

## Mystic River Watershed Initiative Steering Committee

October 13, 2016 | 9:30 am-12:30 pm

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection | 205 Lowell St B, Wilmington, MA

### **DRAFT** Meeting Summary

Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

#### Present

**Present:** Annie Bastini (MassDOT), Erik Beck (EPA), Todd Borci (EPA), David R. Butler (MassDEP Wilmington), Michael Celone (MDPH), Kate Chang (Office of Congressman Michael Capuano), Amber Christofferson (MyRWA), Mel Cote (EPA), Sandra Fanciullo (EPA), Ona Ferguson (CBI), Elizabeth Glivinski (EPA), Matthew Haringa (Town of Winchester), Patrick Herron (MyRWA), Alicia Hunt (Medford), Jon Kachmar (Nature Conservancy Boston), Riana Kernan (MassDEP), Bill Kiley (Boston Water and Sewer Commission), Tenzin Lama (MassDEP), Anne-Marie Lambert (Belmont Citizens Forum), Lisa Marx (MyRWA), Ellen Mass (Friends of Alewife Reservation), Ryan Percival (Town of Reading), Maria Belen Power (GreenRoots Chelsea), Tony Rodolakis (AMEC), Matt Shuman (Town of Watertown), Michael Sprague (Town of Lexington), Stacie Smith (CBI), Curt Spalding (EPA), Ivey St. John (Steering Committee), Mark Voorhees (EPA), Larry Weinstock (EPA), Caitlyn Whittle (EPA), Paul Wintrob (EPA), Catherine Daly Woodbury (Cambridge DPW)

#### Action Items

- All
  - Share success stories with Larry Weinstock and his colleagues to make the case for the program for both funding and general support across a range of outreach efforts.
  - Spread the word about the Urban Waters program.
  - Are welcome to attend MyRWA's annual meeting on October 26.
  - Let Liz or Caitlin know any dates in January that are definite conflicts with our next Steering Committee meeting.
  - Please let your networks know that on October 20 at 1pm there is a twitter chat on the Urban Waters program. All are welcome to tweet questions to @EPAwater, #urbanwaters. The hope is to get a lot of traffic.
  - Are invited to Draw 7 Park for an event on Friday October 14 at 9am.
  - Let Liz or Caitlyn know if you are willing to host the January Steering Committee meeting.
  - Potential January 2017 Steering Committee agenda topics:
    - Steering committee leadership + membership, DCR's Mystic Master Plan. Ivy is working with Dan at DCR to set the meeting date. This could include a discussion of the transition to new leadership on the Steering Committee, how the process should work for selecting co-chairs, membership, how the steering committee operates, how new members join, and the the future direction.
    - Mystic River Watershed Initiative mission & priorities – revisit our 3 year priorities, which were for 2014-2017.
- Ivey St. John
  - Help Patrick at MyRWA write a response to Boston Magazine re: the Mystic.
  - Work with EPA staff to schedule the January Steering Committee meeting.
- Curt Spalding

- Send Ivey bullets for her response to Boston Magazine
- Anna Bastoni
  - Send the SC the digital list of impaired waters in the Mystic and links to assessments.
- Mel Coté
  - Put Rosanne Bongiovani and DOT in touch re: cleaning out storm drains in Chelsea (see below).
- Liz Glivinski
  - Email all SC members to ask about potential conflicts with January meeting dates.

### **Greeting, Introductions, and June 2016 Meeting Summary**

Mel Coté, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), welcomed participants and noted that Curt Spalding, EPA Region 1 Administrator and Larry Weinstock of the Urban Waters program from EPA Headquarters were present. Mel congratulated Patrick Herron, the incoming Executive Director of MyRWA. The group approved the June 2016 meeting summary.

### **Updates and Announcements from Members**

- *Urban Waters* – Larry Weinstock, Acting Associate Director of the Urban Water’s Program in EPA’s Office of Water (Headquarters) said he and his colleagues are working to build support and resources for the Urban Waters Program. He noted that in 2017 there will be new staffing because of the new federal administration, and that the team will need to make the case that these programs are a good place to invest. Larry and his colleagues are trying to strengthen the federal partnership. They are reaching out to regional federal banks, which have influence over urban reinvestment funds and whose board members have good connections. They are raising awareness and building relationships with Treasury Department CFI departments, the foundation community and the Justice Department. In addition, they have awarded the 2016 Small Grants. MyRWA received one of 22. The next round of grants will be released soon. And NFWF will be releasing a new RFP in November.
- *General Thanks* – Curt Spalding, Regional Administrator of EPA Region 1 shared his reflections on the great progress made by this initiative on the Mystic River Watershed. He congratulated those present and thanked them for their devotion over time and across many projects. Curt said the holistic, complete, collaborative approach is unique, and appropriate to the challenging system on which it is working. He noted the impressive change from a D to an A- grade for the main stem.
- *Boston Magazine Article* – Participants discussed a Boston Magazine article issued last week that talked about the Charles and Mystic Rivers. People said they didn’t feel that it was accurate reporting as it failed to fully describe the progress made by many different initiatives in the Mystic. The group noted that people do compare the rivers and watersheds, though they are very different, and we should look to the Charles for ideas, while being conscious of the substantial differences in the two watersheds.
- *Malden River Health Risk Assessment Study* – Patrick presented on this study, which is being led by MyRWA. The Malden River affects Malden, Medford and Everett. It has a lot of toxic sediment and many contaminated shoreline parcels. Very little remediation has been done in

the river, so it has limited public access. However, people are turning anew to the river for rowing, canoeing and kayaking, so MyRWA is working with Everett to analyze river access and potential concerns related to contamination for those accessing the river. There are no financial resources designated to this effort yet, though participants have sought EPA Healthy Communities grants twice, but people are moving forward with it none-the-less.

- *EPA Environmental Education Grant* – Patrick said that MyRWA was one of three recipients of the EPA Environmental Education Grant for a project on education about river herring. The funding will enable the team to install video monitoring at two fish ladders, then allow them to work in K-12 classrooms to get students to help count fish. The goal is to engage 1000 people this year and 10K people next year.
- *Partnering with the Environmental League of MA* – Amber Christofferson said that there was a three hour Walk and Talk with the Environmental League of MA on September 30. There were 30 participants, including five representatives (among them Representatives Jehlen and Provost). Many of them had never walked over the mystic from Baxter to MacDonald Park. This helped us solidify a relationship with ELM and raise awareness of Mystic River needs and opportunities.
- *Canoemobile* – Rani gave an update on Canoemobile. Canoemobile engaged 580 children over the week, with 10 participating schools and 18 partners. The Blessing of the Bay day was especially great. The event was six days long in different MA cities and included two days on the Mystic. Major partners included USFS, Groundwork Somerville, the Charlestown Waterfront Coalition, Green Roots, MyRWA, and EPA. The effort generated a lot of social media coverage. Mel noted that this is only the second year of the program and EPA is happy to be involved.
- *Suffolk Downs Racetrack Penalties* – Todd Borci of EPA noted with pleasure that the final environmental project required as supplemental projects has begun. It is the construction of a boardwalk in Belle Isle Marsh, and should be completed by the end of October.
- *Alewife Brook and Pond* – Ellen Mass said that the Friends of Alewife Reservation have been trying to address the D- rating for the brook and pond. It is still wild and has a lot of habitat. The group testified at a DEP hearing to get a long-term control plan. They have opened a beautiful meadow which has been resilient during the drought. She thanked DCR for their support in the midst of the construction of 5000 residential units.

## **Subgroup Reports and Discussions**

### 1. Municipal Subgroup Report

Patrick described what is included in the proposal for the *Urban Waters Small Grant* that was just awarded to MyRWA from EPA. The grant is to coordinate activities across municipalities, working with youth, to improve how we communicate about the river, provide education, and change behavior. Activities will include evaluating needs of any participating municipality (all are welcome), setting educational goals as a group, and distributing materials. They will build on a program in Maine called “think blue” and will film red rubber ducks flowing down drains into the rivers and they will work on improving the MyRWA website.

Liz said that Mystic Municipalities have been selected to receive support from EPA’s office of Assistance and Pollution Prevention on stormwater funding decision making. Meetings among participating municipalities will begin in January. The purpose is to enable municipalities without stormwater utilities

in place a forum in which to learn whether a utility would work in your municipality or not (before trying to get a ballot initiative passed).

## 2. Water Quality Subgroup Report

Liz said this subgroup will be organizing the bi-annual *Science Forum* to take place in late winter or early spring. The purpose of the event is to share scientific work being done in the mystic. Mel noted that the subject matter can go beyond water quality to include topics such as brownfield and community education.

## 3. Open Space Subgroup Report

Alicia Hunt described the Open Space Subgroup met last week at Green Roots in Chelsea. The purpose of the meeting [or of the group?] is to build relationships, raise awareness and get funding support. Participants included MyRWA, Herb Nolan, and the newly-formed Walk Medford. Ivey is working to get USFS to start participating. Topics included:

- The Mystic Greenways Program
- The Clipper Ship Connector, which is working to extend walking and biking paths for miles along the Mystic and which the DCR Commissioner has said is a high priority
- The MacDonald Park project, which is the biggest green space along the project and very exciting
- Draw 7 River/Park project in Somerville. A seawall is being redesigned, as well as a path to connect Draw 7 to the Rt 99 bridge. The City of Somerville and DCR hope to issue an RFP for design work very soon.
- The Hess Site owned by BRA, which is stuck at the moment. Alicia has some ideas for moving this forward thanks to participants at the Open Space Subgroup meeting.

## **Mystic River Watershed Phosphorous Study**

Mark Voorhees, EPA, presented the Mystic River Watershed Phosphorous Study. It will begin in November and wrap up by September 2017. The study focuses on phosphorous (though both phosphorous and nitrogen contribute to excess algae in the Mystic). ERG will be the contractor, with Arlene O'Donnell as the primary point person there. There are likely to be some subcontractors. EPA is committed to bringing substantial capacity to this initiative.

The purpose of this water quality study is to figure out an alternative way to understand nutrient management (stormwater management) and to develop management goals. The old way is too costly and technically infeasible, so EPA is trying new approaches. They are partnering with DEP and others. This is a significant project for MyRWA's.

This effort will include the following components:

- A modeling approach – under this approach, the group will review existing monitoring programs. It will work with EPA Headquarters to develop the TMDL modeling approach (though it may not be a TMDL officially). They will evaluate the modeling or other analytical approach. The modeling will be designed to enable the user to calculate annual loading for the next 2-3 years, including many conditions. No existing model can be applied in the Mystic to deal with nutrient loading and stormwater management, so the group will develop a recommendation on

a modeling approach. The modeling approach should be ready to use by the end of this effort so when more money is found it can move quickly.

- A technical steering committee – this group will develop desired end points and water quality goals. It will consist of 20-30 people who will work with the technical contractors.
- Data calibration – there will be some calibration of data that has been collected.
- A stormwater management optimization tool – the technical team will apply the Opti Tool, which is detailed stormwater management optimization analysis. This can help identify opportunities for our communities now or in the future.

This project will be funded one step at a time.

### **MA Department of Transportation Stormwater Program**

Annie Bastoni, Stormwater Program Coordinator, MA Department of Transportation, presented an overview the MA Department of Transportation stormwater program.

MA DOT has over 4,500 miles of roads and over 2,000 outfalls. They get an individual permit since 2003 for stormwater management, and all of their projects that impact resource areas have to meet stormwater standards. They have determined that their roadways do not contribute pathogens to MA waters.

MA DOT Impaired Waters Program – this program provides a prioritization method for where DOT should install improvements. This program involves

1. Assessing impaired waters: DOT has assessed every impaired water body across the commonwealth to assess their impact. These impairments are related to impervious cover stormwater runoff.
2. Mapping their contributions to the impaired waters to determine whether they have an impact on the impairment.
3. Setting a target
4. Install improvements to meet the target

In the past five years, they have made a big effort to construct BMPs. Last year DOT spent \$3.5M designing BMPs and \$10M to construct them, and they plan to continue at that same level for the next decade. BMP construction for DOT can happen as a regularly scheduled roadway and bridge construction project or as a stand-alone retrofit initiative to address water quality in places without upcoming construction projects. DOT has an extensive database and map showing their progress on and the status of each impaired water body, DOT project, and BMP installation. Their goal is to track all the projects in one place so they can have a complete picture.

MADOT will be installing 8 BMPs in the Mystic River Watershed along I-93.

MADOT is also updating their handbook, which is a guide for designers for projects in which stormwater improvements must be part of DOT projects, to ensure a consistent approach across the state and department. It outlines principles for when a project will require a BMP. It will also include a significant section on maintenance. It should be completed by the end of 2016, then DEP will need to approve it.

In response to participant questions and comments, Annie added that DOT hasn't looked into waste generated by wildlife on DOT unpaved areas beside roads. Someone asked that DOT put on their priority list to regularly clear sediment and runoff material from storm drains, as this would help with salt marsh restoration work (on Mill Creek in Chelsea along Route 1). The storm drains haven't been cleaned out in over a decade. People asked about DOT's herbicide policy. Annie said the Mystic does have DOT's full attention. She also noted that DOT no longer sands their roads, they instead use a smaller amount of salt (that salt use has been significantly reduced in the past five years). They use best practices to reduce the salt that is used and file with MEPA for their salt program. DOT is not measuring water quality, instead they are modeling and installing BMPs.

### **Steering Committee Operations**

Participants discussed the need to review how their own procedures work, including selection of co-chairs, addition of new members and other process details. Jon Kachmar of the Nature Conservancy attended and described TNC's new focus on urban areas. TNC is newly focusing on nature based resilience to flooding, use of green infrastructure, and the three watersheds around Boston. He's interested in bringing resources and capacity to this initiative. The group will discuss membership questions, triggered in part by TNC's interest in joining, at the next steering committee meeting.