

**Environment Committee
Meeting Summary
July 28, 2008**

Present: Margaret Wirtenberg, Weston; M. Reese Hutchison, Darien; Anna Duleep, Norwalk; Robert Byrnes, Greenwich (via telephone); Paul Settelmeyer, SWRPA chairman; Floyd Lapp, SWRPA; Nicole Davis, SWRPA;

Dr. Floyd Lapp called the Environment Committee (the Committee) meeting to order at 2:05pm. The meeting was held at the SWRPA office.

Mr. Paul Settelmeyer stated that as a result of the recent change to the members of the committee that he would like to appoint Dr. Margaret Wirtenberg and Mr. Robert Byrnes as co-chairs of the committee. Both Dr. Wirtenberg and Mr. Byrnes accepted and stated that they would be happy to co-chair.

Dr. Wirtenberg asked that Ms. Nicole Davis provide the committee with a description of her background, since she will be taking over as staff for the committee. Ms. Davis summarized her experience as an environmental consultant prior to joining the SWRPA staff, her work as a research assistant at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and the completion of a Master of Science Degree from VCU, in Environmental Science, where her research focused on the interactions between land use and aquatic systems.

I. Watershed Planning

A. Status of Proposed Reconnaissance Study

Dr. Lapp stated that previously he, and several committee members had meet with Congressman Shays to urge him to have a reconnaissance study of the regions rivers conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). Dr. Lapp summarized the discussion that took place at the meeting and concluded that Congressman Shays was interested in pursuing a reconnaissance study for the region. Dr. Lapp further explained that Congressman Shays and his staff had met with the ACOE on July 24, 2008 to discuss the study. He explained that the ACOE would conduct a reconnaissance study of the rivers in south western Connecticut (which include SWRPA, Housatonic Valley Council of Government and Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency) for \$200,000.00.

Dr. Lapp commented that the Westchester Reconnaissance study was a good document, which included an investigation and recommendations of each of the area rivers. He stated that the funding for the reconnaissance study would be from federal funds, but that implementation of the recommendations would require matching funds from the municipalities. Dr. Lapp felt the reconnaissance and inventory was needed. He recommended that once we received the draft report from the study that a meeting of the CEO's of the region be held to discuss moving forward and matching funds.

Mr. Robert Byrnes inquired after what was included in a reconnaissance study. Dr. Lapp explained that is was an overview of the landscape and territory, and that someone with knowledge of the area would be able to make recommendations based on the information. Mr. Settelmeyer agreed and commented that a year ago a study was completed for Westchester County which included a portion of the Byram River that runs through Connecticut.

B. FEMA Grant Cycle

Ms. Davis explained that there were several grants being offered through FEMA for flood issues and that some funding may be available to be used towards implementation of recommendations from the ACOE Reconnaissance study. Ms Davis stated that the FEMA HMGP grant cycle will be closing soon. She

explained that the HMGP grants are only available after a disaster has been declared and that this may be the only opportunity the region has to apply for these grants.

Mr. Settlemeyer stated that at this morning's MPO meeting, Evonne Klein (Darien) had suggested that flooding be addressed at one of the round table discussions held by the MPO. Mr. Settlemeyer commented that flooding is a major concern for the region and that we should continue to be proactive and remain ahead of the curve. Mr. Settlemeyer suggested that flooding and watershed planning should be a topic at the upcoming quarterly planners meeting. Mr. Settlemeyer stated that major funding is being made available for watershed planning within towns and that we should find out what is available. Dr. Wirtenberg agreed and suggested that the people responsible for watershed planning in each town be identified.

Mr. M. Reese Hutchison remarked that it has been difficult for the towns to navigate the funding and permit process for the state and the ACOE and that the information provided by the DEP and the ACOE is often conflicting. He felt the SWRPA may be able to help by creating a template of the application process and find out who should be contacted to coordinate the application process at the DEP. Dr. Lapp indicated that personnel from the DEP would be present at the August 26, FEMA grants meeting at SWRPA, and that this may be an opportunity to have a discussion with them. Mr. Byrnes inquired if he and Dr. Wirtenberg should attend the meeting and the committee agreed they should. Ms. Duleep suggested that the municipal grants be included in the meeting.

C. Watershed Planning at a Larger Spatial Scale

Ms. Davis explained that the first step in initiating a watershed planning effort had previously been completed by the committee. She explained that the major rivers of concern for the region and the major issues facing the rivers have been identified. She provided the committee with information showing the location and extent of the watershed for each river the committee had identified, and the jurisdictions each watershed spanned.

Dr. Wirtenberg inquired if SWRPA was aware of the Saugatuck River Watershed Partnership. She stated that they would be interested in having a watershed planning meeting. Dr. Wirtenberg suggested that the agency look at the '1976 Diminsky Oak Rock Plan' from Weston. She felt that this was a complete plan and may be useful.

Dr. Wirtenberg commented that SWRPA should contact the municipalities to determine what has been done for each watershed. She commented that it was important to get the whole picture. Ms. Davis agreed and explained that to move forward with watershed planning in the region that it is important to identify key personnel within each watershed and identify plans and practices already in place. Ms. Davis commented that for any watershed efforts to be effective all of the key players for the watersheds should be involved.

Mr. Settlemeyer commented that many of the rivers cross the state boarder into Westchester County. Mr. Settlemeyer suggested that it may be worthwhile to open a liaison with Westchester to find out what's being done. Mr. Settlemeyer segued back to the ACOE reconnaissance study, indicating that the Westchester Reconnaissance study did not include the portions of the rivers in South Western CT that crossed into New York. Dr. Lapp indicated that as you move east the watersheds of interest cross in to the Housatonic Region and the Greater Bridgeport Region. He suggested that relationships also be started with the Housatonic Valley Council of Governments, and the Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency.

Ms. Davis indicated the funding may be available through NRCS for watershed planning. Dr. Wirtenberg suggested that SWRPA apply for all the grants available. Dr. Wirtenberg further indicated that they should continue moving forward with the items identified.

D. Pre-disaster Mitigation Strategy Update

Ms. Davis explained that she would like SWRPA to apply for a FEMA grant to update the Pre-disaster Mitigation Strategy document. Dr. Wirtenberg agreed that SWRPA should apply for any applicable grants. Dr. Lapp suggested a time line be established. Ms. Davis explained that it would be beneficial to wait for the results of the reconnaissance study, so that the findings and recommendations can be included in the update. Ms. Davis stated that in the interim, unsuccessful recommendations should be identified, and that changes based on the revised FEMA flood maps could be made.

Mr. Hutchison asked when the new FEMA flood maps came out. Dr. Wirtenberg explained that they were not yet publicly available, that the maps have been issued in draft form. She explained that FEMA would be releasing them in September or October of this year.

II. Energy Conservation Planning

Ms. Davis suggested that the committee move forward with an energy conservation plan. Dr. Lapp stated that an energy conservation plan was one of the items dealing with new initiatives suggested late last year. Ms. Davis explained that a similar plan had been created by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which offered ideas as to what to include. Ms. Davis further explained that Governor Rell had released a state energy plan last year which included target goals and benchmarks for the state and state agencies to reduce energy use. Ms. Davis commented that many of the initiatives and benchmarks could easily be incorporated at the town or regional level.

Dr. Wirtenberg stated that the Town of Weston was about to issue an RFP for energy improvements. Mr. Settlemeyer commented that many of the municipalities had an energy conservation task force. Ms. Duleep agreed. Dr. Wirtenberg suggested bringing the task forces together. Mr. Settlemeyer advised that it could be done through the SWRPA purchasing co-op. He commented on the new rates that had been recently locked in for gas, and summarized the process of locking in rates with the co-op.

Mr. Byrnes commented that there are two issues with energy conservation, how to conserve it, and how to move alternative sources along. He suggested that a clearing house could be useful. Mr. Byrnes commented that the cost of heating oil is going to have profound affect in New England. He commented that the more the issue is explored the easier it will be to get ahead of the curve.

III. Norwalk Island Canoe/Kayak Trail Update and Reprint

Ms. Davis explained that SWRPA did not receive funding from the Long Island Sound License Plate Program to update and reprint the Norwalk Island Canoe/Kayak Trail guide. She requested that the committee look into funding to have the guides reprinted. Dr. Lapp commented that these guides “are a best seller” for SWRPA and there was a lot of public interest. Mr. Settlemeyer volunteered to take out a kayak and evaluate what updates need to be made.

Mr. Settlemeyer suggested that the members of the committee review the guide and identify any updates they feel should be made. Mr. Hutchison suggested that Congressman Shays pay for the reprint through his “One Coast, One Future” campaign. Mr. Settlemeyer remark that the committee should look for funding to reprint the guide and suggested that this be revisited at a later date.

Next Meeting

Dr. Lapp explained that previously arrangements had been made to have a representative from FEMA at the next committee meeting. However, a FEMA grants meeting has been scheduled for 10:00 am August 26, at SWRPA. He explained that the date of the meeting was set to accommodate the timing for the FEMA grant cycle. Dr. Lapp indicated that the regions CEO's, planners, and watershed groups have been invited, and that based on Ms. Duleep's suggestion the regions grants coordinators will also be included.

Dr. Lapp stated that items I.A., I.B., I.C., and II are in action; while item I.D. and III are on hold for now.

Dr. Lapp stated that the next meeting would be held on September 29, 2008 at 3:00pm at the SWRPA office.

Adjournment

Mr. Settlemeyer made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Mr. Byrnes. The meeting adjourned at 3:15

Prepared by Nicole Davis, South Western Regional Planning Agency

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