



Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

Torrington • Harwinton • Litchfield • Thomaston • Watertown • Waterbury • Naugatuck • Beacon Falls • Seymour • Ansonia • Derby

Meeting Notes

Wednesday, November 9th, 2016 – 8:30 to 10:30

NVCOG Conference Room

49 Leavenworth Street, Waterbury, CT

See last page for attendance and a roster of steering committee members.

Co-Chair Ingrid Manning opened the meeting and introductions were made.

The meeting began with a discussion about organizational changes.

Chuck Berger announced that he will be stepping down as Co-Chair, while remaining active in the committee as a volunteer. He retired from his position as Watertown's Town Engineer at the End of September, and expressed concern that there were no town employees currently serving as co-chair. The committee agreed that there should be a mix of interests serving in leadership roles. The committee accepted Chuck's resignation effective once a replacement has been found. If there are any town representatives that would like to serve as co-chair, please contact a current co-chair. Ingrid and Jack will remain through the dissemination of the Economic Study results to the towns.

Attendance and participation was also discussed. Attendance has dropped over the past year, and the co-chairs asked how that trend could be reversed. Meeting times and locations were discussed. It was also suggested that the Economic Study "roadshow", where the findings of the economic study will be presented to all 11 municipalities, will drive more interest and be a good opportunity to recruit new members that represent towns. It was suggested that a membership and participation subcommittee be formed to explore options.

It was decided by consensus at the September meeting to change the meeting schedule to quarterly in 2017, with the potential for special meetings when there is a need, such as when the Economic Study is published.

The meeting schedule for 2017 will be:

- February 8
- May 10
- August 9
- November 8

Meeting time was another topic of discussion, with an earlier start time than 9am generally preferred by those in attendance. The NVCOG office is central and convenient, but other locations should also be used especially to highlight progress in towns along the route. It was proposed to have 2 of the meetings at NVCOG and 2 in other locations each year. If you would like to host a meeting or have an idea for a location, please let Aaron know.

The final draft of the **NRG Signage and Wayfinding Manual** was presented by Aaron Budris (see it here: https://www.dropbox.com/s/qbiwq0f568corha/NRG_Signage_Manual_Final_Draft.pdf?dl=0). He explained that the previous draft was amended to address additional comments from the committee and COG staff. NVCOG staff authored several introductory sections, and finalized the layout.

*"The Naugatuck River from Torrington to Derby is rich with history, stunning scenery and wildlife. Just as the river built and shaped our towns and cities, the Naugatuck River Greenway will be a driving force for the next century and beyond.
Our mission is to harness the vitality and protect the health of the river for economic development and quality of life for all."*

Rista Malanca presented the mock-up of an interpretive sign that was developed by Milone and MacBroom as part of the project (See Here: https://www.dropbox.com/s/9ibong3idzy6e0l/24x36%20Torrington_1.pdf?dl=0).

Milone and MacBroom's work is complete, and the final payment for their services was authorized. While there was intent to purchase signs and confidence markers, most of the original budget was spent on the manual development. Aaron explained that there will be approximately \$450 left over from the grant after all payments are made for Milone and MacBroom's services. There was consensus among those present to purchase as many confidence markers as possible with the remaining funds.

Aaron proposed submitting a Recreational Trails application to purchase some signs for open sections of trail, using the newly designed templates and guidance in the Signage and Wayfinding Design Manual. The committee agreed that this was a good idea, directing NVCOG staff to submit an application on its behalf. The committee was most interested in Trailhead Wayfinding signage (see page 19-20 in the manual). The application is due December 15th.

Mark Nielsen explained the current work being done on the **Economic Impact Study**. He had hoped to present findings and figures to the committee at the meeting, but issues came up when examining the final draft of the report submitted by UConn CCEA. While the results show a very large economic impact of building the NRG, the CCEA report did not always explain in detail how those figures were arrived at. While dissecting the figures and verifying how results were calculated, COG staff discovered that some of the figures may have been inflated due to a few assumptions that were made about the count data. Mark has been working with UConn CCEA to resolve the issue. The main concern is that the results could be seen as unrealistic, so it is very important that all results are defensible and understandable. NVCOG will be reformatting and publishing the report once final changes are made, and will be developing short summaries for each town that details the economic benefits for each section of trail. A special meeting may be held once the report is complete to present the results to the committee in detail.

Ingrid Manning discussed the **NaugatuckRiver.net** website, and presented a report from site administrator Jared Sloane. Ingrid explained that the website administration funding that was received through sponsorships is slowly running out, with around \$1500 remaining to administer the website. Jared Sloane is currently administering the site part time, but there has not been the kind of growth in site visits that would warrant asking for more administration money from sponsors. There has been difficulty getting committee members to submit information or news to the site, so there is a concern that it has become stagnant. Susan Peterson commented that several of her submissions have not been posted to the site, and she felt like submitting information was a waste of time if it is not going to get published and/or little feedback is provided. The committee discussed ways to increase traffic to the site including the use of social media. The cost of hosting the site and registering the web address seemed high, and will be looked into. The common problem kept arising that there needs to be someone spending time adding content to keep the site and social media accounts relevant. Ingrid asked to form a subcommittee to study the website and hopefully solve some of the current problems. The subcommittee will also look at the future of the site. The first meeting will be held on December 5 at 9:30 am at NVCOG. Anyone interested in participating on the website subcommittee, please contact Ingrid.

Mark Nielsen discussed the FAST act **Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)** federal program. 6 applications were received by NVCOG for consideration, and 3 of them are NRG related:

- Beacon Falls - Extension of the NRG in south along Route 42 to the newly built River Bend Park.
- Ansonia - Pedestrian Improvements to improve access to the NRG from downtown including a section of multiuse trail on the east side of the river along USACE floodwall.
- Naugatuck – Phase II of the NRG from Waterbury line to Pulaski Way

NVCOG is currently refining the applications and will be submitting them to DOT in December. The committee agreed by consensus that the committee should write support letters for the projects.

The FAST Act is a five year spending bill that authorizes \$305 Billion through FY 2020 for highway, highway and motor vehicle safety, public transportation, motor carrier safety, hazardous materials safety, rail, and research, technology, and statistics programs. It includes a set aside of \$835-\$850m annually for the **Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)** for which bicycle and pedestrian projects are eligible. Half of each state's portion of FAST TA funds is being allocated by urban area population for local or regional priority projects, and half will be allocated to state departments of transportation to be used on projects statewide. The local portion is being allocated by DOT and by MPOs with urban area populations of over 200,000. Large urban areas are being allocated funds and MPOs (COGs) will be able to solicit and choose projects to fund directly. There are four urbanized areas in the NVCOG region, meaning that we will have four small pots of money to apply to for project funding. The Waterbury Urbanized area is completely within the NVCOG region, but since it has a population of just under 200,000, DOT will be allocating funds to be shared with the Danbury urbanized area, and DOT will be making final project selection. For projects in the Hartford, New Haven or Stamford/Bridgeport urbanized areas, we will be working with adjacent COGs to submit projects. Mark explained that the TA program is less than ideal because it does not provide enough funding to complete even a single complex project that are typical of the NRG. The already small pot of funds will also have to be shared, and NVCOG will not have the ability to choose priority projects to be funded. More information about the FAST Act TA allocation can be found in [this letter](#) that was sent to NVCOG from CTDOT.

Rista Malanca discussed the **DEEP Recreational Trails Program**. There is currently a solicitation for projects out with a deadline of December 15th. The state opted out of the federal rec trails program last year in favor of using state bond funds which was intended to reduce the red tape, speed up the process, and provide more funding than the federal program. Unfortunately the 2017 funding has been swept due to state budget woes. There is currently leftover funds from 2016 that will be allocated during this open round. Rista explained that there is still a chance to have funding reinstated, urging all members to write letters to the governor and their state reps highlighting the program's importance to local trail development. Rista presented a draft letter, and asked that the NRGSC endorse it and send it to the Governor. The members present agreed that the committee should send a letter, but would give all members a chance to review it and offer comments before it is sent.

NRG communities are encouraged to submit applications, although there were only two potential submissions discussed including the previously mentioned signage request from NVCOG. Beacon Falls may submit an application to cover the town's local match for its TAP grant (if it is awarded). That may constitute a \$400,000 request depending on the project cost estimate that is currently being developed.

The contracts with DEEP for the OPM funded **Thomaston-Torrington Routing Study** has been finalized. NVCOG is developing a scope of work and will be working with representatives from NHCOG, USACE, Torrington, Litchfield, Harwinton and Thomaston to develop an RFP.

The consultant for the **Watertown/ Thomaston Recreational Trails Project** have been very slow to develop an agreed upon scope, although a scope has finally been agreed upon. NVCOG is currently negotiating hours and fees, and hope to reach a final agreement soon.

Next Meeting: February 8th at 8:30am

NVCOG Conference Room, 49 Leavenworth St. Waterbury

Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

Present in **bold**

Aaron Budris – Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments

Bill Purcell – Valley Chamber

Bob Gregorski - Naugatuck River Watershed Association & Trout Unlimited

Christopher Way - US Army Corps of Engineers

Chuck Berger – Retired – former Watertown Town Engineer

Clifford Cooper - Litchfield Community Greenway

Dave Faber – Connecticut Outdoors, LLC/ Naugatuck Valley Outdoors Club

Dominic Sorrentino – Beacon Falls

Fred Messore - Town of Seymour

***Chair - Ingrid Manning – formerly of CT Community Foundation**

Jack Walsh - Valley United Way

Jim MacBroom – Milone and MacBroom

Jim O'Rourke - Waterbury Y

Jim Stewart - Naugatuck Borough Engineer

Joan Kirchner - Harwinton Conservation Commission

Jolene Podgorski - Watertown DPW

Josh Carey – Connecticut Community Foundation

Kathy McNamara - City of Waterbury

Kevin Tedesco - CT DOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator

Kevin Zak – Naugatuck River Revival Group

Laura Wildman – Princeton Hydro

Laurie Giannotti - CT DEEP Greenways

Liz Falzone- Beacon Falls

Mike Jastremski - Housatonic Valley Association

Mark Nielsen – Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments

Rich Minnick – Beacon Falls

Rista Malanca - Torrington

Sal Porzio – City of Waterbury

Sheila O'Malley – City of Ansonia

Susan Peterson - CT DEEP Watershed Program

Suzanne Stitch – Town of Harwinton

Vicki Barnes - Watertown - Steele Brook Rangers

Vincent Gualtieri - US Army Corps of Engineers

Will Cummings – Thomaston Trail Committee

Also in Attendance:

Roy Cavanaugh – Watertown Public Works Director

Savannah Judge – Housatonic Valley Association