



# Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

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

## Meeting Notes

Wednesday, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – 9am

NVCOG Conference Room

49 Leavenworth Street, Waterbury

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

Co-Chair Rista Malanca opened the meeting, and introductions were made. Rista introduced **Kendra Barat**, an intern with the National Park Service who is authoring an article about the NRG and John Monroe's role with the NPS in helping with capacity building and NRGSC development. Kendra spent several days touring open sections of NRG and discussing the NRGSC with the Co-Chairs.

William Luneski introduced himself as the new alternate to the committee from Ansonia.

Bill Paille, Matthew Ciminella and Jesse Harris of BSC Group presented progress to date in the **Torrington to Thomaston Routing Study**. You can view their presentation [HERE](#). Bill began the presentation with an overview of the project. Jesse explained that BSC Ecological Scientist Ale Echandi spent several days in the late winter and early spring conducting field walks along the entire project corridor, and recording environmental data using a tablet and GPS. Features including potential routes, wetlands, culverts, drainage features, pinch points, viewsheds, etc. were recorded and have been compiled into a GIS system along with existing data compiled by NVCOG. Jesse gave the committee a preview of the GIS system and the overwhelming amount of data that it consists of which will be used for potential routes analysis. A web based GIS application will be made available to the committee and the public shortly.

Matthew presented the potential routes that are being developed in a series of maps, walking the group through the corridor from North to South. Route sections are being numbered by section with common connection points so that route segments and connections can be evaluated separately. Bill highlighted some of the more difficult sections and presented some potential solutions. Rail separation was discussed, as some sections may warrant a "rails with trails" solution, and FHWA rail/trail separation guidelines were presented.

Howard Pincus asked for clarification about several terms used by the BSC team, and expressed concern about safety, especially with planned increases in both sightseeing passenger and freight service in the future. HE also explained that there is an active siding in East Litchfield that needs to be kept active. Howard asked if the railroad would be consulted, and stated that they had not yet had opportunity to provide input. There will be stakeholder outreach and consultation once all potential routes have been identified and mapped.

Howard also brought up the issue of liability, explaining that the railroad's insurance provider asks about the existence of trails within the ROW. He explained that if a trail was built, that he would assume that the railroad's rates would increase. Rista explained that the CT Greenways Council (CGC) has been discussing this issue. There was recreation liability legislation passed a few years ago that applies to municipalities and utility companies that limits liability when property is made available for recreation free of charge. As written, the legislation does not apply to railroads, but there is an effort by the CGC amend the legislation to include them.

*"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."*

Cleve Fuessenich expressed concerns about routes in East Litchfield, explaining that he thinks there will be pushback from residents to any routes in the community. Bill explained that there will be opportunity for public input, and ultimately, routes will not be recommended that do not have public support. Aaron explained that it was understood that there were some concerns about the greenway, and the contracted scope of work for the routing study includes several rounds of public outreach. Once all prospective routes have been determined and the matrix has been formulated, the project team will be visiting Litchfield, Harwinton and Thomaston to present the study to residents and ask for public input. Another round of outreach will be planned when routing has been further refined.

Rista offered assistance in reaching out to O&G who owns significant property on the east bank of the river in Harwinton associated with their materials processing plant.

Jeremy Leifert mentioned that between Hill Road and Route 6, the two main property owners are receptive to routing through their properties between the River and Rail. There are two residential properties that might be an obstacle, however.

The next steps for the study will be continued route evaluation and route evaluation based on a matrix in development. The first round of public outreach will be planned for early fall. The project team will also be reaching out to stakeholders including the Naugatuck Railroad, the USACE, ConnDOT, municipal officials and key property owners along the route.

Aaron discussed progress and news regarding the **NRG Signage Procurement Project** that is being funded with a DEEP Rec Trails grant. A [draft interpretive sign](#) was presented, and a full size mock-up was passed around. This “NRG vision” sign with base will be purchased for open sections of trail, and it is designed to give some background on the Naugatuck River and to introduce trail users to the idea of a connected 44-mile NRG Trail. The signs will be purchased this fall for installation in the spring.

