

EXETER RIVER STUDY WORK GROUP REPORT TO THE ERSC on the Public Meeting & Follow-up

Mimi Becker and Deb Loiselle for the Work Group

- Agenda from the April 29 2010 Public Meeting to obtain public input to the design of the RFP. The meeting was held at 7:00 pm in the Exeter Town Hall, 9 Front Street, Exeter, NH.
 - I. Welcome and Introductions - Dr. Mimi Becker, Exeter River Study Committee
 - a. Exeter must either remove the dam OR renovate and repair the dam.
 - b. Meeting co-sponsors: ERSC, ERSWG, DES, RPC
 - c. Need your help in identifying issues and concerns to be addressed in study [not here to debated whether or what, but to focus on hearing your concerns and questions]
 - II. Explanation of Meeting Purpose and Process - Theresa Walker, Rockingham Planning Commission
 - III. Briefing:
 - Explanation of the Exeter River Project History – Paul Vlasich, Exeter Dept. of Public Works
 - Overview of the Request for Proposals Content & Process - Deb Loiselle, NH Dept. of Environmental Services
 - IV. Small Group Discussions to Identify Public Questions, Concerns, Knowledge – Facilitated by the Rockingham Planning Commission, Scribes from the Working Group
 - V. Summary of Information Provided by Small Groups - Theresa Walker, Rockingham Planning Commission
 - VI. Explanation of how your information will be used to inform the content of the RFP and Next Steps for the Request for Proposals and for Public Education and Engagement - Dr. Mimi Becker, Exeter River Study Committee
 - VII. Adjourn

Compiled Meeting Results:

Note – All comments recorded during the small group discussions are presented below, and have been listed under a theme assigned by the meeting facilitator.

System Concerns

Impacts, of all alternatives, on natural resources in Great Bay

- Value to the environment is dam is removed
- Length of time for river to stabilize/homeostasis after dam is removed – water quality, wildlife, sediment
- Wetland and shoreland impacts
- Environment and flooding combined problem = “dead river”
- Ecological impacts to upstream wetland (Great Meadows, etc.)
- Geology of river bottom up and downstream

- Contaminated sediments
- Estimation of riparian zone restoration and mitigation, what would be required
- Impact on upstream tributaries
- More testing of ecosystem health and better understanding of removal on impacts on water quality if dam is out (dissolved oxygen, temperature, turbidity, etc.) – compare with existing data to build a before and after picture
- How will dam removal affect the geomorphology of the river?
- Sedimentation – downstream movement to Great Bay and impact on shellfish

Natural/Wildlife Resources and Aesthetics

- Wildlife impact upstream and downstream if dam removed
- Evaluation of coldwater, warmwater, and anadromous fish
- Upstream and downstream environmental impacts, wildlife habitat
- Aesthetics – Founder’s park – what will river look like
- Riverbank restoration – natural revegetation vs. invasives
- Fish passage – herring to spawning areas
- Economic and recreational value of River Herring
- How will removal affect the water quality and dissolved oxygen for fish; will removal support fish populations
- Habitat upstream impacts
- Drop to lower falls – can fish get up?
- Loss of wetlands, wildlife in river – environment upstream
- Trees fallen across river
- Loss of aesthetics

Historic Resources

- Impact of flooding on historic bridges and buildings
- When was the dam created and why
- Quantify historic economic costs and benefits associated with the dam between 1600’s and 1800’s, and identify when these benefits went away (dam used to provide economic benefits to mill, etc., but now costs businesses money)
- Thorough assessment of historical resources and communication to town
- Have previous/historic modifications to dam affected nearby structures and understand how these changes affected structures
- Historical evaluation of adjacent buildings
- When did the name Great Dam go into use? Also has been called Mill Dam and historical records may refer to it as Mill Dam

Flooding

- Concerned about loss of flood control
- Did the Wright Pierce Study look at existing climate change data
- Will water level rise upstream and downstream if dam is removed
- Has water levels around the dam increased over time, impacting abutting buildings
- Is flooding increased as a result of water levels dropping and vegetation growing along the shoreline, preventing water from moving more quickly along river
- Will groundwater levels drop to reduce flooding in homes
- Storm event studies (50 vs 100 year)
- Floods – frequency/cause/severity
- Flood level history
- Storm event used? 100 year?
- Options for upstream storage to prevent flooding
- Will removal alleviate upstream flooding
- Will taking dam down alleviate negative and positive impacts from flooding to nearby structures
- What will be the impacts to flooding upstream and downstream
- Extent of flooding if dam is removed
- Historical flood zone data
- Will any action change flood insurance rates
- River Street flooding – how would it change?

Water Quantity/Supply and Water Quality

- Ensure that competing uses and water rights are considered under removal study (Exeter Mill and other users)
- What will be the level of the river under normal flow conditions if the dam is removed (will you still be able to swim in river)
- Water supply for Town Fire Dept.
- Concerned if water lowered and loss of property value
- Would dam removal change the conversation with surrounding communities regarding water supply
- Impact of removal on wastewater treatment plant, stormwater, and combined sewer outfall
- Protection of water supply changed by removal of Dam
- What will impacts be to future water supply demand if dam is removed
- Additional impoundment possibilities
- Look at “big picture”, next dam upstream

- Cost of alternative water supply, re-activating wells
- Ramifications of dam removal on a biotoxic chemical attack in river/water supply
- Impacts on regional water supply
- Water treatment plant replacement costs – put in context (\$7-9M with \$17M)
- Lost impoundment surface capacity
- Modeling time delay/saturation
- If dam is removed and there is a drought, will there be enough water; weather impacts if dam is removed
- Water levels in the river
- Effect of water levels on private wells
- Longevity, drinking water of new wells over long-term under changing conditions
- Recharge to existing and new wells without impoundment – including public and private
- Will we have enough drinking water if dam is removed and will there be enough drinking water if there is a persistent drought
- Extent of impoundment in all alternatives
- Difference in treatment (chemical, etc.) – cost, odor in groundwater vs. surface water
- What would erosion look like if the dam is removed and would erosion affect water quality and how long would it take to stabilize
- Sediment transport to Great Bay
- Will water quality change if the dam is removed; how will it change
- Water quality in river – will it improve?
- Controls of the river upstream pollutants from upstream
- Odor control – downstream – dewatering between bridges
- Velocities through bridges esp. high flow
- Are there other options for water quality improvements

Economics

- What are future consequences of dam removal, opportunity cost lost for power generation
- Cost of removal
- Cost associated with replacing and maintaining new facilities required by dam removal, water treatment for example
- Long term operation and maintenance costs of both dam and fish ladder
- Private property and commercial loss due to severe weather, as well as costs associated with federal, state and local funds invested in post-storm activities
- How does re-establishment of Great Falls benefit Exeter businesses, community image, recreation

- Construction impacts and requirement from removing dam – equipment staging, impact on roads and parking
- Complete the engineering study on modification and removal
- Are any jobs created for the next generation if the dam is removed or if the dam is modified, and what are what kind of educational preparation is needed for these jobs

Recreational Resources

- Will recreational opportunities increase or decrease if dam is removed
- Recreational impacts, canoeing and kayaking
- Recreational access points
- Recreational impacts during drawdown – having to walk through muck to get to river

Dam Management/Past Dam Removal Projects/Hydropower

- Impacts discovered from other dams that have been removed
- How can we learn from other dams removed in NH
- Problems with other dam removals – erosion, etc.
- How has the estimated impacts of dam removal on other NH projects differed from the actual impacts
- When reviewing previous dam removal projects keep in mind the uniqueness of each river system
- Review results of Winnicut Dam removal project
- What would the results of flushing and scouring be as a result of opening and closing the dam gate
- Potential of hydroelectricity from the dam and from riff generation
- Impacts of removal to other dams and dam management
- Impacts of removal dam removal on next upstream dam (Pickpocket)
- Link of flow with Pickpocket Dam
- Costs of uncontrolled dam failure
- Sediment control
- What is the elevation of the dam, above sea level?
- How river is controlled today? Who is in charge?
- Loss of hydropower potential
- Loss/gain of hydropower opportunity if removed or kept

Erosion and Impacts on Abutting Properties

- Impact of removal on Great Bridge and String Bridge and Kimball Island, and on widening Great Bridge
- Stabilization of abutting structures

- Impact on erosion downstream
- Scour impact upstream from storm events (exposed banks)
- Describe and analyze Great Bridge impacts
- Removal impact on String Bridge
- Concerned about impacts to downstream buildings and infrastructure and impacts to upstream assets (wetlands, bridges)
- Damage to String and High Street Bridges: eg. Ice
- Effects on Squamscott from scouring
- String Bridge – sediment fill-in around rocky areas and near buildings
- High Street bridge – undermining
- Impacts on zoning, wetlands maps – create more developable land
- Why aren't we talking about discussing the High Street bridge?
- Impact on foundations and structures abutting river

Project Management

- All riverfront property owners invited to meetings to talk with consultants during the project
- Ensure balance and full disclosure of pros and cons, make sure all facts are included without recommendation
- Compare other successes and failures
- Define study boundaries
- Timeline from state (NH DES) on correcting deficiencies
- Previous studies and project information available from a central website
- Identify other agencies and groups involved
- Hoping for comparison of alternatives in the future
- Good for towns to share info on these types of projects (Durham and Greenland are resources)
- Compare/calibrate costs from different studies to better understand the actual , current costs of removal and repair – costs from previous studies may need to be brought up to date
- Summary paper of what we already know (study is pricey; timeline is too long)
- Would like access to studies that already been done
- Clarity on cost of removal vs. repair, including any additional costs (changes to water supply, after-the-fact costs of dam removal, costs to mitigate other assets)
- Post tonight's power point presentation on Town website
- Compile and report/summarize old information
- Cost – include junk and debris cleanup
- Make sure all options are discussed

In addition to the topics brought forth during the small group discussions, one letter and two e-mails were received from the public. This information is attached.

RECRUITING AND PUBLIC INFORMATION PRIOR TO THE MEETING

RPC Staff issued, in consultation with the ERWG, a series of press releases and public information pieces to inform the public about the meeting and invite their participation. Also the large electric signs were used on major route (108) to announce the meeting time and place, and fliers were handed out to local businesses and posted in public buildings. As a consequence of those initiatives and general postings on the Town's website, as well as high public interest, about 100 people attended and participated in the meeting. Attached please find the attendee sign-in sheets for those participants who signed in. (Not all did so) One example is illustrated below.

This was issued to Fosters, Seacoast Media Group, Carriage Towne News, Union Leader, and the Wire. The announcement has also been sent to the NH Coastal Program, NH DES, PREP, GBNERR, NH Fish and Game, and ERLAC to be distributed to their email lists. The RPC also distributed it to local officials in the 12 watershed communities:

For Immediate Release

April 8, 2010

Contact: Theresa Walker, 603-534-3913

Wanted: Public Input

The Town of Exeter to Hold Meeting April 29 on Great Dam

Exeter, NH –The Town of Exeter will hold a public meeting on April 29th to obtain input on a study exploring the removal or renovation of Great Dam. The meeting's focus will be to establish a public dialogue on information that could be relevant to the study. The public's feedback will be used to shape the request for proposals that the Town will release to prospective consultants in the spring.

The meeting will be held on April 29th at 7:00 p.m. in the Exeter Town Hall. Representatives from the Exeter River Study Committee, the Exeter River Study Committee's Dam Removal Working group, the Exeter Department of Public Works, and the NH Department of Environmental Services will begin the meeting with a review of work completed to date regarding the Great Dam, why the new study is needed, and the objectives of the request for proposals.

The most important part of the meeting will be small working groups during which the public's questions and concerns regarding Great Dam, and ideas on the collection of specific information – cultural, historic, environmental, recreational—will be sought and recorded. Project partners are interested in finding out what the public knows about the Great Dam and what they care about. Staff from the Rockingham Planning Commission will be on hand to facilitate the discussion and document comments, questions, and concerns from meeting participants.

The Exeter Town Hall is located at 9 Front Street, across from the Exeter Town Office. For more information on the meeting, please contact Theresa Walker of the Rockingham Planning Commission at 603-778-0885, or twalker@rpc-nh.org.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS:

It was the conclusion of the Exeter River Working Group that the RPC and Theresa Walker did an excellent job in informing the public, recruiting their attendance and facilitating the meeting. We would like to officially commend that effort and the excellent results we received in terms of public participation and input to the RFP design process. We have committed to share this report with those who participated and left their e-mail addresses with us. We also request its publication, with other River Study documents, on the Town's website. And we have used this report's contents as we have continued work on the design of the RFP.

Next steps are to obtain additional information from the RPC Staff regarding subsequent submissions by the public. These are to be included in the issue identification and considered for incorporation into the RFP and/or the information base to be provided to the consultant via the ERSC. It is the Working Group's advice that the consultant return to consult with the public during the study, as well as to inform and engage them prior to completion of the study and the submission of final recommendations to the ERSC.

RECOMMENDATIONS/ADVICE TO ERSC

1. Accept the report of the ERSWG. This is the public's input to inform the design of the RFP. These issues questions and concerns will be organized so that those addressed in existing studies (and answered in some form) will be reported back to the public. Those which are clearly relevant to the Dam Removal Study will be the focus of the ERSWG in developing the draft RFP for submission to the ERSC for its consideration. The Working group is coding the issues identified above according to relevant sections of the RFP to accomplish this task.
2. If there are questions or issues that the ERSC believes were not raised by the public, please identify them at the meeting of the 20th. We believe that the letter from the Mill should be addressed by the ERSC and advice for dealing with any substantive issues by internalizing them in RFP be forwarded to the Working group.
3. Regarding the RFP and Selection Process, the ERSWG discussed this briefly at their May 4 meeting. While only a brief discussion of a selection committee different from that group was undertaken at this meeting, it was very clear that a different group would have to begin all over to educate itself about the entire program before it would be in a position to effectively evaluate a proposal. We did discuss whether or not anyone on the group was in a position of perceived or actual conflict of interest, and it was agreed

that all were free with respect to this project and the RFP process. This subject will be discussed further at the June 15 ERSWG meeting and a technical review committee will be recommended to the ERSC on June 17 for its consideration.

4. The RFP draft will be ready for the June 17 meeting of the ERSG. However the Working Group cannot meet until June 15 to finalize its recommendation.
5. Post pertinent information pertaining to this project on the Town of Exeter's webpage. This would include information on public meetings, press releases, updated information, previous studies, and other information that is relevant to the project. The Working Group recommends that this information is placed with the ERSC information.
6. Develop a FAQ sheet for this project and post on the webpage.