

Winooski Basin Water Quality Council (Basin Water Quality Council)

Meeting Minutes – 15 February 2024

Winooski Basin Water Quality Council Members:

NRCDS		RPCs	
	Peter Danforth, Lamoille NRCDS	✓	Darlene Palola, CCRPC
	Emily Porter-Goff, Alternate		Garret Mott, CCRPC, Alternate
	Adelaide Dumm, Winooski NRCDS	✓	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
✓	Taylor Litwin, Alternate		
✓	Sam Puddicombe, Alternate		
✓	Ira Shadis, Friends of the Mad River		
	B. Shupe, Alternate		
	Kinny Perot, Alternate		

CVRPC Staff: B. Voigt, L. Frasca, C. Meyer

Guests: Keith Fritschie (Department of Environmental Conservation - Department of Environmental Conservation)

Call to order & Roll call: B. Voigt called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM.

Updates to agenda: none

Public comment: none

Review & Approve minutes from 18 January 2024 meeting (action)

A. Costandi moved to approve the minutes of the 18 January 2024 meeting. M. Braun seconded. Motion carried.

Clean Water Service Provider Updates (discussion) – see presentation

B. Voigt offered the following Clean Water Service Provider updates:

- FY23 Project Solicitation Round 3 is open. The deadline for submissions is 15 March 2024.
- Clean Water Service Provider Summit: scheduled for 5 April 2024 at St. Leo's Hall in Waterbury. There is still time to [register](#). Basin Water Quality Council member input for the Basin Slam agenda item is welcome.
- Status report on pre-qualified project implementors, engineers and construction firms.

E. De Vries asked if a project implementor, engineer, or construction contractor who has not been pre-qualified submits a project proposal. B. Voigt responded that engineers and construction companies cannot be part of a project proposal. A project implementor would need to have a project funded before procuring those services. If the procurement process results in the selection of an engineering or construction firm that has not gone through the pre-qualification process, the project implementor would need to ensure the firm is qualified to perform the proposed work. Alternatively, the firm could go through the pre-qualification process at that time. If there are firms that project implementors regularly work with that have not been pre-qualified, the Clean Water Service Provider can contact them directly to walk them through the process.

- FY23 Progress Report: \$91,444.60 was allocated to fund three design-phase projects with the potential to reduce 221.09 kilograms of phosphorus per year if implemented. No FY24 funds have been spent.

A. Quackenbush asked what the annual phosphorous-reduction target for the Winooski River Basin is. B. Voigt responded 69.6 kg per year. He explained that if the three projects proceed through implementation, that represents the equivalent of the three-year phosphorous-reduction target for the Winooski River Basin if the currently funded design-phase projects proceed through the implementation phase.

- An overview of how the Clean Water Service Provider administers the Formula Grant: from project implementor pre-qualification to signing a Master Agreement and eventually issuing an addendum to a Master Agreement once the Basin Water Quality Council prioritizes a project for funding. He also described the CVRPC Executive Committee role in the process, including their financial management responsibilities.

- The Bull Run project: C. Meyer (CVRPC Executive Director) described the Executive Committee's decision-making process regarding the Bull Run Project (which was prioritized by the Basin Water Quality Council at the January 2024 meeting). The motion to authorize an addendum to the Friends of the Winooski Master Agreement failed in a split vote. Their primary concern was the phosphorous-reduction efficiency of the project. He stressed that the Executive Committee's vote reflected a decision that the project was not appropriate to fund at this time but would potentially be fundable in the future if the phosphorous-reduction target was (close to being) met. The Executive Committee asked the Clean Water Service Provider to establish a phosphorous-reduction efficiency cap for evaluating future project proposals.

C. Meyer stated that he wants the Basin Water Quality Council to feel ownership over these projects. He also noted that once the phosphorous-reduction target is within reach that the phosphorous-reduction efficiency value may change (decrease).

B. Voigt spoke to the development of Strategic Woody Addition projects and how those projects that did receive Formula Grant funding will help the Department of Environmental Conservation refine phosphorus-reduction estimates for this project type. It's not until the Department of Environmental Conservation signs off on phosphorous-reduction credit for a project that the Clean Water Service Provider is awarded that credit.

K. Fritschie agreed with B. Voigt, acknowledging that phosphorous-reduction estimates may decrease following the evaluation of an implemented project. For the Bull Run project, he noted that although Strategic Woody Addition is being used it is really a head-cut stabilization project. That is one reason why this project has a lower phosphorus-reduction estimate than a typical Strategic Woody Addition project.

M. Braun noted that the Strategic Woody Addition project that Friends of the Winooski is working on with Redstart are floodplain reconnection projects that tend to have a higher phosphorous-reduction potential than head-cut stabilization projects. Friends of the Winooski will apply to the Department of Environmental Conservation Enhancement Block Grant for money to fund the Bull Run project.

- E. De Vries asked what type of target B. Voigt was referring to in terms of the next steps. B. Voigt responded that the Winooski River Basin already

has a phosphorous-reduction target of 69.6 kg per year. C. Meyer was discussing a phosphorous-reduction efficiency target, below which project would not currently be considered for funding. Funding the most efficient projects as early in the funding cycle as possible might allow for funding less efficient projects later in the funding cycle.

