

# Winooski Basin Water Quality Commission Meeting Minutes – December 15, 2022

## Winooski Basin Water Quality Council Members:

NRCDs		RPCs	
✓	Peter Danforth, Lamoille NRCD	✓	Darlene Palola, CCRPC
	Emily Porter-Goff, Alternate		Garret Mott, CCRPC, Alternate
✓	Remy Crettol, Winooski NRCD	✓	Alan Quackenbush, CVRPC
	Russ Barret, Alternate		Robert Wernecke, CVRPC, Alternate
Land Conservation Organizations		Municipalities	
✓	Erin De Vries, VT River Conservancy		Annie Costandi, Essex
	Vacant, Alternate		Sarah McShane, Stowe, Alternate
Watershed Protection Organizations			Nigel Hicks-Tibbles, Northfield
✓	Michele Braun, Friends of the Winooski River	✓	Alice Peal, Waitsfield, Alternate
	Shawn White, Alternate		
✓	Ira Shadis, Friends of the Mad River		
	Brian Shupe, Alternate		
✓	Kinny Perot, Alternate		

**CVRPC Staff:** Brian Voigt

**Guests:** Keith Fritschie (VT Department of Environmental Conservation), Karen Bates (VT Department of Environmental Conservation)

**Meeting called to order:** 1:02 PM

**Updates to the agenda:** none

**Public comment:** none

### Review & Approve minutes from November 17, 2022 meeting

*P. Danforth moved to approve the minutes of the November 17, 2022 meeting. D. Palola seconded. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.*

### CWSP Updates

B. Voigt noted that he is working on the Procurement, Records Retention and Personnel Policies and that the Internal Controls Policy is mostly complete. The plan is to present the policies to the CVRPC Board at their January meeting.

The Requests for Qualifications (RFQ, one for Project Implementors and the other for sub-contractors) will be issued prior to the new year. Submitted qualifications will be reviewed by early February. The CWSP also intends to release a project solicitation round following the BWQC's January 2023 meeting.

A. Quackenbush requested a summary of the two RFQs. B. Voigt responded that there will be two separate RFQs – one for Project Implementors and the other for sub-contractors (for things like engineering services). The RFQs allow the CWSP to pre-qualify entities for specific types of project work to simplify future procurement activities. R. Crettol asked how many of the other CWSPs had already released RFQs and where we stand in relation to the progress of other CWSPs. B. Voigt responded that two or maybe three other CWSPs have released RFQs and that one CWSP has released its first project solicitation round. P. Danforth noted that the Lamoille CWSP released their RFQs more than a month ago. He directly solicited contractors that he thought would want to be on the list of pre-qualified entities. B. Voigt stated that the RFQs released by the Winooski CWSP will look similar to those that have already been issued to limit the burden on potential applicants. He noted two potential reasons for variation in the RFQs released by the different CWSPs: 1) criteria is not relevant to a particular basin; or 2) the weighting of RFQ criteria (i.e. how the qualifications are evaluated and scored).

E. De Vries asked for clarification regarding the RFQ release schedule and plans to directly solicit potential applicants. B. Voigt replied that the plan is to release both RFQs at the same time. He encouraged BWQC members to directly solicit potential applicants or requested they provide him a list of contacts so he could reach out on behalf of the CWSP. He noted that CVRPC already directly solicits forms when issuing RFQs and Requests for Proposals (RFPs). D. Palola asked if the companies intending to serve as implementors or contractors were located throughout the basin or whether they're confined to the larger municipalities. B. Voigt responded that the Project Implementors will include watershed and land conservation organizations, natural resources conservation districts or municipalities. He noted that not all municipalities have the in-house expertise to manage grants / contracts and that would likely prove a limiting factor in which municipalities put forth their qualifications for consideration. He continued by stating that the greater the number of pre-qualified Project Implementors there are the greater the number of projects that will likely be brought before the BWQC and that the process (and prospects for success) will be better for this. D. Palola asked if Regional Planning Commissions and non-profits could be Project Implementors. B. Voigt responded that both of these types of organizations could be pre-qualified as Project Implementors. An RPC could assume that role if there wasn't a good fit with another Project Implementor or if there were a particular project they wanted to advance. A non-profit organization could qualify if it possessed

the necessary project and financial management skills to successfully lead a project. He asked the BWQC members to consider who these potential Project Implementors might be and to develop a list that could be used to directly solicit potential applicants at the time the RFQs are released. R. Crettol asked if the RPC serving as the CWSP could also be a pre-qualified Project Implementor. B. Voigt replied that the RPC administering the CWSP can be a Project Implementor and that if the CVRPC were to bring a project before the BWQC that it would be by another CVRPC staff member. He further noted that it is within the purview of the CWSP to take on a project that has been ranked as a high priority but does not have a pre-qualified Project Implementor or a Project Implementor with the capacity to complete the project within the preferred timeline.

