



Niantic River Watershed Advisory Committee

Special Meeting

September 14, 2010

3:00 - 6:00 pm

LTA Room, Waterford Town Hall

Attendees: Fred Grimsey, Save-the-River, Save-the-Hills, Inc.; Erica Larner, CT River Coastal Conservation District; Richard Mason; Joe Mingo, East Lyme; Charles Mozzelli, Waterford; Franca Parra-Polimeni, New London; Marvin Schutt, East Lyme; Tom Wagner, Town of Waterford; Eric Thomas, CT DEP; Judy Rondeau, Watershed Coordinator

Guests: Jay Gigliotti, Salmon River Watershed Partnership; Tony Irving, Eight Mile River Wild & Scenic Watershed

Judy Rondeau opened the meeting at 3:14 pm.

1. Welcome - Judy welcomed participants to the meeting.
2. Introductions – Members introduced themselves, and Judy welcomed and introduced the guest speakers to the meeting.
3. Guest Presentations/Roundtable – Jay Gigliotti introduced members to the Salmon River Watershed Partnership. The SRWP is a partnership of the ten towns in the Salmon River watershed, Bolton, Colchester, Columbia, East Haddam, East Hampton, Glastonbury, Haddam, Hebron, Lebanon and Marlborough. Jay outlined the process undertaken to create the watershed plan and partnership. A steering committee of key stakeholders, including municipal partners, was formed, problem factors such as degraded riparian buffers, storm pipe outfalls, etc., were identified and an action plan to address these issues was created. A non-binding watershed conservation compact was written and signed by watershed chief elected officials. Funds were raised to hire a consultant, which identified threats, reviewed and compared the watershed town land use policies, made recommendations and enumerated next steps to be taken. Two pilot towns were selected to test revised land use regulations (currently underway). Jay stressed how important it is to gain support of all stakeholders, including the town CEOs and commissions, as well as landholders, farmers, developers and so forth, and concluded that the among the next steps for the Partnership will be full-scale implementation of the recommended land-use regulations. When asked how the towns accepted the changes to their regulations, Jay stated that it required some give and take, that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the watershed towns made changes, and that all the recommendations, such as incorporation of LID techniques into site design, made sense.

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When asked what the impact was of having a consultant to help implement the plan, Jay stated that having a consultant alongside made a significant impact to implementation. The consultant was able to tie all the loose ends together and keep the process moving forward. Jay was asked how the organization has developed. Jay stated the organization is loose knit, with volunteer representation from the partner towns, land trusts, etc. When asked how long the process took, Jay said that the project began in 2007. The consultant was brought in two years after that. He stated that though watershed management can be a long process, once the ball starts rolling, it doesn't stop. When asked at an open house when the project would be done, Shelley Green of The Nature Conservancy, who has been an instrumental project partner, stated 'never!'

Tony Irving introduced members to the Eight Mile River Wild & Scenic Watershed. The Eight Mile River Watershed is located in portions of Colchester, East Haddam, East Lyme, Lyme and Salem. Tony stated that interest in the Eight Mile River dates back to the mid 1990's, with a small study in the town of Chester, the purpose of which was to gather information regarding watershed resources. From that initial study, the concept of designating the river for federal wild and scenic status originated. With support of local congressmen, federal authorization and funding was secured to undertake a wild and scenic river study. Study committee members felt that pursuing the wild and scenic designation would allow for a secure funding base that would in turn allow a more proactive approach, paid staff, and greater ability to leverage partnerships with watershed towns. Substantial support came from the National Park Service, which paid for the wild and scenic river study, which included an evaluation of land use regulations, water quality and hydrology studies. Tony explained that the Eight Mile River Wild & Scenic Study Committee was comprised of various stakeholders including land trusts, the watershed towns, CT DEP, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the National Park Service (NPS). When asked about the organization's status, he stated that it has no official status, it is not a regulatory agency, not a non-profit. It has adopted by-laws, follows the watershed management plan, and works with the participating towns as a proponent for the river. Since the federal wild & scenic designation was put in place in 2008, the committee has been implementing the recommendations of the watershed management plan. A key component is the adoption of a protective overlay zone for the river and its tributaries, which prohibits activity of any type within 50 ft of first order streams (headwater streams) and 100 ft of second order and larger streams. A draft overlay regulation document was created and distributed to the towns, minor modifications were made and the towns individually adopted the regulation. The overlay zone is administered and enforced by the town land use commissions. Tony stated that the keys to the river study committee's success include gaining community buy-in and support, participation and support of town boards and planners, creating open

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dialogue and setting realistic goals, and assembling a working group that works well together. He reiterated Jay's point that the work of a watershed group is never done, and the group must both be assembled from the appropriate stakeholders and work well together. Tony stated that Eight Mile Watershed committees include: an education committee, a protection and management committee, a (landuse) application review committee, and a science and monitoring committee. When Jay and Tony were asked how difficult it was to get financial support from the towns, Tony stated that his organization was federally, not locally, funded. Jay stated that it was very difficult. The Salmon River had the support of the town CEOs, but had to work through the various town channels including the finance boards. Jay stated that the town funding was matched by other sources, including grant money, and that some towns chose not to participate.

4. Water Quality Monitoring Update – Fred Grimsey reported that he (as part of STR-STH water quality monitoring program) has been conducting coliform testing at four locations in the upper Niantic River (Post Road bridge, Point Comfort, Turkey Point and Sandy Point), in cooperation with Ledge Light Health District. Last year coliform levels were uniformly low (> 10 coliform units/mL). This year, they have been significantly higher. Fred stated that spikes seem to be associated with rainfall. These findings have raised a number of questions, including why coliform levels are higher this year than last, what the possible source is, and how this information should be utilized. Discussion followed regarding the possibility for some sort of public notification similar to shellfish bed closures following failures for contact water sports. Fred will follow up with the Health District and keep the Niantic River group informed as discussion on this issue continues.
5. Next Meeting – October 12th, 2010, 3:00PM, LTA Room, Waterford Town Hall.

Meeting adjourned at 5:24 PM.

Action Items:

- **Please review draft bylaws and other distributed material for discussion and action at next meeting.**

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