



Minutes for March 26, 2024

RSC Representatives present: Anne Slugg, Chair (Sudbury), Elissa Brown (Lead River Ambassador), Matt Brown (OARS), Dan Cook (Carlisle), Christine Dugan (Lincoln), Bill Fadden (Framingham), Alison Field-Juma (OARS-Emeritus), Marlies Henderson (Billerica), Carlene Hempel (Concord), Stephanie Koch (USFWS), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt)

RSC Representatives absent: Ron Chick (Framingham), Emma Lord (NPS), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Laura Mattei (SVT), Frank Richichi (Bedford)

Welcome and February Meeting Minutes

7:16 pm Ms. Slugg opened the meeting. Ms. Henderson motioned to accept the February Minutes as circulated, Ms. Slugg seconded, and the motion passed 9-0.

River Ambassador Update

7:19 pm Ms. Brown said that she had attended the MetroWest Conservation Alliance's Land Protection Workshop. SVT and representatives from many communities also attended, including Concord and Sudbury. The SVT work was well received. She also attended a League of Women Voters presentation on the future of the MCI-Concord land, which includes over 50 acres. The State is not certain whether it wants to do something with the land, put it out to bid, or work with Concord on developing it. She had no news on the Concord impoundments study. Ms. Koch said that smaller USFWS working groups are focusing on individual species of concern. These smaller groups will then meet with the larger group to synthesize their findings and move forward from there. Mr. Sciacca asked if she could say a bit about what is motivating the impoundments project. She said that staff are currently deciding on which priority biological resources to focus on. She listed Blanding's turtles, managing invasive species, waterfowl, secretive nesting marsh birds, and rare plants as examples. The group will decide on management strategies. They will then make some predictions about how each of these suites of strategies will affect the different resources and settle on the best collection of management actions for those units. USFWS is bringing in a lot of expertise for these different suites of species.

7:24 pm Ms. Brown said that the Warner's Pond Subcommittee reviewed the 2012 Watershed Management Plan and is setting up a steering committee to determine how to move forward. The Friends of Warners Pond held an organized clean-up day and created the website WarnersPond.com which includes selective information. John Boynton, an influential person in Concord, has agreed to design a letter of support for the dam's removal. Ms. Brown has begun writing a draft of that letter. She shared a draft flyer titled "Nashoba Brook Flowing Free Thru Warner's Pond" that she created for tabling events. She and Matt Brown walked the Concord impoundments. She and a few RSC members joined Linda Hansen from Wayland and a Mass Audubon staff member near the Cow Common Trail to get an idea of where the future trail will be placed. She attended the CISMA Annual Meeting which focused on how to bring volunteers together. She attended a Concord Conservation Coffee and a ConcordCAN meeting on neonics to talk about the river. She volunteered during OARS' March water quality sampling event. She shared a slide on the Concord Recreation Department's Facilities Plan. The Town is exploring many recommendations concerning developing a Town-wide water access plan and coordinating for more multimodal transportation, including paddlers. Concord is very interested in developing some access to the water in addition to their recreational sites on the Assabet and Warner's Pond. Mr. Fadden wondered if Concord would discuss creating a landing at the North Bridge or at the Old Manse. Ms. Brown said that neither MMNHP or the Trustees are interested in using those sites for

landings or put-ins. Ms. Slugg thanked Ms. Brown for the time she devotes to monitoring river issues in the Wild and Scenic communities.

Warner's Pond Dam Subcommittee Update

7:29 pm Ms. Hempel said the Warner's Pond Dam Subcommittee has finalized its Request for Proposals for creating a 2-minute educational video. Ms. Brown said that she sent the RFP to 7 organizations and has received 3 responses. The application deadline is April 1st. The video will be used to anchor the Subcommittee's public presentations. Ms. Hempel wondered about the Subcommittee offering an educational presence at some RiverFest events in Concord. They could bring literature on restoring Nashoba Brook. Ms. Field-Juma thought that the Subcommittee should focus more on education than advocacy. She suggested finding someone to talk about the ecological point of view, perhaps on diadromous fish and that connection to the river. Ms. Henderson thought that she could lead a paddle on the Assabet and arrive very close to the Nashoba Brook bakery. Mr. Cook said that she could paddle on Nashoba Brook from the bakery to the dam.

Ms. Field-Juma returned to the topic of Concord's Open Space Plan. She said that river passage is a problem due to many fallen trees. OARS tries to deal with them but there are too many, making it impossible to paddle all of the Assabet. She thought that only Concord could legally manage this work. That would involve prioritizing debris removal and allocating resources to keeping the river open. She wondered if perhaps Concord could devote some CPA money for this work. Mr. Fadden said that the RSC's Budget Work Plan states if the Council is not able to carry out any part of its plan then it may hire a contractor to complete the work. Ms. Hempel referred back to the letter of support for Concord's Open Space Plan. With removal of the Warner's Pond dam there would be increased recreation and access for paddlers. She did not know Concord's level of interest in this and said that she has never heard about river clearing as a topic in Trails Committee meetings or other related meetings but would be willing to bring up the topic. A discussion followed on needing to have Conservation Commission approval for river clearing and on the cost for a contractor to clear the obstructions. OARS' policy is to create a collaboration between landowners and the Town.

