

River Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, January 20, 2022
3 PM
Town Offices, Nowak Room
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Richard Huber (Chair); Lionel Ingram; Terrie Harman; Rod Bourdon; Dan Jones; Carl Wikstrom, the Water-Sewer Advisory Committee Rep; Trevor Mattera, the Conservation Committee Rep; and Paul Vlasich, the Town Engineer

Members Absent: Niko Papakonstantis, Select Board Rep and Warren Biggins, PEA Rep.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Huber at 3 PM.

1. Approval of Minutes

a. November 18, 2021

MOTION: Mr. Ingram moved to approve the minutes of November 18, 2021 as presented. Mr. Bourdon seconded. Mr. Wikstrom and Mr. Mattera abstained, and the motion passed 5-0-2.

2. Update on River Issues

a. Pickpocket Dam

Mr. Vlasich discussed the \$100,000 Clean Water SRF [State Revolving Fund] Stormwater Planning Grant for work on the Pickpocket Dam project. This will be administered by Deb Loiselle, who was one of the members of the River Study Committee during the Great Dam project, so she's familiar with Exeter. We must make a statement on why we don't need to go through a qualifications-based selection process for the consultant; this process was done with the original Great Dam project, and that consultant has expertise in Exeter. We will need to draft a scope of work prior to drawing up the standard engineering contract, and specify which tasks will be paid for with the \$100,000 grant. This grant has a zero match requirement.

Mr. Huber asked if it would be VHB [Vanasse Hangen Brustlin Engineering] that would do this work, and Mr. Vlasich said yes. Mr. Huber asked about the costs. Mr. Vlasich said preliminary estimates are a little higher than our budget, so we will need to refine the tasks. Mr. Huber asked how long it will take, and Mr. Vlasich said about a year and a half. There was preliminary work done in order to justify our request for an extension of the timeline with NHDES [New Hampshire Dept of Environmental Services]. VHB calculated the 2.5X the hundred year storm event, and generated some concepts of our options.

Mr. Vlasich discussed the \$40,000 Coastal Resilience Grant, which requires a \$20,000 match. The scope is not fully solidified yet, but in concept, we'll do an additional topo survey in the area and on some of the abutting land. The preliminary work showed that some of those floodwaters reach out beyond where we have good

cross section data. The second item was a bathymetric survey to map the stream bottom topographically. The third item was a sediment sampling and analysis plan, and some preliminary sediment management concepts. Lastly, we're designing this for 2.5x the 100 year storm event, but as storm intensity increases with climate change, the figures will change, so we're going to do some work around that.

Mr. Huber asked if we anticipate a warrant article in March to address any of this. Mr. Vlasich said no, we will not go for a town vote in March for this project. The town will be paying the balance of this feasibility study from the town ARPA [American Rescue Plan Act] funds.

Mr. Jones asked if this work includes a report on the wetlands that will be drained by this project. Mr. Vlasich said no. As we go through the different scenarios for the dam, there will be an idea of what the water surface elevation of the impoundment may be. From there we could estimate the impact on the wetlands, but we could never fully come to an exact figure. We could get the Wetlands Bureau to weigh in on this. If it was going to be a real detriment to the environment, there's no way we would even be able to get the wetlands permit. With Great Dam, we used a special seed mix to reseed the banks, but even the areas that didn't get that treatment re-established themselves pretty quickly. Mr. Jones said he's talking about remediation, not greening. When the State put in 101, they had to build a large wetland. Walmart had to buy 50 acres of land to create wetland. Mr. Vlasich said if there's a dam removal, it would turn it back to what it was prior to the dam. Mr. Mattera said a project like this would fall under a restoration, and it's generally looked at positively by State and Environmental agencies. It wouldn't require mitigation because the project itself is the mitigation.

Mr. Vlasich said the CIP [Capital Improvement Program] cost is \$185,000, which he expects the town to appropriate from ARPA funds. That should take us to the end of the feasibility study.

Mr. Huber said we will need to inform the public and get them involved.