The Signage Procurement project was also intended to purchase trailhead wayfinding signage to direct potential trail users to trailheads, and to help promote the NRG. Aaron explained that he has been working since the grant was received to get confirmation from CT DOT that the designs meet DOT standards and would be allowed along state routes. Sign designs were submitted for review, originally to the DOT district office with no response, then to DOT headquarters. The intent was to ensure that designs would be acceptable to DOT for placement within state ROW on state roads. Town public works would be responsible for installing the signs, and would need an encroachment permit to install signs along state roads, and NVCOG wanted to make sure that that process would go smoothly. Aaron finally received a response in May. The CTDOT traffic division discussed the issue and ruled that wayfinding signage for linear trails will not be permitted within state ROW along state roads. They further stated that linear trails would likely not be considered for the Tourism Signage Program. Aaron explained that most of the sign locations that had been identified on the [NRG sign siting map](#) were on state roads, and without those directional signs, wayfinding to trailheads would not work.

There was discussion about whether or not there was already directional signage installed for trails on state routes, and it was suggested that there might be for the Larkin Trail and for the Hop River trail in Vernon. There were also questions about the importance of being a state designated greenway if state agencies would not recognize the designation.

Aaron explained that NVCOG has until May to expend the grant money. If wayfinding signage was ruled out at this point, an alternate use of the funds should be suggested and run by DEEP. He suggested the possibility of

purchasing trailhead entrance signage instead, and presented a variant of the 12x48" sign that could be used for that purpose.

The general sentiment of the group was that they were not ready to give up on the wayfinding signage, and suggested that NVCOG push back against the DOT ruling. Rista said that the Greenways Council should discuss the issue at the next CGC meeting. Aaron said he would look into other ways forward.

Rista explained that the outreach for the **NRG Economic Study** is ongoing. NVCOG staff and Co-Chairs have met with CEOs or presented the study with committees or boards in Torrington, Harwinton, Litchfield, Thomaston, Naugatuck, Beacon Falls, Ansonia and Derby. A meeting in Seymour was cancelled due to the severe storms in May, but will be rescheduled. Rista also explained that there has been some discussion about hosting a legislative outreach event in May at a location along the trail. The purpose would be to promote the NRG as a regional priority to state decision makers. Assistance will be needed to help plan for such an event, and NVCOG is looking for funding.

The **Watertown Thomaston Recreational Trails** project is underway, and Mark Nielsen gave a project update. The project scope includes design of critical elements in Watertown, and design and construction of a section in Thomaston connecting a trailhead on Old Waterbury Road near the dog pound to the future crossing of Branch Brook. VHB has submitted Draft design plans to the towns and NVCOG. The plan includes two parking areas along York (Old Waterbury) road to accommodate 13 vehicles with additional parking available along the road shoulders. A 10 foot wide stone dust trail will extend 1100 feet from the parking area following along the northern edge of the WPC facility property, turning south parallel to Branch Brook, then turning toward the river at the preferred crossing location. VHB is investigating bridge types and costs, and NVCOG is exploring funding options (the bridge will not be covered by the Rec Trails grant).

A Public information meeting was held on June 21<sup>st</sup>, and around a dozen residents attended. There was no opposition or negative comments expressed about the plans. Mark explained that NVCOG is exploring some funding options that could allow the trail and a bridge to be constructed simultaneously. NVCOG's contract with DEEP ends August 31<sup>st</sup> and an extension has been filed to allow for construction in spring 2019. VHB is continuing to design critical features in Watertown.

Rista discussed potential upcoming ribbon cuttings or promotional events. Ansonia had scheduled a last minute event for Saturday, August 4<sup>th</sup>, but rain postponed it, and Ansonia rescheduled it at 10am on the 8<sup>th</sup>, simultaneous with the NRGSC meeting. DOT has not yet handed over the trail next to the new bus maintenance facility in Watertown to the town, so there is no ribbon cutting scheduled right now. There was no one present to report on Seymour's grand opening of their newly completed trail section.

DEEP has announced a new round of grant funding through the Recreational Trails program, and a request for applications has been sent out with a deadline of October 31<sup>st</sup>. \$3 million will be awarded in what will surely be a very competitive process. More information is available on the DEEP Rec Trails page [HERE](#). Rista suggested that the NRGSC meet early or hold a special meeting to discuss and review applications related to the NRG, and a date will be proposed shortly.

### **Roundtable**

**Torrington** – Rista reported that revisions have been made to trail plans on top of levees to address initial USACE concerns, and they have been re-submitted. The City is awaiting approvals, and hope to construct sections next summer.

**Thomaston** - Jeremy Leifert reported that the town may submit a rec trails application for trail and access improvements on their Dug Road open space property. There are several unmarked and partially overgrown trails on the property that were built sometime in the 1970s.

**Watertown** - Roy Cavanaugh reported that the new Steele Brook Greenway Bridge is open just off Route 73 in Oakville. The town is looking at extending the SBG through Unico Field to French Street, but needs to work through some private property in order to do so. They are currently working on an appraisal.

**Waterbury** - The City is still expecting to begin construction in 2019 on Phase I from Platts Mill to Eagle Street.

**Ansonia** – The new bridge connecting the NRG/ Ansonia Riverwalk to Pershing Drive is open and seeing increased traffic. The City is working on a \$900,000 Transportation Alternatives Block Grant to complete segments 3 and 4 of their [Riverwalk Design Plan](#), and they are currently out to bid for construction.

**Derby** – Jack Walsh reported that he gave Kendra Barat of NPS a tour of the Derby section of Greenway and posted a photo to Facebook, prompting some public interest. Jack said he is considering a formal public tour of the greenway.

The meeting was adjourned, and a tour of the newly reconstructed Freight Street, including “complete streets” treatments followed. Thank you to Sal Porzio and Judy Mancini from the City for leading the tour! Photos have been posted [HERE](#).

**Special Meeting: October 10<sup>th</sup> at 9am, NVCOG**

**Next Regular Meeting: November at 9 am**  
**Location – TBD**

# Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

\*Indicates Co-Chair - Present in **BOLD**

## **Municipal Representatives**

<b>Torrington</b>	<b>Rista Malanca*</b>
<b>Litchfield</b>	<b>Cleve Fuessenich</b>
<b>Harwinton</b>	Suzanne Stitch <b>Joan Kirchner</b>
<b>Thomaston</b>	<b>Jeremy Leifert</b>
<b>Watertown</b>	<b>Roy Cavanaugh</b>
Waterbury	Kenny Curran Sal Porzio
Naugatuck	Jim Stewart
Beacon Falls	Liz Falzone Josh Carey
Seymour	Rory Burke
<b>Ansonia</b>	Sheila O'Malley <b>Bill Luneski</b>
<b>Derby</b>	<b>Jack Walsh*</b>

## **Stakeholder Representatives**

**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 Watertown Town Engineer

Clifford Cooper - Litchfield Community Greenway

**Courteny Morehouse – Housatonic Valley Association**

Dave Faber – Naugatuck Valley Outdoors Club

Jim MacBroom – Milone and MacBroom

Jim O'Rourke - Waterbury Y

Jolene Podgorski - Watertown DPW

Josh Carey – Connecticut Community Foundation

Kevin Zak – Naugatuck River Revival Group

Laurie Giannotti - CT DEEP Greenways

**Mark Nielsen – Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments**

Melanie Zimyeski – CT DOT

**Rick Lynn – Northwest Hills Council of Governments**

**Steve Casey – Railroad Museum of New England**

**Susan Peterson - CT DEEP Watershed Program**

Vicki Barnes - Watertown - Steele Brook Rangers

## **Also Present:**

**Kendra Barat, National Park Service**

**Bill Paille, BSC Services**

**Matthew Ciminella, BSC Services**

**Jesse Harris, BSC Group**

**Howard Pincus, Naugatuck Railroad**

**Paul Grimmer, Shelton Economic Development Corporation**