

Mystic River Watershed Initiative Steering Committee
September 10, 2015 | 9:30 am-12:00 pm
Chelsea Collaborative: 318 Broadway, Chelsea, MA 02150
Meeting Summary
Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

Action Items

- The EPA will follow up with Ernie Zupancic at HUD to convene a meeting about HUD funding opportunities prior to the proposal deadline. The EPA will invite the Boston Water and Sewer Commission and planners, housing development, and open space-focused municipal employees from communities in the Mystic River Watershed.
- EK, Ivey, and EPA to convene a planning call to plan an Open Space subgroup meeting to discuss collaboration between MyRWA's new open space initiative and the subgroup.

Decisions:

The steering committee made the following decisions:

- Approved the June 2015 meeting summary

Welcome, Introductions, and June 2015 Meeting Summary

Mel Coté, EPA Surface Water Branch Chief, welcomed the committee members, led introductions, and reviewed the agenda. He noted that Lynne Hamjian is now the Deputy Office Director of the Office of Ecosystem Protection and he has assumed Lynne's role with the Mystic River Watershed Initiative and the Urban Waters Federal Partnership. The committee approved the June 2015 meeting minutes without any revisions. It was noted that quorum might not have been met. Mel suggested reviewing the group's decision-making rules at a future meeting.

Member Updates and Announcements

Members provided the following updates and announcements:

Harvest Your Energy: The City of Medford will hold an energy festival titled Harvest Your Energy on October 3 at the base of the wind turbine. Members interested in conducting outreach to Medford residents are invited to attend the event.

Belmont Citizens Forum: The Belmont Citizens Forum will hold an event tonight called Water Trouble to raise awareness of stormwater management among the residents of Arlington, Watertown, and Belmont.

Wynn casino development: A proposal was submitted to use barges to remove sediment during remediation of the Wynn casino site. The proposal was initially declined due to a lack of docking facilities, but it is hoped that a docking system will be installed. Disposal of the sediment via rail is no longer being discussed, but trucks may be used. The sediment slated for removal may be less than anticipated since a proposed building was removed from the 500-year storm flood

level. The oyster project was removed from the remediation plan but the living shorelines component is still included. A regional study of traffic patterns and open conversation about the casino transportation plan is needed.

Subgroup Reports

Committee members reported on the municipal, water quality, and open-space subgroups:

Municipal subgroup: A series of workshops will be launched to help municipalities comply with the soon-to-be-final MS4 permit. The three workshops will cover the following topics in this order: Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination (IDDE), public education and outreach, and funding mechanisms. The IDDE workshop will be convened in October or November in Lexington, MA.

Water Quality subgroup: EPA, MyRWA, DEP, and USGS are collaborating on phosphorous data collection and hydrologic modeling in the freshwaters of the Mystic watershed. The USGS installed three new stream gauges for a total of six in the watershed. The collected data will inform a phosphorous loading model and ultimately a TMDL for phosphorous.

The phosphorous study will have many potential positive impacts on water quality. Investigators anticipate that the study will provide an understanding of how water flows through the system, which in turn will help municipalities determine how best to deploy limited resources to reduce the phosphorous entering the system. The study may also provide insight on other pollutants and how they relate to water flow.

Committee members expressed support for the project and requested regular progress updates. Due to staff transition in state and federal agencies, a member suggested that the core technical team representatives from the partnering organizations and agencies continue to meet at least once per year to keep everyone up-to-date and on the same page with how the project is progressing.

In response to a question about the cad cells in Chelsea Creek, EPA commented that the CAD cells will not be used to dispose of dredge materials from the Conway Terminal. Due to PCBs found in the dredge materials, the material will be deposited in an upland storage facility designed for hazardous waste.

Open Space subgroup: A brief update was provided on Draw Seven Park and DCR's effort to create a pathway between Draw Seven and Route 99. The DCR and MBTA negotiation is nearing completion; more information will be made public once it is complete. There are five million dollars in escrow for Draw Seven. The original DCR plan was to rehabilitate the landscape and create a pathway at the east end of Draw Seven near the MBTA yards, but the crumbling retaining wall presented some challenges. Efforts are ongoing to fund the design of a new retaining wall and pathway. A challenging portion of the project, in light of the Wynn traffic projects, will be the pathway crossing through Route 99 into the Schrafft property.

