

# Winooski Basin Water Quality Council Meeting Minutes – October 19, 2023

**Winooski Basin Water Quality Council Members:**

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

**CVRPC Staff:** B. Voigt, L. Frasca

**Guests:** Keith Fritschie (Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation), Dan Albrecht (Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission), Royal DeLegge (Town of Northfield)

**Call to order & Roll call:** B. Voigt called the meeting to order at 1:33 PM.

**Updates to agenda:** none

**Public comment:** none

**Review & Approve minutes from July 20, 2023 meeting (action)**

*P. Danforth moved to approve the minutes of the July 20, 2023 meeting. E. De Vries seconded. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.*

**Clean Water Service Provider (CLEAN WATER SERVICE PROVIDER) Updates (discussion)**

B. Voigt provided an update on the Vermont Land Trust berm-removal project, noting the award documents have been signed and work has commenced. L. Frasca offered

an update on Winooski Basin Clean Water Service Provider project identification efforts and progress on a Water Quality Project Development Block Grant proposal that CVRPC intends to submit to the Addison County Regional Planning Commission. B. Voigt explained that the goal of this project is to identify and develop non-regulatory, phosphorous-reduction projects whose design and implementation could be supported with Formula Grant funding. He went on to note that the intention is not necessarily for CVRPC to serve as the Project Implementor, although they could in the absence of another partner. Rather, CVRPC would use this process to develop a queue of potential projects that could be handed off to pre-qualified Project Implementors to shepherd them through final design and implementation. B. Voigt also reminded the Basin Water Quality Council of the distinction between CVRPC in its role as the Clean Water Service Provider for the Winooski River Basin and CVRPC in its role as the Regional Planning Commission for Central Vermont. While the Winooski Basin Water Quality Council has a say in how the Clean Water Service Provider conducts itself, that does not extend to the activities of the Regional Planning Commission. The primary reason CVRPC intends to apply for this funding is to avoid a future Project Solicitation round where no proposals are received.

M. Braun responded that Friends of the Winooski prefers to be the first point of contact with landowners rather than have a project handed off to them. E. De Vries asked what CVRPC would do with grant funds if awarded. B. Voigt responded that CVRPC would use the money for project development with a focus on projects that are fundable with Formula Grant money and cost-effective with respect to their phosphorous-reduction potential. This could include reviving projects that have been dormant for an extended period of time. E. De Vries and M. Braun requested the opportunity to review the list of projects CVRPC is proposing to address with the Block Grant funding to ensure it does not include projects their organizations are currently working on. K. Fritschie suggested it would be beneficial to share the list of projects CVRPC intends to prioritize. B. Voigt responded that CVRPC will share a draft of the proposal with partner organizations prior to submitting the funding request.

M. Braun commented that the project records in the Watershed Projects Database are not always up to date. For example, a project designated as preliminary design may be further along in the implementation process than the database indicates because funding was secured from sources other than the Department of Environmental Conservation and an update to the Watershed Projects Database was not required as part of that award. B. Voigt responded that it was incumbent on project implementors to update the database, regardless of where their most recent project funding came from, so that the database remains a centralized location for tracking the status of projects and to make it easier to identify projects for future Formula Grant (or other) funding.

E. De Vries suggested the lack of capacity on all parties is problematic. B. Voigt noted that CVRPC and the Clean Water Service Provider have the ability to take on additional work and encouraged project implementors to consider ways to capitalize on this availability. P. Danforth spoke to his experience in the Lamoille Basin. He suggested inheriting projects as a place the Clean Water Service Provider could play a role in projects. B. Voigt is in favor of project adoption and mentioned that the DEC is still deciding on the amount of phosphorus credits a Clean Water Service Provider could claim from inherited projects. Once that decision has been made, opportunities for project adoption should be pursued. B. Voigt noted that we do have capacity at CVRPC for this work.

B. Voigt noted that CVRPC staff will discuss the potential to conduct Lake Wise Assessments in the Calais / Woodbury region with the Department of Environmental Conservation staff. CVRPC currently has funding for three stormwater projects in the area and will be coordinating with the town's planning and conservation commissions as part of that effort. Expanding the conversation to introduce Lake Wise Assessments is another opportunity to identify potential projects.

E. De Vries asked for a list of pre-qualified Project Implementors. The list of pre-qualified Project Implementors includes: Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, Friends of the Mad River, Friends of the Winooski River, Lamoille County Natural Resources Conservation District, Vermont Land Trust and Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District. The Caledonia County Natural Resources Conservation District has submitted their qualification materials for consideration. The Request for Qualifications for Project Implementors remains open on a rolling basis and Vermont River Conservancy's application is welcome anytime. B. Voigt mentioned that he is also hoping to broaden list of Project Implementors to include municipalities throughout the Winooski River Basin.

A. Peal asked if we can expect any projects in this next round of solicitation. She asked if Winooski Basin Water Quality Council members should be asking around their region for potential projects. B. Voigt responded that Winooski Basin Water Quality Council members represent different constituencies and getting the word out about opportunities for funding and engagement is part of the membership responsibility.

B. Voigt explained the order of Project Solicitation. The call for projects will be open for about 6 weeks. The projects will undergo an initial review during the December 2023 meeting and prioritized for funding at the January 2024 meeting. The subsequent Project Solicitation round will open in January 2024. E. De Vries asked about the projects L. Frasca mentioned that were not found in the Watershed Projects

Database. He listed three documents whose projects were not included in the Watershed Projects Database: Stevens and Jail Branch River Corridor Plan, Moretown River Corridor Plan and the Mad River Headwaters Stream Geomorphic Assessment.

### **Outreach & Communications Policy (discussion)**

B. Voigt described the current steps the Clean Water Service Provider follows when advertising a Project Solicitation round. He then listed additional steps that could be taken to promote a call for projects and asked the Basin Water Quality Council for their feedback.

A. Peal recommended an all-of-the-above approach. A. Quackenbush recommended mentioning each call for proposals in the CVRPC weekly newsletter, noting that it reaches a lot of people. He also suggested including a special section in the newsletter describing the Clean Water Service Provider program. B. Voigt replied that he and L. Frasca will be presenting an overview of the Clean Water Service Provider program to the CVRPC Board before the end of the year. I. Shadis echoed A. Peal's suggestion that the more pre-work that can be done will minimize the effort required to complete the application process. He asked if a slide deck would be made available that could be used by partners (individually or in collaboration with the Clean Water Service Provider) to present to their constituencies. Lastly, he recommended a review of the draft policy currently being considered by the Northern Lake Champlain Basin Water Quality Council. B. Voigt responded that he and L. Frasca will assemble a slide deck that can be used for this purpose and invited collaboration in reaching as broad of an audience as possible.

N. Hicks asked how many towns are in the Basin and what the workload would be to present to all of them. B. Voigt responded that there are about 50 towns in the Winooski River Basin. K. Fritschie noted in the chat that there are approximately 30 – 35 municipalities with significant land area in the basin. B. Voigt proposed arranging meetings with multiple municipalities simultaneously to further minimize the workload burden. Another option he proposed was to record a video explaining the role of the Clean Water Service Provider and the opportunities that Formula Grant funds represent that can be shared broadly before following up with interested municipalities and organizations. E. De Vries asked for any presentation to include a slide listing pre-qualified Project Implementors. N. Hicks recommended using Front Porch Forum as an avenue for advertising. M. Braun reminded the group that Friends of the Winooski River has volunteer Front Porch Forum posters. D. Albrecht mentioned Regional Planning Commissions can post to Front Porch Forum twice a month for free and that these posting could include links and / or contact information to the various Clean Water Service Providers throughout the state.

B. Voigt inquired requested feedback on the idea of conducting pre-proposal project evaluation and assistance with proposal preparation. Projects with a low pre-proposal score could still seek Formula Grant funding, but this might also offer organizations the opportunity to reconsider other funding opportunities before investing time in the full application process. If a decision is made for the Clean Water Service Provider to assist with proposal preparation, a threshold score below which assistance would not be offered should be established. P. Danforth agreed this approach could help organizations prioritize which projects in their portfolio they pursue Formula Grant funding for, as well as when to look elsewhere for funding. K Fritschie requested that organizations reach out to him for assistance with estimating phosphorous-reduction potential since that is one of the key factors driving funding decisions. A. Quackenbush agrees this would be helpful.

### **Potential projects roundtable (discussion)**

B. Voigt offered opening remarks for the projects roundtable discussion noting that he sees this as a way to improve communication among Basin Water Quality Council members as well as keep the Clean Water Service Provider apprised of what to expect in response to the call for proposals.

M. Braun described the projects Friends of the Winooski River intends to seek Formula Grant funding for, including: 1) implementation funding for a project on the Steven's Branch in Barre; 2) final design funding for a stormwater sewer disconnection project in Northfield; 3) design and (eventually) implementation funding for a stream project on the Dog River to mitigate the effects of a severe head cut; and 4) design funding for a floodplain reconnection project in East Montpelier and Plainfield. Friends of the Winooski River are also working on a clean water project at Baker Pond access area for which they have already applied for Lake Champlain Basin Program funding. She also noted that SLR is assessing options for the Clark Sawmill dam (in Cabot) that blew out during the July 2023 storm. Friends of the Winooski River are only interested in this project if the site is publicly owned, which it currently is not. B. Voigt asked if M. Braun knows how the Department of Environmental Conservation will compute the phosphorous reduction for a partially blown out dam. M. Braun responded that she did not, but that she has engaged the state in this conversation.

P. Danforth remarked that the Lamoille County Conservation District worked with Watershed Consulting tom complete a Stormwater Master Plan for Stowe. Of the priority projects, three progressed through the 30% design process and all of these may be suitable for Formula Grant funding. These projects are ranked high for phosphorus-reduction potential, but a quantitative estimate is not provided. The three projects include: 1) Baggy Knees parking lot in the area of Stowe's recycling center; 2) the covered bridge parking lot area near Gull Brook; and 3) along Moscow Road. All

three projects will request funding for final design. M. Braun is also working on the Gull Brook and P. Danforth would like to collaborate on this project.

E. De Vries stated that the Vermont River Conservancy will not be applying for Formula Grant funds for river corridor easement projects, but they will likely apply for funding for riparian buffer projects. Her organization does not believe that Clean Water Service Providers should be creating river corridor easement projects until there is a better process in place. B. Voigt made the point that easement projects are fundable through CLEAN WATER SERVICE PROVIDER if organizations are interested in pursuing these opportunities.

K. Fritschie described a Peacham Pond stormwater project in Caledonia County that should have a 100% design in December. Whether that will be completed in time to request implementation funds in this Project Solicitation round or the next remains to be seen.

Friends of the Mad River will not be submitting any proposals in the next funding round I. Shadis noted they are working to complete a scoping project that will generate about 30 projects that may be considered in future Project Solicitation rounds. The Conservation Commissions in the Towns of Waitsfield and Warren recently applied for funding through the Lake Champlain Basin Program for buffer planting projects. If the proposal is not awarded funds, they will submit proposals in a subsequent Project Solicitation round.

The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission is not looking to actively develop projects at this time. However, D. Albrecht noted that his organization does have the capacity to manage projects if there are municipalities that would benefit from that service.

### **Announcements (discussion)**

N. Hicks reminded the Basin Water Quality Council to be on the lookout for the next Project Solicitation to be released later this month. A. Peal asked if we will continue to work on an Outreach and Communications Policy at a future meeting. B. Voigt responded that with D. Albrecht's permission the CLEAN WATER SERVICE PROVIDER will share a draft of the Northern Lake Champlain Clean Water Service Providers policy for discussion at the December 2023 meeting. This would set the stage for adopting a policy during the January 2024 meeting.

### **Adjourn**

*A. Quakenbush made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:57 PM. P. Danforth seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*