### **Winooski Tactical Basin Plan Updates**

K. Fritschie introduced himself as the new Basin Planner for the Winooski. He presented information on the relevance of the Tactical Basin Plan to the BWQC, the Tactical Basin Planning timeline and the development of geographically-explicit actions (strategies) for key land use / land cover sectors within the basin. Tactical Basin Plans are required by the VT Clean Water Act and focus on major pollutants and stressors (e.g. nutrients, toxins, pathogens, invasive species) that affect water quality. The development of strategies to address these pollutants and stressors include a review of past sector-specific efforts, considering how to increase the adoption of practices relevant to sectors and their pollutants and identifying partners to help minimize barriers and leverage incentives. He continued with an explanation of the Implementation Table included in the [2018 Winooski Tactical Basin Plan](#), describing how the table links priority areas with strategies, partners and potential funding opportunities.

In terms of the current Tactical Basin Planning timeline, the DEC is still in the information gathering phase, including reviewing past projects with other state partners and organizations. Looking forward to the first half of 2023, the DEC Basin Planners will collaborate with partners to develop strategies and complete the draft preliminary plan. He then presented examples of strategy development for: 1) stormwater management, 2) riparian buffers, 3) agricultural lands and 4) monitoring and assessment.

- 1) Stormwater management: There is a need to identify P-efficient, non-regulatory projects with landowners willing to host a project. Strategies to address this need include supporting the continued development of a CVRPC stormwater project database, sustained partner outreach in priority communities and identifying funding to support these activities.
- 2) Riparian buffers: These buffers can be very P-efficient practices, but their efficacy is reduced by invasive species and there are tree stock limitations which

affect project planning and scheduling. There is a need to develop partner-wide understanding of where and when invasive species reduce the effectiveness of this approach as well as a more stable and abundant source of planting stock. Potential strategies to address these needs include supporting the development of guidance and technical assistance (e.g. mapping tools) to help plan for more effective, durable installations over the long-run and identifying funding to increase available stock.

- 3) Agriculture: Farmers / practitioners are sometimes unaware of practices and opportunities relevant to their land. There is a need for a more streamlined network of information sharing. One strategy that could meet this need is the establishment of “farm teams” that filter site-specific conservation program information to landowners through a trusted liaison.
- 4) Monitoring and assessment: Data gaps limit DEC’s understanding of where nutrient source material originates. Identifying monitoring locations and supporting volunteer water quality monitoring efforts could help identify sources of nutrient pollution which in turn could lead to P-reduction project implementation.

K. Fritschie requested assistance from the BWQC distributing a public survey to facilitate information gathering and the identification of specific waterbodies or issues of local concern. BWQC members should notify K. Fritschie and K. Bates about where / how the survey was distributed. B. Voigt mentioned that he intends to reach out to Conservation Commissions (and Selectboards) to advertise this opportunity. K. Fritschie also asked BWQC members to review the strategies from the 2018 Tactical Basin Plan and reach out to him and K. Bates directly to highlight gaps in strategies relevant to your municipality / organization.

E. De Vries asked K. Fritschie who he envisions developing tools like the one described in the riparian buffer example above. K. Fritschie noted that this conversation is in its infancy, that the DEC still needs to understand what tools might prove useful to partners (i.e. partner need) and that there’s flexibility in how the tool is developed with the potential for DEC or a partner organization taking the lead.

### **Developing a Co-Benefit Scoring Matrix & Methodology**

B. Voigt introduced the topic and described the work undertaken since the last meeting as an effort to distill the co-benefit scoring methodology down to something that is both manageable (i.e. able to be done) and meaningful (i.e. useful for distinguishing the merits of one project from another). He compared the list of co-benefits included in the [UVM Co-Benefits White Paper](#) with the list of co-benefits being proposed by the CWSP for inclusion in the project scoring and ranking process. For each of the five categories he presented the co-benefit definition, the conditions under

which a project is considered to produce a co-benefit, data that can be used to quantify the co-benefit and the number of points earned for each of the co-benefit criteria.

- 1) Environmental Justice: realized when a project is situated in a Census Block Group where one or more demographic conditions exist to warrant the identification of that area as an Environmental Justice Focus Population. This co-benefit draws on Act 154 (signed by the Governor earlier this year).
- 2) Ecological Benefits: realized when a project reduces sediment and / or non-P nutrient loads to stressed, altered, impaired or priority waterways to which it is hydrologically connected. This co-benefit emphasizes strategies identified in the Winooski Tactical Basin Plan.