Recognizing the important contribution of green spaces to recreation and water quality, MyRWA is committed to organize a comprehensive review of green spaces and access to those spaces in

the Mystic communities. Ultimately, the goal of their efforts will be to advance restoration through park and trail development in the Mystic River watershed. MyRWA is eager to coordinate and collaborate with the Steering Committee and the Open Space subgroup on this initiative.

Members made the following comments:

- It would be great to publicize the locations of kayak and boat launches since the difficulty in finding them limits access to the river.
- Medford is looking at installing natural play-scapes and is in search of creative funding opportunities; if anyone has ideas, please share them with Alicia Hunt.
- MyRWA could also consider including the perspectives of local fishermen who lack access to the river.

Urban Waters Federal Partnership Progress

During the June 2015 Steering Committee meeting, federal partners described many of the projects and goals they are working on or striving to achieve in the watershed; however, there wasn't enough time to discuss areas of potential collaboration between the steering committee and federal partners. To further this conversation, Eric Roberts and Stacie Smith from the Consensus Building Institute, called several steering committee members to ask about opportunities for collaboration with federal partners that could achieve the Initiative's mission and priorities. Eric Roberts summarized the potential opportunities that committee members identified with various federal agencies:

United States Forest Service: Areas of potential collaboration could include invasive species removal and native species plantings to maintain safe and secure public spaces (i.e., Mill Creek Pathway); native species reforestation in Draw Seven Park; and assistance to identify locations in the watershed that may be ripe for urban forestry grant programs.

United States Geological Survey and the US Army Corps of Engineers: Areas of potential collaboration included in-kind contribution of field work or technical assistance for SWMM and HSPF modeling to help compensate for peer-review standards and matching fund requirements; analysis of public health risks associated with boating and swimming in the Mystic and Malden rivers; clean-up of contaminated sediments on the Malden side of the river, and improvements to embankments to support public access, and; assistance connecting with other parties about the CAD cells in Chelsea Creek.

US Department of Transportation: Steering committee members suggested potential collaboration could include the management of sediment from Route 1, which is causing sedimentation in the salt marsh at the headwaters of Mill Creek, and area that underwent restoration, and; assistance in the planning stages to identify access and green space mitigation projects or other improvements that would help connect people to the river since roadways frequently are the barriers to river access.

National Park Service: Areas of potential collaboration include the development of national parks along Chelsea Creek (e.g., historic sites of the revolutionary war) or

dedications and commemorative installations at historic points, and; rivers, trails and conservation grant programs for open space initiatives.

Environmental Protection Agency: Steering committee members suggested the EPA could help to facilitate recognition among federal and state agencies of MyRWA, as opposed to the Boston Harbor Association, as the representative of interests concerning the Mystic River Watershed and assist MyRWA to be involved in conversations that could impact the watershed; support community environmental justice efforts; more actively regulate to identify permit violations and increase the use of the Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEP) bank to achieve public health and water quality goals; assist in facilitated conversations between community groups and NPDES permit holders, and; encourage TMDLS for the Mystic River and Chelsea Creek.

The above areas of potential collaboration were presented to the federal partners during a federal partners conference call on September 1. Elizabeth Glivinski, ORISE Participant at EPA, summarized federal partner feedback about the potential areas of collaboration. Her main points included the following:

- The USGS is interested in completing hydrologic modeling but they would need external funding to complete the work. Kirk Smith, USGS, has done some work on highway runoff and might be interested to do more.
- The USFS suggested the committee look at two opportunities. The first opportunity is riparian zone reforestation through landscape scale restoration grants. The second opportunity is to insert green infrastructure projects into the USFS state action plan, which is updated every five years.
- HUD has many grant opportunities; proposals will be accepted in spring 2016. The proposals to HUD must be community driven and cannot come from EPA or a single NGO. Steering committee members could engage municipal development corporations and other NGOs and municipal bodies to talk about and insert projects into HUD proposals. A potential opportunity might be to integrate stormwater infiltration projects with new housing developments. The EPA will contact municipal subcommittee members to identify planners, housing development, and open space-focused municipal employees who might be interested to participate in a meeting about HUD funding opportunities.
- The NPS proposed collaborating to launch the Canoemobile program.
- The federal partners decided to schedule quarterly calls to stay informed of the Initiative's activities and to draft an action agenda that would list active projects that they are working on together. Lynne Hamjian, EPA, commented that the plan over the next six months to one year is to draft the action agenda, vet it with the federal partners, then ask the steering committee to review and approve it. She added that the action agenda should dovetail with the Initiative's mission and priorities and could be included as an addendum to the mission and priorities.

Committee members made the following points while discussing the potential opportunities for collaboration and the summary of federal partner conference call.

- Members made several comments about the HUD opportunities: It would be great to link nonpoint source projects to housing project developments launched by the Boston Housing Authority. It would be good to loop the Boston Water and Sewer Commission

into a discussion about HUD opportunities; the commission is also looking at school upgrades as another area to make improvements. Community members who live in housing developments, and especially those where projects are likely to happen, should be invited to participate, too.

- There are several threads through all of the potential areas of collaboration. Jamie Fosburgh, of the NPS River and Trails program, could be a good person to help link some of the common themes together.
- The Open Space subcommittee could work on some of the riparian and green infrastructure opportunities.
- USACE has capacity to manage hazardous materials and it might be useful to engage them to evaluate, potentially conduct a risk assessment, and begin to address legacy contamination and sediment issues in the Malden River. A potential barrier is the funding match requirement; but if municipal land is used it possibly could be included in the match value.

Other Updates

The following updates were also discussed:

Water Quality Grading System: The group was briefed on the new water quality assessment grading system co-developed by MyRWA and EPA. Both the new system and old system base grades on bacteria levels in relation to water quality standards for swimming and boating as outlined in the Clean Water Act. The difference between the systems is that the old grading system assigned one grade to the entire Mystic River watershed whereas the new grading system reports individual grades for each of the 14 waterbodies in the watershed. The new method provides a more nuanced understanding of water quality conditions and highlights areas where efforts to improve water quality were successful and areas where additional effort is required. It takes the focus off of the larger water body, the Mystic River (which received a grade of B+), and applies the focus to smaller water bodies that are not meeting water quality standards.

The group made the following comments about the new reporting method:

- Shifting the focus to the poor quality of smaller tributaries seems unfair to some towns because it shifts the negative perception to the towns where the poorly graded tributaries are located. However, shifting the focus to the smaller tributaries also encourages towns to actively manage the water discharged from their outfalls.
- Requiring towns to comply with standards related to boating and recreation on tributaries that are neither navigable nor recreational seems too stringent. EPA commented that the standards are required by the Clean Water Act and that the state could downgrade water quality standards, but this is a laborious process and saved for extreme circumstances.

Canoemobile: On September 22, Canoemobile will engage grade school and high school students in a series of water-based and land-based educational activities. NPS, USFS, Groundworks Somerville, EPA, and other organizations are involved in the planning and implementation. This year's program will be one day. Organizers hope to expand the programming to several days and several additional locations in Greater Boston in the coming years.

Stormwater Coalitions: The concept of stormwater coalitions is growing in the state and in New England. Municipalities that share a common watershed form the coalitions to provide an opportunity to share resources and expertise. A similar type of group has formed in central Massachusetts to discuss public outreach for the MS4 process. Similar coalitions could be formed in the Mystic River watershed. It was suggested the municipality subcommittee further discuss the idea. Some participants expressed interest in pursuing the formation of a coalition, but indicated they did not have the capacity to lead the effort. A participant suggested involving Cindy Brown in this effort, if possible.

Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday December 10 at the Massachusetts State House.