



Minutes for the December 22, 2020 Meeting

RSC Representatives present: Anne Slugg, Chair (Sudbury), Emma Lord (NPS), Amber Carr (SVT-Incoming), Ron Chick (Framingham-Alt), Bill Fadden (Framingham), Alison Field-Juma (OARS), Christine Dugan (Lincoln), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Marlies Henderson (Billerica), Laura Mattei (SVT), Trek Reef (Billerica-Alt), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), David Witherbee (Concord).

RSC Representatives absent: Mary Antes (Wayland-Alt), Joseph Piantedosi (Bedford-Alt), Linh Phu (USFWS)

Location: Zoom Video Call

7:05 pm

Minutes

Mr. Sciacca and Ms. Field-Juma suggested edits to the November minutes. Ms. Henderson motioned to accept the minutes with their edits. Mr. Hammond seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Community Grants

The RSC took up the Wayland Conservation Department's community grant proposal requesting \$5,802.29 for two interpretive signs at the Heard Farm Conservation Area. The signs would "provide information on grassland habitat and grassland birds, specifically the bobolink." Ms. Slugg noted that the RSC does not have enough remaining community grant money to pay for both signs. Ms. Henderson said that, based on her experience in creating an interpretive panel for Billerica, the proposed signs would be considered too wordy by current best practices. She also noted that this is a proposal for grassland bird habitat while the RSC is concerned with river habitat. A discussion followed on whether the Council could ask Wayland to post signs asking owners to leash and pick up after their dogs as a condition of funding the interpretive signs. Ms. Mattei said that this site is perhaps the largest area of grassland habitat in the entire watershed and that she was happy to support the signage. She advised that the RSC require SuAsCo's name and logo to appear on the new signage. Mr. Chick said that we could request that a QR code referring to the RSC also be added. It was suggested that the Conservation Dept. could apply for CPA funding to pay for the second sign, which is reasonable. Ms. Slugg said that we may not have a say in the language of the sign but we could state a preference for the site placement since the proposal listed several possible locations. Ms. Mattei motioned to fund one sign at a cost of \$2,986.15, requiring the RSC's name and logo to appear in the commentary, and to offer Wayland our help in evaluating the wording. Ms. Field-Juma seconded and the motion passed unanimously. Ms. Slugg stated that we now have approximately \$700 remaining in our community grant budget for the rest of this year.

7:15

Strategic Plan Review and Evaluation: Land Protection and Stewardship

Ms. Slugg opened this discussion by asking which projects were most worthy of our attention and how we should best proceed to make progress with our strategic goals. Ms. Henderson mentioned the possibility of building a boardwalk on the Bedford/Billerica line near Great Meadows. This project idea has been blocked by a landowner and Ms. Henderson noted that SVT has shown no interest in it. Ms. Lord said we could consider this project in the coming year. Ms. Field-Juma said that there was consensus to look at land parcels with a diversity lens. Ms. Lord said Framingham signing the Conservation Preservation Act was a notable achievement of last year. Ms. Mattei asked if the RSC has any priorities for land stewardship. Ms. Carr said that we could place a social justice layer on a GIS map and suggested that Ms. Mattei could take up the idea with Christa Collins at the SVT. Ms. Mattei noted that often there is not much to protect in a such a layer as parcels of less property value are usually not near the high value areas. Ms. Field-Juma was in favor of adding this map layer. Ms. Slugg said that protection can't just be along the WSR because that has mostly been protected by now. The impact now should be focused on the upper sections of the WSR. Ms. Henderson said that the whole watershed is important. She noted that Lowell is benefitting from educational and youth programs as well as river protection while Billerica, a member town of the RSC, gets less attention than the outer watershed area. She reiterated that there are 60 acres on the Bedford/Billerica line that should be looked at. Mr. Chick said that CPA passed by 2:1 margin in Framingham, that the city spent \$20,000 for invasive species removal on the Sudbury River, and that the Parks and Recreation Dept. is looking at creating dock space with parking along the river.

Strategic Plan Review and Evaluation: Water Quantity and Quality

Ms. Slugg said that posting a link to town stormwater by-laws would be useful, adding that the RSC funded a Mass Rivers Alliance project which included advice on writing stormwater bylaws. Ms. Lord said that link to that already appears on Mass River Alliance's website. Mr. Sciacca cited a recent news item noting that a toxin called 6PPD-quinone, which is found in tires and is carried to the rivers in runoff, has been found to be responsible for killing off salmon in the northwest. He said that we can assume it kills other types of fish and possibly other types of creatures. He wondered if we could partner with another group to fund looking into the effects of this toxicant in our rivers. It was agreed that such a partnership could be a first step and that hiring a consultant to define the project's scope could also be worth further investigation.

Ms. Henderson said she met 2 women along the Sudbury river in Billerica who were working on a PFAS study. She said that studying PFAS in our rivers could be an RSC project. Ms. Field-Juma said that the women probably worked for the DEP and, noting that this is a stormwater issue, said she believed this project could at least benefit from a literature review. Ms. Lord said there is early research for this among emerging contaminants. Mr. Sciacca will contact Julia Blatt at the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance to inquire about their interest in partnering on this topic.