A. Peal asked where the data for Priority Waters and 303(d) streams, rivers, lakes and ponds. B. Voigt responded that the data is produced by the DEC and available via a public-facing data repository (the Vermont Center for Geographic Information). M. Braun noted the focus on aquatic resources and wondered if terrestrial resources would be included in the Ecological Benefits consideration. B. Voigt responded that those considerations are at least partially represented via the priority waters supporting, for example, aquatic biota and fishing. M. Braun asked whether improving habitat anywhere in the watershed is a good thing. B. Voigt responded that if the BWQC wants to treat all of the surface water in the basin the same that it doesn't make sense to include this as a co-benefit since every project will have the "same" net positive result on the adjacent surface water. M. Braun disagreed and suggested that many projects don't have a habitat restoration component. She offered an example where two stormwater projects come before the BWQC, but only one includes a habitat restoration component, the one featuring habitat restoration should be awarded more points. B. Voigt responded that regardless of whether there was a specific habitat restoration component of a project that the ultimate result of implementing a stormwater project is downstream habitat improvement. R. Crettol expressed concern that limiting the co-benefit to impaired waters is too restrictive. He would like to see protection of rare, threatened and endangered species, species of greatest conservation need and habitat connectivity (e.g. number of miles of stream connected, acres of floodplain reconnection, invasive species mitigation) addressed in this co-benefit. P. Danforth reminded the BWQC that the primary focus of the group is P-reduction. He acknowledged the varying perspectives that were presented and noted that he thinks it unlikely that this (individual) co-benefit will be the factor that tips the scale. He recommended that the BWQC come to agreement on an initial approach that can be modified as necessary after it has been applied to a round of project evaluations. He also noted there is other project funding (Enhancement Grants) to support projects that may fall outside of the priorities of the CWSP

program. R. Crettol noted the utility of the proposed idea but indicated it falls short in terms of habitat and that perhaps an additional category focused on that should be included in the co-benefits matrix. B. Voigt requested that members who are not satisfied with the proposed approach respond with specificity about what to consider and how to operationalize that consideration within the co-benefit evaluation process.

- 3) Ecosystem Services: realized when a project improves carbon sequestration or flood resilience potential on the landscape. This co-benefit draws on the [Millennium Ecosystem Assessment](#) classification of ecosystem services into four categories – with a particular short-term emphasis on regulating services (specifically carbon sequestration and flood resilience) and medium-term expansion to include provisioning and cultural services. His recommendation is to identify specific project types that “qualify” for co-benefit credit (e.g. carbon sequestration – riparian planting).

P. Danforth supported this approach as a starting point but also noted that project evaluation will be contextual and that if a proposed project includes services not on this list they should be considered at that time. B. Voigt noted the issue here is that there is not always data to support the claims of expected ecosystem service (generation and delivery) and by starting with a narrow focus that credits specific project types with ecosystem service co-benefit points the BWQC could avoid representing project characteristics with qualitative assertions instead of quantifiable values.

- 4) Community Building: realized when a project involves the community in data collection and decision-making, enhances the working landscape and provides recreational benefits. This co-benefit draws on the information contained in the UVM Co-Benefits White Paper.
- 5) Education: realized when a project includes aspects of: a) public outreach designed to educate community members about the importance of phosphorus reduction and watershed health; or b) community involvement in project development and implementation. This co-benefit draws on the information contained in the UVM Co-Benefits White Paper with an option to geographically target activities.

B. Voigt noted that this co-benefit could be included in Community Building, but it was kept separate based on the conversation from the previous BWQC meeting where members seemed inclined to assign a low weight to this co-benefit. A. Quackenbush supported maintaining separate categories for Community Building and Education. He suggested that the community involvement component (of the Education co-benefit) should instead be included in the Community Building co-benefit. BWQC members

agreed with this suggestion. BWQC members were not inclined to include the proposed education multiplier.

B. Voigt summarized the conversation by noting the group is generally in agreement on the Environmental Justice, Community Building and Education co-benefits, and have tentatively agreed to a very narrow definition of Ecosystem Services, but still have some work to do on defining the Ecological Benefits to be considered. K. Perot suggested this appears more like a disease model rather than a wellness model – focusing on what is impaired and where the deficiencies are within the basin versus habitat restoration and enhancement. P. Danforth agreed with this perspective. D. Palola argued that the BWQC needs to protect high quality waters and that this is a strategy included in the Tactical Basin Plan.

In terms of next steps, B. Voigt intends to spend more time fleshing out the Ecological Benefits and Ecosystem Services co-benefits and that he hopes to receive input from BWQC members that were not satisfied with the current proposal. He offered to organize a small-group meeting, host one-on-one meetings or receive written input to help guide revisions to the proposed methodology. A. Quackenbush recommended a deadline for comments. B. Voigt proposed January 5, 2023 as the deadline for comments to leave him sufficient time to incorporate comments and distribute meeting materials with enough lead time prior to the January 2023 meeting.

### **Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for January 19, 2023.

### **Adjourn**

*R. Crettol moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:01 PM. E. De Vries seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*