Windham Regional Commission
Natural Resources Committee Minutes
February 28, 2019

Members Present: Gabby Ciuffreda, Chair; Bill Dunkel, Susan Hammond, Liisa Kissel, Steve Lembke, Kevin Stine, Andy Toepfer, John Whitman, Everett Wilson.

Absent: Lise Fortin, Linda Hecker.

Staff present: Emily Davis.

Public: None.

Presenter: Kathy Urffer, WRC Special Interest Commissioner, Connecticut River Conservancy.

1. Call to Order:
   - Meeting called to order at 5:03 p.m.
   - Action: Minutes from the January 24, 2019 meeting were approved, with a motion by Steve Lembke, seconded by John Whitman. Motion passes with an abstention from Liisa Kissel.

2. Additions or Changes to the Agenda
   There were no changes.

3. Presentation of EnviroScape table: Kathy Urffer of Connecticut River Conservancy

   Kathy Urffer joined the meeting, both as Special Interest Commissioner to the WRC for Water Quality, and as the River Steward for the Connecticut River Conservancy. She had presented the EnviroScape table, which is an educational tool that was purchased by the CRC to be used by local regional partners to demonstrate how land use practices may impact water quality.

   Kathy demonstrated the tool, with the intent to have the Natural Resources Committee ask the WRC Executive Board to support the CRC’s purchase of the tool by giving a donation to the organization, and the identify opportunities where the table can be used during events or brought into the community.

   - Action: Recommend to the Executive Board that they identify $250.00 that can be donated to the Connecticut River Conservancy, to support their purchase of the EnviroScape table to be used for public education in the Region, with a motion by Andy Toepfer, seconded by Liisa Kissel, and unanimously approved.
4. Act 250 comments

Gabby Ciuffreda started by reminding the Commissioners of the legislative process of the Act 250 update, given its 50-year anniversary. While Commissioners were previously given the opportunity to make comment individually to their legislators, there was some group discussion about certain criteria in the draft bill.

Specifically, there was a detailed discussion around the change from defining ridgelines from lands above 2500’ down to 2000’. Both Bill Dunkel and John Whitman said that this change would be problematic for their towns. The Committee agreed that it would be helpful to know what the justification for the change is, since the goals of the criteria change were not clear.

Gabby Ciuffreda identified that one of the common responses to Act 250 from the developer point of view is less about the criteria of the permit, but rather the process. She said that criticisms are around the timing, permit requirements, lack of effective communication, and unequal application of the permitting process in the different districts.

John Whitman also recalled the potential issues that may arise when there isn’t clear and uniformly-used definitions for certain land uses. Specifically, he read in the draft legislation about the functioning of the “critical resource area.” Other terms were used to describe high-value resource areas, but none of which had clear criteria.

As a result of the discussion, the Committee agreed that they would ask questions related to the Act 250 legislative update and send them to Emily, who can then have them clarified at once. The questions generated in the meeting were to: clarify the intent of changing the ridgeline elevations from 2500’ to 2000’, how critical resource areas are determined, and clarity on what problems are currently not being addressed right now, and how the current legislature intends to address them.

5. Commissioner input on special regional projects

Gabby Ciuffreda started the conversation by saying that this is the beginning of a brainstorming session, where Commissioners were invited to share their thoughts about how village wastewater planning and climate change action could be sufficiently worked on by Commissioners. The question was around which structure might be best (sub-committee, work being house in an existing committee, joint committee meetings, etc).

Andy Toepfer offered that village wastewater planning was an important enough issue, that having its own committee would be ideal and most effective, Steve Lembke cautioned that having another committee might continue to strain existing Commissioner bandwidth, and that many other committees and Full Commission has a difficult enough time reaching quorum.

The issue was left for Commissioners and staff to consider, and the topic may be picked up again when there is a better understanding of how the two issues fit within the planning program.

6. Continued discussion of opportunities for Commissioner engagement

Steve Lembke said that one way for the WRC to work on the two aforementioned issues (village wastewater and climate change), is to host a series of convening’s, which would include outside experts
that can help inform the conversation. This could be a way to not burn out staff and Commissioner capacity.

Gabby Ciuffreda also mentioned that Linda Hecker would be presenting alongside Mary Ellen Copeland of the Dummerston Conservation Commission at the next NRC meeting, to share what role the WRC may play in public education and outreach.

Steve Lembke added an idea of a field trip to Harvard forest, where attendees can learn about how our forested landscape looks this way.

Bill Dunkel closed the conversation by reporting that The Nature Conservancy had just purchased 3,500 acres in Windham.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 6:39 pm, with a motion by Andy Toepfer and seconded by Steve Lembke.