Mr. Chick said that in Framingham there are approximately 8,500 storm drains, of which 5,500 flow into the watershed and need to be managed according to new MS4 permitting. The RSC might be able to become involved in that work. In addition, he said that the Framingham City Council voted to remove the Birch Road wells from future withdrawal and consideration. If the wells were to be reactivated at a later time the MWRA contract process would have to start all over again. Mr. Sciacca said that if the land is not developed for wells this groundwater quality issue could become a land preservation issue. Mr. Chick said that there is a tax lien property on wetlands in Framingham just upstream from the WSR. The city's Senior Stormwater and Environmental Engineer is requesting that Framingham foreclose upon that property and turn it over to the city.

Other suggestions were to have a second mussel study done and to look at climate resiliency plans in member towns. Mr. Sciacca said that Wayland and other towns have passed Town Meeting motions encouraging their towns to look seriously at local climate action. The RSC could support local efforts.

Ms. Lord brought up woody debris removal from rivers, noting that there are many opinions about how to manage this problem. Ms. Field-Juma said that these problems have to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. She said that obstructions can now be reported to OARS and then listed as active problems on the OARS website. Sometimes the solution calls for a professional, sometimes it can be handled by volunteers. The city of Framingham issues a generic order of conditions for removal. Mr. Fadden said that most of the obstructions are less than 8" in diameter. Amateurs can handle this sized woody debris. They usually clear the obstructions and paddle through. Ms. Field-Juma said that leaving cut debris in the river can be problematic as many parts of the river contain a good deal of debris already. Ms. Slugg said that this topic needs further discussion and that we should come to written clarity on it later this year. Mr. Chick said that he has satellite photos from 5 years ago showing river vegetation in Framingham and said that it could be useful to find similar photos along the length of the WSR going back 20 years, with 5 year updates in order to understand the problem better. Ms. Slugg said that this topic should also be considered at a later meeting.

Strategic Plan Review and Evaluation: Ecology, Recreation and Access

OARS is working to install a dock on the Sudbury River above the Saxonville dam. Ella Weber shared her ideas for training on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ms. Weber also spoke to representatives for the Nashua WSR on these same issues. This work is a part of Ms. Weber's Transportation fellowship and will be provided at no extra cost to either WSR. Ms. Field-Juma suggested that the RSC work with partners to increase river access for those people who cannot reach rivers now. Ms. Carr said that AMC is currently working with Mass Audubon on educational content. Ms. Henderson said that private docks are being built on the river in Billerica but the Billerica Conservation Commission is not investigating them. Mr. Sciacca said that we could write up some suggestions and ask the Conservation Commission to send them to river abutters. Mr. Chick said that a path from Saxonville to the WSR would be worth considering. Mr. Reef would like to see watershed signage at River Meadow Brook.

8:43 pm

Strategic Plan Review and Evaluation: History, Archeological, and Literary Resources

Ms. Field-Juma said that OARS has completed all its scenic assessments of the WSR. Mr. Sciacca said that some recognition could be given to the Two Brothers Rocks in Bedford considering they were a landmark recognized even by early colonists. Ms. Field-Juma said that we could look to fund more art projects, suggesting the area under bridges as an example. Ms. Lord said that the SuAsCo will be featured in the April edition of the WSR monthly newsletter. Each WSR river is being profiled in order of their designation.

Strategic Plan Review and Evaluation: Scenic Resources

Mr. Sciacca said that repairs should begin on Stone's Bridge in Wayland in August. Ms. Lord suggested Eightmile River's morning gathering and Ms. Carr suggested using Concord's Conservation Coffee as models for encouraging collaboration among conservation groups and other town departments and individuals.

Strategic Plan Review and Evaluation: Education and Outreach

Mr. Chick said that Farm Pond and MCI-Framingham will be coming up for sale over the next few years. These properties could offer opportunities to promote environmental justice. Ms. Lord said that our education goal can easily be expanded to include equality, justice, and diversity. Having a multilingual website would be one example of that. Mr. Sciacca said that fishing is hugely popular and that we could approach environmental justice issues by creating more opportunities to fish. Ms. Field-Juma said that there should be more signs warning about mercury in fish. Ms. Henderson said that we could see about giving people educational information on packing in and packing out when they receive their fishing licenses, though many people don't bother getting licenses. Mr. Hammond said there are people in Bedford who depend on fishing for regular meals. Those areas need more warning signs about mercury.

9:04

Ms. Lord said that our January meeting should be used to discuss internal projects the RSC may want to fund. RSC members should come prepared to make solid proposals for any ideas they have. She suggested that members send her any edits they have to our strategic plan in advance of that meeting.

Ms. Henderson gave an update on the interpretive panel she is designing for the Middlesex Canal Museum. She needs a final review by a Wampanoag Council representative. She estimated that review would require an hour or two of consultation time at a rate of \$50 per hour. Ms. Slugg moved to approve that \$100 be allocated for this consulting fee, Ms. Field-Juma seconded and the motion passed unanimously with one abstention.

9:15

Ms. Lord adjourned the meeting.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan