

Mystic River Watershed Steering Committee

Meeting Focus: Partnerships for Environmental Justice in the Mystic River watershed

April 29, 2021

Held online via Zoom

Meeting Summary

Meeting in Brief

Federal partner agencies shared updates and announcements for 2021. Then, several representatives from the Malden River Works project shared their experience with partnerships with agencies and municipalities when working with environmental justice populations, followed by a group discussion. There were no formal slides from this meeting. A list of meeting participants can be found at the end of this document. For more information about the steering committee and current efforts to restore the Mystic River watershed, please visit www.epa.gov/mysticriver.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 3 at 10am on Zoom; register at <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYIdeyopzosHNZ94MaV0aI6tL0r6FHUIC80>.

Federal Agency Updates for 2021

Environmental Protection Agency – Mel Cote, Surface Water Branch Chief at EPA Region 1

The Biden Administration has made Environmental Justice and Climate Change top priorities, and there have been a series of executive orders since the inauguration that enable federal agencies to take more action on these issues. Section 303B of Clean Water Act requires states to assess and report on their impaired waters. Last year, EPA and MassDEP developed an Alternative TMDL for Phosphorus for the Mystic as part of this process, and just yesterday, EPA had a session about integrating environmental justice (EJ) and climate change into 303B efforts. In Region 1, each division in Boston has formed an EJ team, and an overarching EJ team for the office is developing an updated EJ Action Plan. All regional programs (such as National Estuary Program locations) are revisiting the composition of their advisory committees and other engagement opportunities to ensure that their membership reflects the demographics of the region. EPA has also recently held targeted public meetings prior to the public comment period for the oil terminals along Chelsea Creek. Our recent focus on Trash Free Waters also has a goal of addressing community needs.

EPA has two Environmental Justice grants open now, and just a week ago it was announced that there is significantly more funding for both. Applications are due June 1. Information at <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>.

US Forest Service – John Parry, Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator - Northeast States

Our local contacts are based at the Durham Field Office. Karl Honkonen is the primary Mystic contact. Contacts: karl.honkonon@usda.gov, john.parry@usda.gov, constance.carpenter@usda.gov. USFS works with state agencies & other partners to provide grant funding, training/education, technical assistance. Programs include Urban Forestry, Watershed, Forest Stewards, Forest Health (Insect/Disease), Conservation Education.

USFS Urban & Community Forestry (UCF) Program

- Promotes management and protection of trees and resources in urban and developing areas. National Funding Increased by 25% this year.
- Landscape Scale Restoration Grants: Applications due ~ Sept. 1.
- Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants: Letters of intent to apply are due October 1st and full proposals are due November 1st. The grants require a 50-50 match, but those projects serving environmental justice neighborhoods require a lesser match of 75-25.
- Resources: i-Tree (assesses urban tree cover), UF Strike Team (responds to natural disasters in urban areas), Urban Reforestation

Many of USFS's efforts come through MA Dept. of Conservation & Recreation's [Urban & Community Forestry Program](#)

- Julie Coop, MA DCR UCF Program Coordinator: julie.coop@state.ma.us
- MA Urban Forestry Challenge Grants
- Greening Gateway Cities: reforestation in state-designated Gateway Cities, which in the Mystic includes Chelsea, Revere, Everett, Malden
- Their newsletter goes out bimonthly; sign up on the website above.

Environmental Justice is an emphasis in grant/program language this year. Plan to add a staff position focused on Environmental Justice later this year, and to increase funding to underserved areas.

Housing and Urban Development – *Martha Curran, Environmental Officer, HUD Region 1*

HUD is working on a climate action plan and an environmental justice plan. Martha's office of environment and energy is leading the climate change work in region 1. HUD's grants are entitlement grants, and flow through cities and towns, which can make decisions about how to use these resources. HUD wants to embed climate resilience and mitigation into grant programs, to motivate grantees to take climate action (for example, green infrastructure, energy efficiency, etc). Recently, most grantees have been very focused on Covid response: emergency housing, physical separation for individuals living in shelters.

National Park Service -- *Stephanie Stroud, Community Planner with Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance Program*

Stephanie began with a land acknowledgement and shared that NPS is doing work to understand its obligations to and relationships with tribes. NPS is working to address Biden Administration's EJ and Climate executive orders with new working groups and plans. There is a face covering requirement in place in parks since January. Coastal parks are developing climate change/sea level rise programs, and other locations are focused on Building Back Better economic development programs. NPS's RTCA program is working with Green Cambridge on a community health profile in the Alewife Reservation and nearby communities. They are also partnering with Groundwork South Coast in New Bedford on a park master planning project.

US Geological Survey – *Alana Spaetzel, Hydrologist in New England Water Science Center*

USGS just filled a tribal liaison position in the New England area. Like other agencies, they are figuring out what the new executive orders mean for them. They are working on a project in the Mystic River basin to integrate stormwater infrastructure into stormwater drainage mapping in the StreamStats tool. Municipalities in the Mystic have shared their data and shared feedback; USGS has completed a pilot area in the Upper Aberjona, which includes parts of Woburn, Wilmington, and Reading and they hope to

expand. Intend for this tool to address stormwater issues, including MS4 permit requirements. They will share in more detail about this project at the next Steering Committee meeting.

FEMA – Sean Loughlin, Community Planner FEMA Region 1

Massachusetts has been a national leader on integrating climate preparedness into their Hazard Mitigation Plan and has emphasized nature-based solutions to mitigating hazards. A few planners are assigned to 1-2 states each, and approve state mitigation plans.

Partnerships for Environmental Justice in the Mystic River Watershed

Conversation with Malden RiverWorks Steering Committee members: Karen Buck, Amber Christoffersen, Laura Le*, Marcia Manong*, Barbara Murphy, and Kathy Vandiver (* via pre-recorded interview), Moderated by Sasha George, EPA Region 1.

Representatives from the [Malden RiverWorks](#) steering committee and project team shared introductions, a description of the Malden River Works project, and some perspectives on successful partnership, missed opportunities for partnership, and suggestions for moving forward. Some key notes:

- Some participants were pre-recorded because not everyone is available to attend a meeting on a weekday morning.
- In 2019, a number of partners conducted a public health risk assessment that showed that the Malden River was safe for boating and public access – and this meant that public access was needed. In Malden, the only available space was behind the Department of Public Works, and this project was brought to MIT’s Department of Advanced Urbanism and won a prize to implement the design process. The project specifically focuses on “waterfront equity and climate resilience”. A steering committee was formed in order to directly engage community leaders of color in this project.
- An example of a missed opportunity for partnership was a park renovation led by a ward councilor that not only did not take neighbor’s needs into account, but actually redesigned the park to exclude local residents, especially affordable housing residents and people of color. Once the project was finished, it seemed mostly to benefit a local Catholic school and a charter school, and was not accessible to others.
- Working with schools is an important way to reach a wide range of residents, including youth and families. Recruiting a diverse volunteer base to do outreach and education is also essential to making everyone feel welcome, and like the river belongs to everyone.
- When boating became an option on the river, a boathouse was built and all three high schools in the city began offering rowing, introducing many more people to the river. Slowly, the mayor and the city council also began to advocate for new ways for the public to access the river in Malden. Malden RiverWorks was an important catalyst for even broader engagement, and that group has been thoughtful about bringing a diverse cross-section of the community together in meetings to engage on this project.
- Compensating steering committee members for their time has been essential – but many grants don’t allow for that (Community Preservation Act funding, for example, does not allow stipends). Also, it’s important to focus on both the process (of building a park) and the product (the final design) to ensure that everyone feels welcome.
- Discussion focused on open space, and how racist attitudes, in particular, pervade municipal conversations about parks, for example: who spends time in parks, whether they belong there, how well parks in different areas are maintained, NIMBYism from abutters, decisions about which amenities and resources a park offers. Several representatives from state and federal

agencies described ideas and resources that would support more open space projects in EJ communities in Massachusetts, as well as more youth engagement and engagement from a diverse cross-section of the community.

Announcements, Updates, and Funding Opportunities

- Melissa Cryan (EEA): [PARC](#) and LAND grants are now available for municipalities. Both can fund different types of land acquisition. Email melissa.cryan@mass.gov for more info on any grant opportunity.
- Tom Philbin (City of Everett): there will be a [virtual public meeting](#) on the vision plan for the Everett Waterfront on May 13.
- Tom Philbin (City of Everett): on May 15 there will be an Earth Day cleanup along the Malden River in Everett. A [recent article](#) highlighted other improvements to the river.
- Patrick Herron (MyRWA): [The Mystic River Herring Run & Paddle](#) is happening virtually this year to support the watershed association, beginning on May 9.
- Christie Getto Young (State Senator DiDomenico's office): Sen. DiDomenico spearheaded an EJ bill that passed as part of the larger Climate bill last session. We have re-filed parts of the original bill that did not pass the first time around and we are working as part of a large coalition representing groups statewide. And of course working with and learning from one of our local partners, GreenRoots in Chelsea. Reach out to learn more about the EJ efforts happening in the state legislature: Christie.young@masenate.gov.
- Tony Rodolakis (Wood): An RFR from MA Division of Ecological Restoration Ref-ID DER 2021-02 was released April 20. The Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) is seeking applications for new Priority Projects, as defined in this Request for Responses (RFR), including dam removal and river restoration, cranberry bog wetland restoration, and coastal wetland restoration projects, or any combinations thereof. *The deadline for applications was May 17.*

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Upcoming Mystic Steering Committee meetings:

- June 3
- September 9
- December 2

Meeting Attendees

Name	Affiliation
Alana Spaetzel	USGS
Alicia Hunt	City of Medford
Amber Christoffersen	Mystic River Watershed Association
Andy Hrycyna	Mystic River Watershed Association
Arn Franzen	City of Somerville
Barbara Murphy	Malden River Works
Bill Copithorne	Town of Arlington
Brett Gonsalves	Town of Stoneham
Bryan Manter	Town of Winchester
Caitlyn Peale Sloan	Conservation Law Foundation
Caitlyn Whittle	EPA Region 1
Catherine Pedemonti	Mystic River Watershed Association
Catherine Woodbury	City of Cambridge
Christie Gelb Young	Senator DiDomenico's office
Cynthia Lopez	HUD
Darya Mattes	Urban Waters ambassador, Groundwork Somerville
David Butler	MassDEP
Doug Gutro	
Elaine Vreeland	Town of Winchester
Eileen Coleman	Town of Burlington
Ellie Tonkin	EPA
Emily Sullivan	Town of Arlington
Hillary Monahan	MWRA
Hung Pram	MassDOT
Jay Corey	City of Woburn
Jeff Barbaro	USGS
Jennifer Letourneau	City of Cambridge
Jesse Caldwell	Conservation Law Foundation
John Parry	US Forest Service
Karen Buck	Friends of the Malden River
Karen Mullins	Town of Lexington
Kathy Vandiver	MIT/Malden Riverworks
Leo Olsen	Empower East Boston
Martha Curran	HUD
Matt Barrett	City of Woburn
Mel Coté	EPA Region 1
Melissa Cryan	EEA
Michael Sprague	Town of Lexington
Nate Pacheco	VHB
Patrick Herron	Mystic River Watershed Association
Pete Steeves	USGS
Sasha George	EPA Region 1
Sean Loughlin	FEMA Region 1
Stephanie Stroud	National Park Service
Stephen Perkins	MyRWA volunteer
Todd Borci	EPA Region 1
Tom Philbin	City of Everett
Tony Rodolakis	Wood Environment and Infrastructure Solutions

Vallery Cardoso	Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Wayne Chouinard	Town of Arlington
Yem Lip	City of Malden

For questions regarding this meeting summary, please contact Darya Mattes (darya@groundworksomerville.org).