

Winooski Basin Water Quality Commission Meeting Minutes – March 16, 2023

Winooski Basin Water Quality Council Members:

NRCDs		RPCs	
✓	Peter Danforth, Lamoille NRCD	✓	Darlene Palola, CCRPC
	Emily Porter-Goff, Alternate		Garret Mott, CCRPC, Alternate
✓	Casey Spencer, 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)

Meeting called to order: 1:06 PM

Updates to the agenda: None

Public comment: None

Review & Approve minutes from February 16, 2022 meeting

A. Peal moved to approve the minutes of the February 16, 2023 meeting. A. Costandi seconded. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.

Project Scoring, Ranking & Prioritization

B. Voigt thanked M. Braun for sharing detailed information for projects the Friends of the Winooski River (FWR) have successfully solicited funds for in the past. B. Voigt used this project-level information to test the CWSP project scoring methodology and present the findings to the BWQC. In addition to the FWR projects, B. Voigt included a

stormwater project currently being implemented by CVRPC to round out the examples.

B. Voigt presented the Project Scoring matrix and described each of the four factors:

1. P-reduction efficiency is worth up to 75 points; points are awarded on a sliding scale based on the ratio of proposed cost to overall p-reduction.

B. Voigt reminded the BWQC that the Winooski CWSP receives approximately \$1 million per year to reduce p-loading by nearly 70 kg. This translates to roughly \$15,000 / kg p-reduction. With these values in mind, he presented a table outlining the sliding scale used for scoring projects, and made the case for considering implementation-phase project differently than design-phase projects. Implementation-phase projects projected to cost less than \$7,500 / kg p-reduction will be awarded the full 75 points for their p-reduction efficiency score. As the cost / kg p-reduction increases, the points awarded decrease. Implementation-phase projects with anticipated costs in excess of \$30,000 / kg p-reduction will not earn p-reduction efficiency points. Lastly, B. Voigt referenced Table 3 from the [Water Quality Restoration Grant Target and Fund Allocation Methodology](#) as a resource for BWQC members.

P. Danforth predicted the p-reduction efficiency scores would be low. B. Voigt acknowledged that point and noted that he is not proposing a minimum project score necessary to qualify for funding. That may change for future solicitation rounds as the CWSP and the BWQC gain experience with project evaluation. B. Voigt also noted that P. Danforth's suggestion is borne out in the examples he will present in subsequent slides.

2. Project risk is worth up to 10 points (the higher the point total, the lower the perceived risk); up to 2.5 points are awarded for each of the following: a) landowner relations – landowner is working with an organization and is committed to the project; b) organizational capacity – the CWSP is currently pre-qualifying Clean Water Partners; pre-qualified organizations will receive full organizational capacity points unless their staff are currently overburdened; c) Operations & Maintenance agreement – is there an Operations & Maintenance agreement in place / is the land owner amenable to the Operations & Maintenance requirements; and d) permitting – will consider whether permit(s) are required to implement the project and whether any permitting challenges are anticipated that might delay or derail the project.
3. Projects with a lifespan exceeding 15 years are awarded 5 points; and

4. Co-benefits are worth up to 10 points; points are awarded according to the methodology adopted at the February 16, 2023 meeting.

B. Voigt completed his overview of project scoring by noting that the total Project Score is calculated by summing the values of the four factors described above. Although the total Project Score is the sum of all four factors, it is largely determined by the p-reduction efficiency score. The remaining three factors should prove useful for ranking and prioritizing projects with otherwise similar cost structures (i.e. p-reduction efficiencies).

A. Quackenbush remarked that the example helped clarify the approach the CWSP will take for scoring projects. P. Danforth asked for clarification on the weighting of co-benefits. B. Voigt responded that the co-benefit weights represent an average of the weights assigned by each BWQC member. Individual BWQC members weight each of the co-benefits. Given the variety of perspectives represented by BWQC members, it is expected that co-benefit weights will vary from member to member. P. Danforth noted that this fixes the weight for all projects and that he'd weight factors differently depending on where the projects are. B. Voigt responded that although this does fix the co-benefit weight, it does not fix the score. He also noted the difficulty in comparing project scores if different scoring methods are applied. A. Peal asked P. Danforth if he was proposing to score projects differently based on their physical location. He responded in the affirmative. B. Voigt suggested he walk the BWQC through the project scoring examples to help clarify outstanding questions, noting that project location is accounted for in some of the co-benefit scores. A. Peal also asked if the CWSP and the BWQC guidelines were the same. B. Voigt responded that they are and then continued his response by describing the project evaluation process. Projects will be scored by the CWSP using the methodology described today. The CWSP forwards project scores to the BWQC for their review, and projects are ranked and prioritized at the subsequent BWQC meeting. P. Danforth asked how the scoring would work under a scenario where a BWQC member's organization has proposed a project for Formula Grant funding and whether that organization's input on co-benefit weights would (or should) matter. B. Voigt responded that the co-benefit weighting scheme is not specific to a project, it's specific to the process. The BWQC contribution to this part of the process is the co-benefits weighting scheme. The CWSP uses this information to derive the co-benefit scores based on the methodology adopted by the BWQC.