- B. Voigt announced the project solicitation round that opened today includes a phosphorous-reduction efficiency cap of \$30,000 / kg. He noted this is the limit that is used in the project scoring matrix (above which a project is awarded zero (0) phosphorous-reduction efficiency points).

Project Development funding (discussion) – see presentation

The Clean Water Service Provider met with the Department of Environmental Conservation Technical Project Manager and Winooski River Basin Planner to discuss funding of project development activities. The Department of Environmental Conservation is willing to consider a simplified process. However, a project proposal will be required and funding cannot be allocated without a purpose.

Outstanding questions to be answered by the Basin Water Quality Council include:

- Should proposals be for individual vs. a collection of projects?
- What should the award amount per activity be?
- What should the duration of an award be?
- How to ensure projects developed with this funding are brought before the Basin Water Quality Council for design / implementation funding?

B. Voigt requested comments be provided in the coming weeks so that a revised draft can be shared with the Department of Environmental Conservation for their consideration by late-February / early-March.

Basin Water Quality Council member roundtable – see presentation

D. Palola mentioned the benefits of planting projects for absorbing phosphorus and asked if this is considered in project prioritization. B. Voigt responded that riparian buffers are one of the preferred project types for Formula Grant funding because of their potential for cost-efficient phosphorus reduction. D. Palola asked if planting projects are more efficient than erosion control projects on logging roads. B. Voigt responded that details on logging road projects are not clearly established, but that would also depend on the size of the planting. Buffer plantings are more efficient than stormwater projects but may not achieve as significant of a phosphorous-reduction credit as larger floodplain restoration projects. D. Palola asked if stormwater projects

yield a phosphorous-reduction benefit on their own? B. Voigt responded that they do but at a much higher cost.

K. Fritschie added that while there is a good degree of certainty regarding phosphorous reduction achieved by buffer plantings, estimates for floodplain restoration projects are still being developed.

M. Braun mentioned that buffer planting phosphorus reductions are not realized for a decade or more and they do not always succeed. Stormwater projects on the other hand are immediately useful for phosphorus reduction. B. Voigt encouraged her to raise this point at the upcoming Clean Water Service Provider Summit.

P. Danforth offered that buffer plantings may be a great fit for Formula Grant funding because of their limited maintenance fees. If this model works it could mean an indefinite amount of money going towards maintaining buffer plantings into the future. However, he noted, the buffers must be large enough to be effective.

E. De Vries asked what the Clean Water Service Provider is looking for from Basin Water Quality Council members in this roundtable. B. Voigt responded that the Clean Water Service Provider is soliciting input (now and at future meetings) from Basin Water Quality Council members regarding increasing the number of projects considered for funding and increasing collaboration on project development.

E. De Vries and the VRC will be attending the VT Association of Wetland Scientist Annual meeting at the end of March 2024. She is looking for opportunities to collaborate on riparian and wetland buffer projects.

B. Voigt asked if anyone is intending to submit proposals in the current project solicitation round. I. Shadis indicated that Friends of the Mad River will likely submit a project development proposal to identify potential projects on a parcel recently acquired by the Town Waitsfield.

P. Danforth asked if project development funds could be used by a collaborative of several organizations to identify and develop projects together. He wondered if one organization should propose that or if a multi-organizational proposal would be considered. B. Voigt doesn't see an issue with a multi-organization proposal, but a lead organization would be easier to administer. P. Danforth works in the Lamoille Aquatic Organism Passage Committee and funding for all committee members comes from the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

D. Palola asked if any municipalities had gone through the pre-qualification process. B. Voigt responded no, although he noted that the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission is a pre-qualified partner. The Clean Water Service Provider intends to conduct outreach to towns to help identify projects on municipal land. Municipalities wouldn't necessarily have to administer project funding. The hope is that this outreach will lead to the identification of projects that a pre-qualified project implementor could develop.

A. Peal mentioned that Planning Commissions need more information about possible project opportunities and going to Planning Commission meetings is a good use of time to explain Formula Grant funding.

L. Frasca advertised the March 14, 2024 Clean Water Advisory Committee meeting featuring the Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District, the Department of Environmental Conservation Lakeshore Coordinator and a discussion of upcoming Lake Wise Assessments on Nelson and Sabin Ponds. He also noted that the Vermont Natural Resources Council is interested in becoming a pre-qualified project implementor and may seek funding for the removal of the Rouleau Dam (Williamstown).

E. De Vries asked if the Clean Water Service Provider outreach materials mentions the pre-qualified project implementors and whether CVRPC received funding for project development from the Addison County Regional Planning Commission's Block Grant. B. Voigt responded that CVRPC has not yet pursued the project development funding. E. De Vries suggested the Basin Water Quality Council help narrow down CVRPC's list of potential projects at a future meeting.

B. Voigt encouraged members to reach out with project ideas or requests for assistance with proposal development.

E. De Vries requested a calendar invite for recurring Basin Water Quality Council meetings with the minutes and agenda attached. B. Voigt will add E. De Vries and K. Perot to the calendar invite and include the link to minutes and agenda.

Adjourn

P. Danforth made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:12 PM. E. De Vries seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Next meeting scheduled 21 March 2024