how efficient are they, could some of the dams be removed?
- Others pointed out that dams can provide recreational opportunities within the reservoirs created behind the dams.
- There is some need to control boat speeds in the river to limit erosion. River bank erosion may be an issue in some locations, due to wakes from boats or other factors.
- An important bi-state goal is the preservation of meadows/wetlands, which provide both water quality and scenic value.
- There is a need to reinstall gauging stations to maintain accurate data on flow and water quality. Suffield is the only full-service USGS gauging station in the state.
- The Enfield dam is undergoing gradual deterioration—it most likely is better for the river if it is left open.

- One member shared that north of the Enfield dam, there is 6 to 8 inches of heavy metals from upstream industry, that gets churned up in storms. What is the best way to address this water quality issue?
- The Connecticut River Watershed Council should be tied into this effort.

Ms. Kowalewski thanked Assembly members for their comments, and said she would report back to the Assembly on this project at their January 2010 meeting.

Working Session on CRA Conservation Zone Map Resource Project

Mary Ellen Kowalewski shared maps that are being developed with input from the Connecticut River Assembly members. More information is needed on the Middletown/Portland area. Mr. Stephen Sorrow of Suffield offered some corrections to the Suffield portion of the map.

2010 CRA Meeting Schedule

It was the consensus of those present to accept the 2010 CRA Meeting Schedule as presented. Meetings are scheduled for the second Thursday of each month to accommodate potential development applications. However, the Assembly committed to meeting every other month on the following schedule:

January 14, 2010
March 11, 2010
May 13, 2010
July 8, 2010
September 9, 2010
November 11, 2010

Cancellation notices will be mailed for the remaining six months, in cases in which there are no development reviews requiring action. The meeting dates for these six months are:

February 11, 2010
April 8, 2010
June 10, 2010
August 12, 2010
October 14, 2010
December 9, 2010

Meetings will be held at 7:00 p.m. at the Wethersfield Town Hall, Town Manager's Conference Room, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT.

Other Business

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.