

Mystic River Watershed Steering Committee

June 13, 2019

DRAFT Meeting Summary

Housing and Urban Development, Community Planning and Development offices
Boston, MA

Greetings and Introductions

Mel Cote, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), opened the meeting. Bob Shamiko, Regional Director of the Office of Community Development at Housing and Urban Development (HUD), welcomed the group to HUD and provided some background on the grants that his office oversees, including community development block grants (CDBG), HOME grants, and homelessness programs. Through its grant programs, HUD collaborates with EPA on issues related to water quality, brownfields, disaster recovery, and mitigation associated with watershed areas, among others.

Status of MS4 implementation

Suzanne Warner (EPA) provided an update on the process of implementing the new MS4 permit. Most communities at this point should have authorization, and EPA expects to authorize the remainder of communities soon. The first-year reporting period ends on June 30, and EPA expects to receive useful updates on what communities have done and what progress they have made.

Group members discussed strategies to deal with the costs of wet weather sampling required by the permit. Suggestions included strategies to help municipalities reach economies of scale, such as by sharing a consultant or a lab.

Update on nutrient study and municipal expansion

EPA expects to issue the final report on the nutrient study soon, and is currently planning how to share the results with communities and coordinate with the state on implementation. EPA also plans to involve another group of municipalities that expressed interest in collaborative meetings to learn about small scale stormwater best management practices (BMPs) and options to update municipal ordinances regarding stormwater management.

Update on MyRWA's stormwater education collaborative

Andy Hrycyna, Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA), provided an update on the stormwater education collaborative meetings that MyRWA runs. The project emerged from an urban waters small ground, and is an opportunity for MyRWA to convene municipalities to collaborate and share strategies to help them fulfill the MS4 regulations. The project includes yearly targets for education of residents, businesses, developers, and industry regarding stormwater issues. Following the grant period, MyRWA has hired Catherine Pedemonte to help run the collaborative. Catherine explained that the initiative generates a minimum of two messages per audience per year, and develops additional messages regarding phosphorus. Communication goes out to the 12 municipalities participating, and may take the form of a video or PSA.

To increase interest in and uptake of the educational messages from the initiative, one participant suggested connecting stormwater management to trash pollution in water bodies.

[Mystic River Urban Waters Federal Partnership Ambassador program and likely activities](#)

Adi Nochur, Deputy Director of Capacity Building, Groundwork USA, provided background information on the role Groundwork USA is playing to host a Mystic ambassador for the Urban Waters program, in partnership with its local Groundwork Somerville affiliate. In this partnership, the ambassador will be responsible for supporting the Mystic Urban Waters initiative and steering committee. The Mystic ambassador will also work on the ground in the watershed to enhance environmental justice and community access to the Mystic River. Groundwork USA frequently works in partnership with EPA and the National Park Service (NPS) through task agreements with the agencies to provide technical assistance for community engagement and community planning around brownfields. Groundwork USA also helps co-coordinate the Urban Waters Learning Network with River Network to provide tools and resources to Urban Waters practitioners across the country.

[Mystic River water quality report card roll-out update](#)

For the past 10 years, EPA and MyRWA have issued a water quality report card. The report card is focused on bacteria levels. There has been a steady and gradual improvement in water quality during over the time of issuing report cards.

Fourteen Mystic report card grades based on sampling and analysis for 2018 will be announced soon. Since 2014, the grades have been calculated using a multi-segmented process. The roll-out event for the report cards will take place June 26 at 2 PM at the Mystic Lakes Dam. Acting Regional Administrator Deb Szaro will attend.

Andy Hrycyna (MyRWA) explained the methodology for calculating the grades. Bacteria levels are tracked in 15 locations monthly. In addition, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) testing in the Mystic and Alewife is included in calculations. Because mechanisms that bring wastewater into stormwater are increased during rain events, wet weather predictably leads to worse conditions in many if not all sites. The grade is structured to buffer that effect by weighting wet and dry weather events separately, and to use a three-year rolling average to mitigate the impact of one outlier year.

One participant asked whether the previous rain event before the most recent wet weather event was considered in calculations, since, for example, the second rain event in a week may flush fewer pollutants than the first rain did. Andy explained that though a second rain event would not introduce as much phosphorus, which tends to build up on impervious surfaces, for bacteriological pollution, the amount of pollutant released is more related to the intensity of the rainfall than the frequency over several days. For this reason, the Mystic report card takes one filter, which is the amount of rain in the last 48 hours.

Industriplex NRD restoration planning process update

Karen Pelto, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) provided some background information on the Natural Resource Damages (NRD) program she coordinates. When there is a release of hazardous substances or an oil spill, resulting in the creation of a Superfund or Massachusetts Chapter 21E site, trustee federal agencies are empowered to work on behalf of the public to evaluate harm to public natural resources, including rivers, ecosystems, animals, etc. States and tribes are also trustees. MassDEP coordinates this program on behalf of the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs. The Industriplex case was settled to compensate for harm caused by release of arsenic into the Aberjona River and will fund wetlands and pond habitat restoration, among other projects.

Public meetings for the program were held last fall in Winchester and Woburn. Sixteen project ideas were submitted to the trustees in December. Following site visits, meetings will be held in the end of June to discuss the project ideas. Project ideas included a range of restoration activities such as species-specific habitat restoration, green infrastructure as a restoration tool, buffer planting, wetland restoration, and others, totaling \$4.3M in proposals. The trustees have engaged a consultant to help develop the restoration plan and assure NEPA compliance and comply with environmental impact assessment requirements for projects. Projects are evaluated according to Department of the Interior criteria. Projects that are restoring the same or a similar resource that was harmed in the same or a similar location, and projects that are closer to the location of the injury, are scored higher. Project ideas are available on the MassDEP website.

Announcements, updates, and funding opportunities

- The Conservation Law Foundation/Exxon lawsuit related to climate change and how projections are incorporated into NPDES permits, is ongoing. EPA testified in the case.
- The MS4 lawsuit is in mediation.
- The Urban Waters Federal Partnership continues to be active. USGS has been involved with data for water quality assessments. The Forest Service held workshops recently. The federal partners recently held their yearly call in which they discussed the future direction of the program and continued an ongoing conversation about ideas for cross-agency collaboration. The hope is to involve the new ambassador in fostering collaboration. The Federal Partnership is focused on water quality, habitat restoration, and public access. There may be interest in holding another workshop with various agencies to discuss grant opportunities.
- Kathy Vandiver, MIT Center for Environmental Health Science and Friends of the Malden River, shared information about the MIT Leventhal Cities Prize. The Friends of the Malden River recently applied for funds to improve public access to the river.

Committee business

Mel Coté (EPA) asked for feedback from the group on location, substance, and other dimensions of meetings in order to foster attendance and engagement.

- Some members indicated that meeting closer to or in the watershed could be helpful.
- There was some discussion of whether some of the topics which were previously covered primarily in steering committee meetings were now being mostly addressed in subcommittee or related meetings, including the Stormwater Education Collaborative meetings, the Resilient Mystic Collaborative (RMC) meetings, or others.
- One participant suggested more focus on equitable resilience in future meetings or in the RMC meetings. One participant suggested inviting the ambassador once the position it filled to the RMC meetings for this purpose.
- Another participant suggested a conversation on brownfields, involving EPA, NRD, and Groundwork USA.

Mel asked for group feedback on the structure and substance of the biannual science symposium.

- One participant suggested more focus in the future on the collaboratives.
- Another participant suggested that the fact that the agenda appeared similar to that of the previous year could have dampened interest in this year's symposium.

The meeting was adjourned at noon.