

Town of Exeter, N.H.
River Advisory Committee
Nowak Room
February 20, 2020
Final Minutes

1. Convene the Meeting

Chairman Huber convened the Meeting and conducted the roll. Those present included Richard Huber, Lionel Ingram, Rod Bourdon, Warren Biggins, PEA; Carl Wikstrom, Water / Sewer Advisory Committee; Ginny Raub, Conservation Commission; Terrie Harman, Liaison Sustainability Office and joined later by Dan Jones. Kathy Corson was absent.

2. Minutes of the January 16, 2020 Meeting

After discussion relevant to the [previous evening] February 19th meeting about new EPA draft permit, Lionel Ingram, seconded by Ginny Raub, moved to approve the Minutes of the January 20, 2020 Meeting as submitted. All in favor stated "Aye;" those who abstained included Terrie Harman and Carl Wikstrom. The Minutes passed.

3. Update on Various River Related Items (Paul Vlasich)

Paul Vlasich, Town Engineer, referenced the fore-mentioned public meeting held the previous evening regarding the Great Bay Total Nitrogen Draft Permit proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES or DES). Mr. Vlasich introduced Jennifer Perry, Public Works Director, who explained the draft permit and its long-term outcomes for the Town of Exeter:

- a. A general, "integrated" permit issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) January 7, 2020, presently in the middle phase period for public comment [initially closed March 9th but now extended to May 8, 2020] as an impactful, long term permit for the Town of Exeter. The permit integrates both stormwater and wastewater and non-point sources for total nitrogen for the first time in one permit.
- b. The basic unit applied as a desired nitrogen load of 100kg total nitrogen per hectare per year as a typical unit for use in a watershed; an empirical observation of what may be required for healthy eelgrass in other estuaries.
- c. Currently twelve communities with wastewater treatment plants that surround Great Bay have individual permits; permits for Exeter and Newmarket only held language for total nitrogen load. The draft permit does not anticipate future growth or potential inclusion Portsmouth Ave, Stratham business use of the wastewater treatment plant.

- d. The wastewater treatment plant presently performs a strenuous lift at 108lbs per day. The initiative does not anticipate future growth while carrying the same or improved load.
- e. The requirements expect to achieve 45% reduction in nitrogen sources from non-point sources (such as septic systems) and stormwater source over the next 23 years, reducing every five years. For example, the first reduction milestone is achieved by year 8 at 11% and then every 5 years until 45% reduction achieved at 23 years.

Ms. Perry expressed the professional opinion of the Department and its Consultants (Geo-Syntec and Wright-Pierce Engineers) that many factors and their related costs render the goal as unfeasible. Discussion surrounded these factors, needs and improvements:

- a. Improve street-sweeping
- b. Initiate weekly leaf-litter pick-up (Fall)
- c. Expand pet-waste programs
- d. Initiate a slow-release fertilizer program targeting 80% of the Town population
- e. The standard is too high
- f. Add structural improvements – require retro-fit of 35% existing septic systems with advanced nitrogen options
- g. Treat 20% impervious cover in the Town at a cost of \$10 million and involves private properties
- h. Costs add up: \$20 million for capital costs; \$1 million for annual O&M costs; \$50 million over a 20-year lifecycle just for non-point sources.
- i. The wastewater treatment plant presently faces an upgrade charge to reduce from 5mg per liter to 3 mg per liter and increase flow capacity in accordance with the contractual grant within the next 4 years.

Ms. Perry provided the following link to view the permit and fact sheet:

www.epa.gov/npdes-permits/draft-great-bay-total-nitrogen-general-permit

Chairman Huber opened discussion citing the neighboring towns and leaders at the review meeting, by noting collective disagreement about the timeline, responsibility of towns not included in the general permit, and the need for peer-reviewed science. Mr. Huber summarized by saying that every town [represented at the open meeting] wanted the initiative reviewed and changed to reflect more accurate numbers and time-evolved adjustments for improvements or major development.

Additional discussion surrounded the necessary improvements and potential to request State interventions and taxation. Approximately 80% of stormwater run-off from impervious surfaces, improvements to septic systems and fertilizer restrictions would require both access to private properties and/or State mandate. The process was noted as complicated with best management practices proving more costly to remove from non-point source origins. The wastewater treatment plant would require an earlier than

planned upgrade to the facility. Another impact involved consideration of the fairness of assessing taxation to only sewer users to cover the costs for both aspects of the permit.

Paul Vlasich referenced a previous study as an important parameter to understanding the overall issue. He said that following all the recommendations made under two grants conducted by Waterstone Engineering they would reach only 2% nitrogen reduction and not close enough to the 11% that will be required by year 8 of the permit. Other comments by members surrounded community concern for the accuracy of the numbers provided by the EPA, the timeframe in which to make the corrections and the ability to adapt the plan as improvements are seen. Lastly, discussion surrounded the number of communities involved with contributing to the issue as compared to the lesser number that will fund fixing the issue. It was commented that there should be “push back” to the DES and EPA to get other towns involved and cease providing waivers to those towns and get State involvement with the new rules and regulations.

4. Discussion of Town Warrant Article 14: Pickpocket Dam (\$110,000)

Chairman Huber read and summarized the Warrant Article as related to the Town’s Letter of Response to a Letter of Deficiency from NHDES regarding Pickpocket Dam. Designated potentially as a high-hazard dam, the Dam Bureau requested a breach analysis of the hydraulics of the river (through various examples) to both understand the discharge capacity of the dam and to determine the potential risk of damage to property should a breach occur. Such analyses could impact the re-labeling of Pickpocket to a high-hazard dam with new requirements not currently in effect. The Town of Exeter committed to determine the safety factors by the year 2022 and conduct any repairs by 2025. Article 14 requests \$110,000 to allow hydraulic evaluation of a 21/2-year x 100-year-storm event, conduct a dam feasibility study alternative study wherein Engineers determine the options to make the dam safe using the hydraulic evaluation, place a cost on the different options and go to public meeting with the town of Exeter and Brentwood to present those options. Discussion also surrounded ownership of the dam. Although the dam borders Exeter and Brentwood, the Town owns the structure and has kept Brentwood apprised of the matter.

5. Other Business

Chairman Huber noted there were no updates for the Sustainability Office, the river viewing platform nor comments on the Committees’ role in the Master Plan.

6. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

7. Adjourn the meeting

The March meeting was cancelled, and the next meeting was scheduled for 3:00 pm on Thursday, April 16, 2020. Carl Wikstrom moved to adjourn, seconded by Rod Bourdon. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Celeste M. Camire
Recording Secretary