Mr. Vlasich said that on the Great Dam project, dam removal wasn't initially on the table, but DES came with some funding and asked us to look at dam removal one last time, and that's how the feasibility study happened. Some of the fixes to the dam from the report ended up not being viable because of factors like climate change. At that time, this committee put a smaller committee together for the study itself, which figured out a scope of what we wanted to ask a consultant and got public input. It was the committee that educated the public on the final report and what the options meant. Mr. Ingram said this committee should be the linkage between the engineers/consultant and the public, but we should not try to influence which option the public votes for.

Mr. Ingram said we could potentially remove the problems, such as the nearby houses, rather than remove the dam. Mr. Vlasich said that option will be considered.

Mr. Mattera asked who the final decision maker will be. Mr. Huber said that in the case of the Great Dam, the Select Board was not in favor of proceeding quickly, but there was a Citizen's Petition on removing the dam, and it passed with 60% of the

vote. Mr. Ingram said he thinks this will be a more controlled process with a town warrant article.

b. Nitrogen Control Plan

Mr. Vlasich said about 9 years ago, the Total Nitrogen Permit was going to be quite stringent, but more recently the State introduced a different approach, with an adaptive management portion for the stormwater. This is a way to remove nutrients from our stormwater system. This is in the CIP at \$99,000 for several different tasks, but will be funded through ARPA funds rather than being on the warrant. We're looking at a potential grant for a portion of this. There are three projects that would be funded from this grant: looking for a way for the town to incentivize the installation of advanced septic systems; looking at installing more BMPs [Best Management Practices], which take nutrients out of stormwater; and a program of fertilizer education to reduce runoff.

Mr. Vlasich said the town annual nitrogen report is due at the end of the month. We put together a nitrogen control plan in conjunction with the wastewater treatment facility. We're putting that report together now.

Mr. Ingram asked whether the town knows about the quality of the existing septic tanks in town. Mr. Vlasich said no; we know through sewer bills who's connected to the town sewage, but we don't know the quality of those septic systems. Probably not a lot of them are advanced. Mr. Ingram said we should look at which existing systems are likely to fail at the same time we're looking at advanced systems. Mr. Vlasich said for the last few years, the Conservation Commission has done a septic awareness week in September with social media posts and education. He thinks a mailing about maintenance was going to be sent to those who have septic systems, but he doesn't know if that happened or not. That's not what this grant is talking about though.

c. Sewer Siphons Project

Mr. Vlasich said the design work for the siphons is complete, but we still have to finish the permit process. We're waiting on the Army Corps of Engineers permit, and there was an additional request about the borings in the river. We thought we had enough information from the original installation of the siphons plus installations on the mill side of the river and the pump station side of the river, so we're going to send them that info next week. For easements on the mill side, we had some sketches that they agreed to, now it's a question of putting words to paper. Regarding funding, Rep Pappas was trying to get us \$600,000 of Congressional spending, which is still in limbo; we should know more next month. We probably will not see a warrant article on that because town ARPA funds can be used. Some costs have increased on that project.

3. Other Business

a. Mr. Huber said there is an Alewife Festival planned for around May 14th, depending when the Alewife are running. The planning committee would like the

River Advisory Committee to be involved. Mr. Ingram said he would only be willing to help by providing information on the Great Dam and where we're going in the future. That's within this committee's charter.

- b. There's a new report coming out from PREP, the Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Partnership. Mr. Mattera said he works for PREP, so if there are any questions he can answer them.
 - c. The new date for reporting to the Dam Bureau on how Pickpocket Dam will be addressed is June 2024, and all fixes must be complete by December 2027.
4. Public Comment
 - a. There was no public comment at this meeting.

5. Review Committee Calendar

Mr. Huber asked Mr. Vlasich if the Committee should meet next month. Mr. Vlasich said if the Committee would like to comment on the scope of the Pickpocket Dam project, then it should meet next month, otherwise he can move the grants forward himself. The Committee agreed to meet again in March.

6. Adjournment

MOTION: Mr. Ingram moved to adjourn. Mr. Mattera seconded. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 4:05 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary