

Winooski Basin Water Quality Council (BWQC) Meeting Minutes – 21 December 2023

Winooski Basin Water Quality Council Members:

NRCDS		RPCs	
✓	Peter Danforth, Lamoille NRCD		Darlene Palola, CCRPC
	Emily Porter-Goff, Alternate		Garret Mott, CCRPC, Alternate
✓	Adelaide Dumm, 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
	Vacant, Alternate		
✓	Ira Shadis, Friends of the Mad River		
	Brian Shupe, Alternate		
✓	Kinny Perot, Alternate		

CVRPC Staff: B. Voigt, L. Frasca

Guests: Emily Finnegan (District Manager, Caledonia County Natural Resources Conservation District), Keith Fritschie (Watershed Planner, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation)

Call to order & Roll call: B. Voigt called the meeting to order at 1:07 PM.

Updates to agenda: none

Public comment: none

Review & Approve minutes from October 19, 2023 meeting (action)

A. Peal moved to approve the minutes of the October 19, 2023 meeting. E. De Vries seconded. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.

Appoint new Alternate Representatives for Friends of the Winooski River (action)

M. Braun noted that Friends of the Winooski River have two new staff members starting in January 2024. She provided an overview of their respective backgrounds

and qualifications. B. Voigt reminded the Winooski River Basin Water Quality Council of the process for appointing Alternate Members.

E. De Vries made a motion to appoint Taylor Litwin and Samuel Puddicombe as Alternate Members to the Winooski River Basin Water Quality Council. K. Perot Seconded. No discussion. Motion passed unanimously.

E. De Vries asked about nominating an Alternate Member for the Vermont River Conservancy seat. She will submit materials to support the nomination of Remy Crettol prior to the January 2024 Winooski River Basin Water Quality Council meeting.

FY24 Project Solicitation Round 2 Proposal Pre-review (discussion)

B. Voigt introduced the proposal pre-review agenda item, noting that a two-slide summary for each of the five proposals was included in the meeting packet. Four proposals were submitted by Friends of the Winooski River and one proposal was submitted by the Caledonia County Natural Resources Conservation District. Project proponents were offered an opportunity to present their proposals and respond to Basin Water Quality Council members.

Friends of the Winooski River – Bull Run Tributary Restoration Implementation at Camp Wihakowi: M. Braun described the proposed project located on the site of a dam removal completed in 2020. Two tributaries were impacted by the July 2023 flood. The downstream tributary has developed a 4.5-foot headcut with the potential to migrate upstream for several hundred yards. With continued migration of the headcut comes significant potential for a large amount of sediment to enter the Dog River. The implementation of this Strategic Wood Addition project would prevent sediment from entering the river. I. Shadis asked who would do the implementation. M. Braun said the project would go out to bid so she is unsure at this time. K. Perot asked how the phosphorus reduction was calculated for this project. M. Braun responded that the Department of Environmental Conservation River Scientist, Staci Pomeroy, used the Functioning Floodplain Initiative tool to calculate phosphorus reduction. E. De Vries asked if there are other tributaries that were affected by the storm. M. Braun replied that there are two tributaries that were considered intermittent following prior work at the site. However, that work was completed during drought-like conditions, and the downstream tributary may actually be perennial. The upstream tributary is intermittent and has an 18" headcut with lumber and piping that was added at some point to create a pool. The majority of project is on the downstream tributary.

Friends of the Winooski River – Coburn Road Floodplain Restoration Final Design: M. Braun described this project as being situated on a semi-agricultural property just

over 30 acre and bisected by the East Montpelier – Plainfield town line. This area includes abutments from the original Route 2 bridge. Rip-rap was put in place to protect the house but the material did not hold up in the July 2023 flood. The landowners did a lot of research and looked at many floodplain restoration options. They have decided to remove all constructed bank armoring and reestablish a floodplain forest. The house and the road make this site challenging to remove everything without putting infrastructure at risk. Fitzgerald Environmental Associates completed preliminary scoping work on this site during the last field season. They offered recommendations for floodplain restoration that would minimize flood risks to the house and road. E. De Vries asked if this is the property visible from Route 2 and if the entire property is being considered through this project. M. Braun responded in the affirmative. A. Peal asked if the sediment that was deposited is now a threat for entering the river. M. Braun replied that the Natural Resource Conservation Service collected post-flood field data this week after the rain on snow event and the property did flood but the house stayed dry. A. Peal asked if the berms were preexisting. M. Braun said there are a lot of berms and it remains to be determined which berms will be modified. She also noted that the Vermont Land Trust is working with an upstream property owner who is considering a river corridor easement.

Friends of the Winooski River – Nantanna Mill Stormwater Project: M. Braun described the preliminary design work, funded by Watersheds United Vermont, that has been under development for the last year and a half. The Town of Northfield considers this a high priority project because of the large amount of stormwater runoff generated from the site. The site is an amalgamation of buildings constructed over time for a variety of uses. An underground filter was constructed to separate wool fibers from the wastewater stream. This project is seeking funding to support a final engineering design to retrofit the historic wool fiber separator as a sand filter for managing stormwater. A. Peal asked if the stormwater infrastructure will need to be maintained. M. Braun responded that the system will require periodic maintenance.

Friends of the Winooski River – Strategic Wood Additions: M. Braun described how Friends of the Winooski River have been working with Redstart Consulting to identify and develop four different Strategic Wood Addition projects. They have worked together on a project in Cabot and Redstart has three other projects in the Winooski Basin. Redstart has been working with The Department of Environmental Conservation's Winooski Basin Planner, Keith Fritschie, and River Scientist, Staci Pomeroy to establish a method for calculating the phosphorus reductions for these projects. Redstart still needs to do more field work to establish the phosphorus efficiencies of these projects. K. Fritschie said Redstart's field work will help inform the use of the Functioning Floodplain Initiative tool in calculating phosphorus reductions for projects of this type. A final design is needed in order to further refine the

phosphorus-reduction benefits. M. Braun asked K. Fritschie about Strategic Wood Additions in the bigger picture for the Department of Environmental Conservation's Rivers Program. K. Fritschie said, he and Staci Pomeroy see these projects as promising candidates for clean water project funding based on the cost effectiveness of preliminary phosphorus reduction estimates. Staci Pomeroy is the point person for reviewing these projects. P. Danforth is working on a Strategic Wood Addition project on an overlapping property in Lamoille County. He asked K. Fritschie if historical review is needed for this project type. K. Fritschie responded that this is considered a floodplain and river restoration project type and that there is no exemption from historical review at this time. M. Braun clarified that this proposal is for four different projects in four different towns. The property in Elmore that M. Braun and P. Danforth are working on straddles both watersheds and Redstart is working in both locations. B. Voigt said as a CWSP we are excited for the revised phosphorus numbers to gain some more certainty on the efficiency of these projects. The amounts listed currently make this an attractive project.

Caledonia County Natural Resources Conservation District – Peacham Pond

Department of Fish and Wildlife Access – Stormwater Implementation: E. Finnegan, District Manager, Caledonia County Natural Resources Conservation District described this project proposal. The final design was funded by a Natural Resource Conservation Services enhancement block grant. The water quality volume being treated is small because the total project area is a small. The access point sees high year-round use. The Peacham Pond Association would assume the bulk of the maintenance activities and have expressed a desire to keep operations and maintenance costs to a minimum. This site has high community value and is used by many recreationists from within and outside the area. This is a good demonstration project for other potential Lake Wise projects. K. Perot asked if there is an outflow for the pond. K. Fritschie said there is an outflow into Molly's Fall Pond. K. Perot asked when we evaluate phosphorus reductions are we looking at reduction in general, or just those that contribute to the Lake Champlain Total Maximum Daily Load goals? B. Voigt replied that if the Department of Environmental Conservation assigns a phosphorus credit to a project then it would contribute to meeting the Total Maximum Daily Load goals for Lake Champlain.

Following the presentation of the proposals, B. Voigt. explained the next steps for project review. CVRPC staff will score the projects and draft a memo to the BWQC by the first week of the new year. The next Basin Water Quality Council Meeting is scheduled for 18 January 2023. At that meeting the Basin Water Quality Council will vote to prioritize funding for the projects. He encouraged Council members to send comments or thoughts to Clean Water Service Provider staff.

Project Development funding (discussion)

B. Voigt presented a breakdown of project development funding, noting that there is \$118,596 of funding for project identification and development from SFY23 and SFY24. No project development funding has been requested or spent to date. He proposed three alternatives for consideration: 1) Create a simplified application process for requesting Project Identification & Development funds; 2) Allocate up to \$10K per year for each pre-qualified Project Implementor, noting that this amount may need to be changed in the future depending on the number of pre-qualified Project Implementors; and / or 3) Fund the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission to further explore municipal support for water quality improvement projects.

K. Perot asked if these options are mutually exclusive, suggesting that all three are worthwhile alternatives. B. Voigt said any or all of the above could be feasible. M. Braun explained Friends of the Winooski currently has project development funding, but once that is spent down they would be ready for more. E. De Vries said looking forward to 2024 and beyond the Vermont River Conservancy would like project development funds when they are pre-qualified as a Project Implementor. She also supports the idea of simplifying the application, but noted that she has not looked at the application for funding since 2022. B. Voigt responded that there is not a separate proposal for Project Identification and Development. An applicant simply selects that project phase for which they are requesting funding. If we allocated \$10,000 for each of the seven pre-qualified Project Implementors, there would still be money left in case additional Project Implementors are pre-qualified before the end of the fiscal year.

A. Peal is interested in funding the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission to review town plans to identify opportunities for advancing water quality goals. B. Voigt replied that we have completed an analysis of 13 town plans (using 604b funding) and the remaining towns will be reviewed once funding resources become available. A. Peal would vote for that funding and asks that this work be included in the regional plan update.

M. Braun spoke about the need for application simplification. Project Development applications often ask for projects to be identified in order to apply for money to identify projects. With the recent flooding project identification grant workplans need to be rewritten and adaptable. Different projects may arise along the way and a funding source that is flexible is needed. B. Voigt agreed for the need for funding that is suitable to the workflow of project implementors. Maybe the commitment needed for a simplified application is not on the project level but on the sub-watershed level. A. Dunn agreed with E. De Vries and M. Braun about application simplification. She

asked if the Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District is a pre-qualified Project Implementor and explained they have not yet applied for projects but are working on expanding their capacity to do so. She also likes the idea of having funding for scoping and project development. B. Voigt confirmed that the Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District is a pre-qualified Project Implementor. M. Braun said it's hard to tell municipal boards and commissions that work on their priorities will be delayed because of funding restrictions.

E. De Vries asked for a list of pre-qualified Project Implementors. B. Voigt responded that they are listed on the website. He mentioned the importance for Project Implementors to communicate with each other so as not to duplicate efforts and better work with landowners in need.

B. Voigt asked Council members to continue considering ideas to simplify the application process and wants to keep the conversation going. Staff will create a draft plan for project development funding based on this conversation to discuss at the January 2024 Basin Water Quality Council meeting.

Outreach & Communications Policy (discussion)

B. Voigt explained what the Winooski Basin and Northern Lake Clean Water Service Providers are already doing regarding outreach and communication. He asked the Council for additional ideas on connecting with a broader audience, including marginalized populations and organizations with water quality missions?

A. Peal likes the idea of public workshops and a community roadshow. Taking this to a select board meeting could be effective but planning commissions could be even more effective. The presentations should be brought to watershed partners and the Ridge to Rivers program. I. Shadis thinks all of these audiences would be important and the roadshow would be particularly valuable for targeting planning commissions, conservation commissions and municipal leaders. A. Peal commented, if you bring this information in a forum or presentations to Yestermorrow it could surface projects / problems that you didn't know about. I. Shadis said this information trends toward action and the program is technical but could be further developed for a broader audience.

B. Voigt has been invited to the Waterbury Selectboard to talk about the Clean Water Service Provider program and water quality and stormwater project opportunities in Waterbury. L. Frasca mentioned the possibility of adapting presentations to fit the audience and highlighting projects that are known to be cost efficient. K. Perot likes the idea and timing post flooding, she thinks the commission would be good audiences and people are eager to act now more than ever.

I. Shadis has been asked to talk about flooding in the Mad River Valley and wondered if there would be presentation materials available by February / March 2024. B. Voigt responded that presentation materials would be available by then. He and L. Frasca will be presenting an overview of the Clean Water Service Provider program to the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission Board at their January 2024 meeting and that he would be willing to join I. Shadis for his presentation in February / March. B. Voigt also mentioned the high cost of stormwater projects and the need realistically present what (types of) projects may be suitable for Formula Grant funding.

I. Shadis supported the formal adoption of an outreach and communication policy. B. Voigt asked Council members to submit suggestions to be included into a draft outreach and communication policy to review at the January meeting.

Announcements (discussion)

- River & Roads Program 2024 Training
- Department of Environmental Conservation Clean Water Conversation and video series
- CVRPC Clean Water Advisory Committee January meeting; "Prioritizing Culvert Replacement and Dam Removal"
- E. De Vries announced the Vermont River Conservancy has completed a strategic plan. She will distribute this to the BWQC and will be seeking funding for implementation.

Adjourn

P. Danforth made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:42 PM. A. Peal seconded. Motion carried unanimously.