B. Voigt described the details of the four sample projects. He explained his reasoning for the scores he assigned for each. In response to the Bedrosian Riparian Planting project rundown, M. Braun noted that she would have expected to see points for ecological benefits to be awarded. B. Voigt responded that while there may be

ecological benefits associated with a riparian planting, for this particular project no ecological co-benefits points are awarded based on the definition of ecological benefits adopted by the BWQC. M. Braun suggested that this definition be reconsidered in the future. B. Voigt reminded the BWQC that it is important that the project review process be feasible, consistent and supported by available data.

B. Voigt summarized the results of the four projects and then offered the CWSP funding recommendation: fund the Bedrosian Riparian Planting and Montpelier Stump Dump proposals; postpone a decision on funding the Barre Town Recreation Fields until a future funding round (depending on what other project proposals are received); and reject funding for the Moretown Elementary School & Town Office proposal.

A. Peal asked if the Moretown Elementary School & Town Office project review considered their potential wastewater project. B. Voigt responded that it did not. A. Quackenbush asked whether the Moretown project was funded under an existing state program. B. Voigt responded that it was funded under the Design Implementation Block Grant. K. Fritschie asked for clarification on why the CWSP recommended the Montpelier Stump Dump project for funding but not the Barre Town Recreation Fields given that they both were awarded a similar score. B. Voigt responded that the Montpelier Stump Dump project is still in the design phase and that in order to keep a deep roster of potential projects on the CWSP radar that it's worth assuming increased risk by funding these projects. Hopefully, advancing through the design phases will eliminate outstanding questions (related to overall cost and the expected p-reduction return on investment). P. Danforth asked if the number of projects being proposed were different (i.e. fewer) whether the CWSP would reconsider the recommendation for the Barre Town Recreation Fields project. B. Voigt responded that this is where the relationship between the CWSP and BWQC is critical. The CWSP is making a recommendation. The BWQC can decide to accept the recommendation as is, or make revisions based on their ranking and prioritization processes. The only time this may be problematic is if the BWQC decides to prioritize a project whose cost is considered prohibitive by the CWSP. Even in this case though, there is room for compromise. If the CWSP has funded numerous low-cost projects and has met their p-reduction target, remaining funds could be used for projects that would otherwise have been deemed too costly. K. Fritschie asked if the CWSP has evaluated enough projects to have a sense of the variability in project scores based on project types. B. Voigt responded that he has not, but expects this information to be more readily available as the CWSP advances through project solicitation rounds. A. Quackenbush asked when the first project solicitation round will begin. B. Voigt responded the first solicitation will be issued March 29, 2023.

BWQC Meeting Schedule

B. Voigt revisited the meeting schedule conversation from the last meeting. He asked the BWQC if they would like to host a “short” meeting the month prior to each ranking & prioritization meeting to afford applicants an opportunity to respond to CWSP / BWQC questions. Following the Q & A session, the CWSP will calculate the project scores and distribute that information to the BWQC for their review prior to the subsequent meeting. A. Quackenbush, I. Shadis and A. Peal supported this approach. As noted previously, the first project solicitation will be issued March 29, 2023. Proposals will be due on May 1, 2023 and those materials will be distributed to the BWQC for their review prior to the May 15, 2023 BWQC meeting.

Announcements

K. Fritschie noted that draft strategies for the Winooski Tactical Basin Plan have been released to partners for their review. A full draft will be ready for review in July. B. Voigt announced that interviews for the Natural Resources Planner have been scheduled and that the CVRPC hopes to onboard the new staff member in the next month.

Adjourn

P. Danforth moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:08 PM. I. Shadis seconded. Motion carried unanimously.