Ms. Hempel concluded by saying that the Warner's Pond Subcommittee is moving forward with laying groundwork and will further discuss creating an educational event for RiverFest. Ms. Slugg said that any river clearing project could be funded in next year's budget, or with leftover money from this year if there is any, or possibly through a Community Grant if a Town wanted to submit a proposal.

2024-2025 Draft Budget and Work Plan

8:09 pm Ms. Slugg referred to the Draft Budget and Workplan which includes conditional budget numbers. She said that Ms. Lord has stated that the Council can approve the draft budget which was created from funding votes taken during the RSC's February meeting and its March 1st special meeting on partner proposals. This vote can take place even though the draft budget does not reflect the official amount of Congressional funding. Ms. Lord will announce the official funding amount at the April meeting and the RSC will vote on the Final Budget at that time. Ms. Henderson motioned to approve the Draft Budget and Work Plan. Ms. Hempel seconded, and the motion passed 9-0. Ms. Slugg said that Ms. Lord will submit the approved Draft Budget and Workplan to the NPS in order to start the process for receiving FY2024-2025 funds. Ms. Lord will circulate the budget once more and will include any number changes due to the new official funding number. Mr. Fadden suggested that the final budget be reduced to 2 pages and only include line items.

2024 Riverfest

8:24 pm Ms. Brown said that Julia Khorana will be helping out with RiverFest again this year. She is already reaching out and contacting volunteers to lead events. She is having a pretty good response so far.

Town Updates

8: 26 pm Ms. Henderson said that a year ago she had submitted a MEPA comment letter as a private citizen concerning the developer's proposed plan for a **Hanscom airfield expansion**. She corrected errors in the

document such as noting that the Shawsheen River isn't mentioned, only its Elm Brook tributary and noted that it was a mistake to say there is no drinking water use because the Shawsheen River is a main source for Burlington's Mill Pond reservoir. She wanted the Council to know that the Save our Heritage coalition recently read her letter and asked her to attend one of their meetings as a SuAsCo representative. She attended one meeting but does not expect to attend any future meetings on behalf of the SuAsCo. Mr. Cook said that he had submitted a letter to the Carlisle Mosquito in opposition to the Hanscom expansion because of the effect it would have on climate change. He noted that it would set back Massachusetts' greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. Mr. Simms said the Draft Environmental Impact Report for this project is now available and open for public comment. He recently attended a public meeting with the developers at which a lot of opposition was raised. Sen. Barrett made an impassioned plea to shame the project and the developers, who themselves appeared unfazed.

8:31 pm Ms. Henderson said she read about **MWRA** completing a series of feasibility studies on expanding its water system to the MetroWest, Ipswich River Basin, and South Shore areas. She noticed that Billerica was not listed even though some neighboring towns were. Billerica's DPW Director does not know why Billerica wasn't included. She asked if anyone could suggest a contact person at MWRA. Ms. Brown said there are an increasing number of communities interested in connecting to MWRA because water from the Quabbin Reservoir is completely free from PFAS chemicals at the moment. Mr. Sciacca thought the MWRA would be more interested in connecting towns that are closest to its existing distribution lines in order to limit expenses. Ms. Field-Juma agreed that building the infrastructure to Billerica would be very expensive but perhaps MWRA could "wheel it." For instance, Bedford is connected through a separate connection and Billerica's water could be taken from that, which is not ideal but perhaps the only way. Mr. Fadden said that he would send her some names and perhaps a link to some MWRA presentations on this subject.

8:42 pm Mr. Sciacca said that both he and Wayland's Town Manager recently submitted letters in support of the **Talbot Mills Dam removal**. Mr. Sciacca said that Wayland is the only SuAsCo community along the river to have written a letter of support and encouraged other towns to do so.

8:45 pm Mr. Fadden said that Ben Keefe, Director of Wayland's Facilities Dept, mentioned that workers repairing the **Stone Bridge** need drought conditions to work on the bridge's foundation. An effort is in progress to work with the DCR and MWRA to somehow control the reservoir's limited flood storage capacity to prevent at least minor flood conditions at the work site. He said that the Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee to the MWRA is planning a presentation to the MWRA. He will see if the subject of bringing more flood control capacity in the reservoirs can be included.

8:49 pm Ms. Henderson motioned to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Sciacca seconded and the motion passed 9-0.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan