

Bristol Mills Dam ad hoc Advisory Committee

Minutes of Meeting Tuesday, November 14th, 2017
Bristol Town Office

Committee members present: Pam Allen, Bill Benner, Claire Enterline, Chuck Farrell, John Freburger, James Hatch.

Apologies: Jim Albright, Abby Ingraham

Also present: Alex Beaudette, Brittany Cicchetti, Robert Davidson, Marvin Farrin, Chris Hall (Town Administrator), Joe McLean (Wright-Pierce), Don Means, Mary-Rae Means, Lyn Prentice, Kristine Poland, Rick Poland, Peter Riley.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Enterline at 6:02 pm with a quorum present, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Enterline welcomed the several members of the public who were present.

A motion to accept the minutes of 10/24 was proposed by Farrell and seconded by Freburger. Two amendments were accepted, to change the time on page 3, paragraph 1, from 8.45 to 6.45 pm, and to make it clear in page 3, paragraph 5, that as chair, Enterline was summarizing concerns rather than expressing her own. As amended, passed 5 – 0, with Benner abstaining due to his absence from that meeting.

No amendments were offered to the agenda beyond the previously notified addition of discussion of an Executive Summary to the Wright-Pierce report.

Meeting Schedule:

Enterline had attended a Selectmen's meeting on November 1, at Administrator Hall's suggestion, to discuss the schedule. Selectmen want to wrap up with the public hearing in January so that they can place any Warrant articles before the Budget Committee at the beginning of February.

Enterline noted that she and J. McLean will be presenting the draft report to the Parks and Recreation Commissioners on Tuesday, November 21, and that the next meeting of the Committee will be on November 28. There was discussion as to whether a third meeting would be needed, and if so, it was agreed to bring this forward from December 12 to December 5th. Enterline pointed out that this would allow Wright-Pierce time to incorporate amendments into a second draft suitable for publication ahead of the holidays, allowing time for the public to digest this ahead of an early-January public hearing.

Hatch questioned how feedback from the public hearing would be recorded and available to Selectmen. Hall suggested it was likely that the Selectmen would attend the public hearing, which would be recorded. Hatch felt that it was unlikely that any new initiative would emerge at the hearing, and that a simple comment log could be appended to the report which would then become final.

Hall noted that there was considerable feedback from the public to the first draft, which had included numerous comments on Facebook and a petition to Selectmen from members of Bristol Fire and Rescue. He suggested that these did not need to become part of the Committee record.

Enterline noted that there appeared to have been some misunderstanding, noting reported comments about ‘dumbing down’ the report. The Selectmen have asked for an Executive Summary, to clarify and simplify the issues, and her concern expressed at the previous meeting about premature discussion of the report is based on the need to change the draft to incorporate feedback from the Committee and the public. Hatch noted that there is a placeholder in the draft report for an Executive Summary, and there followed discussion as to who should write this. It was agreed that Enterline and Allen would draft a first version, for review by the Committee, incorporating material from past press releases.

Benner asked how to get this out to the public. He noted that in the past, the whole Bristol Comprehensive Plan had been published in the Lincoln County News as a Public Notice. Hall was asked if the Town could mail this to all residents, to which he replied that such mailings have not been done in the past. It was felt that ‘phones will be ringing’ to get people out to attend a public hearing and Town Meeting, and that publication in the newspaper had the advantage of notifying residents in the upstream towns as well as Bristol. The report and a prominent Executive Summary would also be public on the Town’s web site, a printed version would be available at the Town Office, and Lincoln County television could also be asked to publicize ‘video on demand’ of the Committee’s meetings and the public hearing.

Financial summary and discount rate discussion, continued

Hall introduced this discussion by saying that, as he had raised this, he felt the need to clarify once again what he meant. He used the example of the estimated \$6,000 per year forecast for annual dam maintenance in the Wright-Pierce report. Over 50 years, this amounts to \$300,000. However, to get this in current (2017) dollars, we could in theory purchase an annuity today that would pay out \$6,000 a year for 50 years. We would not pay \$300,000 for this, but something considerably less. What we would actually pay would depend on the discount rate – the Net Present Value of the stream of payments. He argued that a discount rate was necessary to account for four uncertainties: the actual need for such expenditures; the inflation rate and so the future value of dollars; changing interest rates; and the economy, which influenced the Town’s ability to pay based on tax collections.

