

River Study Committee

January 22, 2015

1. Convene Meeting

Chairman Lionel Ingram called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM in the Nowak Room of the Exeter Town Office building. Members present were: Rod Bourdon, Frank Patterson, Peter Richardson and Virginia Raub. Also in attendance: Paul Vlasich of Exeter DPW, Jake St. Antonio of Vanesse Hangen Brustlin (VHB) and a representative from PEA for Roger Wakeman who was unable to attend. Paul Kirshen would arrive later.

2. Approval of Minutes

The draft minutes of October 23, 2014 meeting were approved as presented.

The draft minutes of the November 20, 2014 meeting were approved as presented

3. Report on Status of Dam Removal

Mr. Paul Vlasich reviewed the grants received and those pending. The Town received a \$15,000 grant from the State Conservation Fund although the grant application was for \$40,000. A grant of \$100,000 from the State's Aquatic Resource Mitigation (ARM) is still in review at the State level.

There is out there a HUD grant, although a sizable amount, it is a nationwide competition but a submission will be made for the March 15, 2015 application due date. He added since the November meeting, Eric Hutchins from NOAA indicated there may be funding available; will be pursuing.

On the ongoing engineering projects, he spoke of the completion of the Geotechnical Design Basis report prepared by the VHB subcontractor on the test borings done in the river back in November. Also, the project effect form and narrative submitted to NH Division of Historic Resources (DHR) is complete and accepted by the agency. The next step will be for the Army Corp to draft an effect memo; VHB will assist in the draft. Also, a Great Dam Resource Agency Coordinator meeting was held on December 16, 2014 and that report is also on Town website.

The Town is continuing to work with The Mill complex on their water intake outlet but no agreement is in place yet.

Addressing the ongoing Section 106 process, Mr. Jake St. Antonio stated the Army Corps of Engineers will be the lead federal agency. Also, the Town Section 106 subcommittee with members of the four consulting parties has met with VHB. Mr. Bill Jordan is the chairman of the subcommittee. He is not a member of any of the groups or any Town committee or Commission but will serve as the overseer of the subcommittee. It was determined the River Committee is a consulting party and Mr. Dick Huber will be the contact between the 106 subcommittee and the River group. Because the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is to be ready by end of April/early May, the subcommittee is being asked to complete their task within a narrow timeframe.

Outlining a proposed schedule, a first public hearing is tentatively scheduled for February 25; awaiting confirmation from DHR and Army Corps on availability to send representatives. A second public hearing will be the end of March.

A draft 50% design plan is being prepared (by VHB) to be submitted in early February to Mr. Vlasich for his review. And during the same time period (VHB) will be starting a draft permit application and submit a full packet by end of February. When questioned, Mr. St. Antonio stated a 50% design plan is sufficient for permitting; does not contain specs or notes needed for actual construction.

Responding to Mr. Patterson's question of potential road blocks to achieve the fall 2015 project deadline, Mr. St. Antonio replied with any project this size there is always the potential for comments etc.(from review by various participating agencies) .to incur delays but right now everything appears to be on target.

Mr. Richardson asked if any consideration is being given to the construction of a pedestrian walkway along the river from the library up to String Bridge in the mitigation process. If not he suggested thinking about such. He feels it would be an excellent opportunity for walkers to connect with the river and explore the history of the area. Although it is not being explored at this time, Mr. Richardson suggested thinking about it.

Mr. St. Antonio stated that could be a separate project not associated with the actual dam removal. The Chair suggested the upcoming public hearings be the appropriate time to bring it up as residents express their ideas how the dam should be memorialized. And added, what we want (to do) does not need to be included in the MOA; only enough to satisfy the historical people in Washington and Concord.

Mr. Vlasich acknowledged Mr. Richardson had expressed the idea during discussions on the upcoming repairs to the String Bridge. VHB is not looking at solutions but he does have in the VHB contract the capability to vet out some of the proposed solutions/ideas.

4. Review of the CAPE Analysis and Findings

Dr. Paul Kirshen of the UNH Engineering Department and lead project coordinator for the Climate Adaptation Program for Exeter (CAPE) returned to provide an update on the program. He acknowledged the project is between 4 and 5 months behind and thanked the Committee for their patience but did feel they were back on schedule.

He stated this project has two major parts: initially to gain input from the residents of the Town to make a program that is useful for the Town and to then build models to translate complex climate changes into changes in hydrological regimes, water quality and ecological impact. This second phase is where the delays have occurred.

A set of models were completed last summer but after external review a variety of data problems and (models)were not functioning as they wished. They went back and revisited and reworked some of the data. He feels they have resolved some of the issues and are at a point where they can get back to working with the citizens group on applying these models to look at the impact of climate change in particular, flooding without the dam in place, water quality, ecological impacts and local drainage issues.

The report must be complete by June 30, 2015 and they feel they are in good shape to meet that deadline. He would like to return to the River Committee to provide monthly updates and also to interact with other Town boards and the citizens in this time period.

Responding to a question from Mr. Patterson on what were the unrealistic outputs he referenced. Mr. Kirshen reviewed the models used and when they saw results that were inconsistent with the general knowledge of the present climate change and the general knowledge of the future climate change they realized more work/review was to be done. They have retooled to develop new projections of the future climate change and feels confident in the present models/data being used.

Mr. Kirshen expressed appreciation for the questions as he wants the community to have confidence in the report, but, did stress the report portrays what climate change “may” look like. There are many variables to climate change and much depends on future emissions of greenhouse gases; future climate is uncertain. They will be working with the community to come up with a set of strategies for adaptations that work over this ranges of futures He wished to emphasize they are trying to minimize the uncertainty by having using strong models.

Asked if he had enough data on the flow rate of Exeter River and is the data from Haigh Road gauge sufficient, Mr. Kirshen responded the Haigh Road gauge has approximately 20 years of data. It is sufficient but would be beneficial to have perhaps 30 years of data. Also the discussion determined it could be beneficial to the Town to have a gauge downstream of the Haigh gauge to get more flow data; perhaps downstream of the confluence of Little River and Exeter River. The Chair felt that could be brought up at the next citizens meeting group. With no further questions, he was thanked for his presentation.

The Chairman read from a note received from Mr. Huber, the Committee’s point person for the Section 106 subcommittee outlining much of what was presented earlier by Mr. St. Antonio. Discussion determined the February public hearing will be handled by the Section 106 subcommittee but did emphasize the need to get enough public participation and ideas to help the process with ideas early on as possible.

With the resignation of Dr. Mimi Becker, there is an opening on the Committee. Mr. Ingram suggested if anyone is interested in joining the group to contact the Town Manager’s office for more details.

The next meeting is set for Thursday March 19, 2015 at 9:00 AM.

Meeting adjourned at 9:54 AM

Respectfully submitted

Virginia Raub