Farrell supported such an approach as one that he is familiar with in the public sector. Hatch, however, felt that future inflation meant that we should inflate, not discount, future spending amounts. McLean pointed to a recent study Wright-Pierce had done which took a low discount rate in valuing a project, taking expected interest rates and deducting expected inflation.

After long discussion, Hall said he believed further attempts to find agreement were unlikely to reach a consensus, and that he thought therefore that a summary table of costs should simply identify present (year one) costs, which were those that the Town would have to borrow to complete any of the three options; and then to show the sum of expected future costs, with a note that these are uncertain for all the reasons discussed.

Enterline asked for a motion and Hatch proposed, seconded by Allen, that the report separately show present and future costs in undiscounted dollars, with a note explaining the uncertainty of future spending. Passed 4 – 0, with 2 abstentions.

In public comment, Marvin Farrin asked that a discount rate be shown, and that the Committee should not assume a lack of sophistication on the part of the public. Alex Beaudette argued to the contrary that total future costs should be used. Benner asked if the report should not also include revenue from fish harvesting, but Enterline pointed out that the value of any future harvest is even more difficult than future costs to place a value on.

Hatch believed that the capital costs of Options A and B were not comparable, as to reach the maximum carrying capacity of the watershed for alewives a future second Denil ladder would have to be installed, to equal the impact of removing the dam altogether. He asked that this be noted in the report.

Review of Draft report, Sections 1 and 2

Enterline circulated written comments from Jim Albright, who is unable to attend in November.

Section 1.1. Introduction.

Albright's request to note that there is a possibility that any solution might not work to significantly improve the alewife run was rejected by the Committee. Hatch argued that experience shows that fishway improvements do work. Allen asked that the report note that in the case of a nature-like fishway, all species (not just alewives) would benefit.

Farrell requested a glossary be included, showing the meaning of technical terms and acronyms used throughout the report. The Committee agreed, and Allen volunteered to do the glossary.

Section 1.2. Purpose of report.

No comments.

Public comment (Beaudette): thousands of fish die trying to get to the dam, creating an unpleasant sight and odor as they rot on the wire barrier. This is part of the reason for seeking to act now.

Hatch suggested that words to this effect be added to the introduction section. Enterline volunteered to draft wording, noting that this will overlap with the Executive Summary.

McLean will be happy to incorporate wording that is unbiased; he is trying to keep the report neutral and unbiased as it is over his form's name.

Section 2.2.1

Albright's written comment on fish mortality from tagging was noted. Enterline will check the date of improvements to the dam. Farrell asked for elaboration on page 2-2 as to why fish do not get up the ladder, and on 2-3 to note where the turning pool is on the diagram of the fish ladder.

Section 2.2.2

Albright's comments that volunteer efforts had had much more than 'marginal' impact was debated. The difference between the high 2016 and low 2017 numbers could be accounted by water flow, Hatch believed. Benner recalled that he had previously asked R. Poland if anything could have been done to improve passage in 2017, and understood that Poland felt his adjustments to the baffles (done in 2016, not in 2017) had helped improve the passage rate.

The effectiveness of the wire fence was also discussed, with members noting that something so labor-intensive was not sustainable without many volunteers.

Section 2.3.1

Albright's request that the cost of work already done in 2016 be deleted from the costs shown in the report, was rebutted by McLean saying that such costs had already been dropped.

Section 2.3.2

The question of incorporating mechanical gates in the dam, in place of the unsafe stop logs used today for water level control, was raised. McLean believed it would be easy to install these in summer 2018 if the Town voted the money. Benner asked that a written communication be sent to the Selectmen urging this safety expenditure, and Enterline offered to go to the Selectmen to urge this in person.

Section 2.3.3.

There was discussion about the rating of the dam, considered "fair to poor" in 2014. Freburger asked if Wright-Pierce had not done a more recent inspection. McLean said that he had not conducted a full inspection since then to allow him to modify that rating, but he suspected that the dam had likely moved closer to "fair" but not sufficiently to achieve that rating, which would need further concrete work on the upstream face.

Next meeting:

On November 28, the Committee will try to get as far as possible through the report; Enterline asked that members be prepared with their comments on all remaining sections (3 through 9).

Public comments:

M. Farrin noted that the eels have come back ten-fold, and that they represent an income of maybe \$40,000 - \$50,000 in the ten-week season each year to Bristol's half-dozen or so harvesters. He also asked that a walkway be included at the dam for public viewing of the fishway.

On a motion from Farrell, the committee adjourned at 8.22 pm. The next meeting will be held Tuesday, November 28th, 2017 at 6pm at the Bristol Town Office.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Hall