

Norwalk River Watershed Initiative Advisory Committee
Regular Meeting of November 18th 2015
Wilton Town Hall, Main Building Conference Room

Minutes

Members Present: Alexis Cherichetti (Norwalk), Todd Bobowick (NRCS), Tony Hill (TU-Mianus), Cindy Ingersoll (Coordinator), Mike Conklin (Wilton), Mike Law (TU-Mianus), Catherine Minter (Weston), Dave Pattee (Redding), Geoff Steadman (Norwalk Harbor Commission), Mike Towle (WestCOG),

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM and attendees introduced themselves.

Topics Discussed

Branchville Development Plans-

Mike Towle gave a preliminary report on the Branchville area development plans. The planning project is an offshoot of a Connecticut DOT Route 7 Corridor project, initiated years back, to include 'enhancement initiatives' along the corridor to encourage residential development near current transit areas, of which Branchville is one. Existing DOT plans for this area recognizes the environmental constraints posed by the river and wetlands, and included initiatives to incorporate sustainable, low impact development; limit impervious surfaces; maintain contiguous open space and include a river walk. The recent charrette planning activity in Ridgefield to gather public input is being funded and implemented through WestCOG and CT DOT. Final plans for Branchville are expected by the end of 2016. Towle will check to see if there are any additional DOT planning efforts for the area and will forward the results from the charrette and next steps in the process.

On-Going, New and Old Business

a. Live Green CT Festival

Ingersoll gave a recap of the NRWI exhibit at the Live Green Connecticut Festival in September. The exhibit included our new NRWI banner and Non-Point Source photo display. Information was distributed on the Long Island Sound Report Card, Norwalk Harbor Report Card, septic maintenance and pet waste management, along with a promo for our website. Although the attendance was lower than expected at the festival, it was a good opportunity to reach pet owners and those interested in the Sound. There was also an opportunity to network with other exhibitors. Potential outreach opportunities from discussions with attendees and other exhibitors, the Norwalk Public Library and Shop Rite in Norwalk, will be pursued.

b. Norwalk Library Display

The Norwalk Public Library - Director of Library Information Services, Cynde Bloom Lahey, has agreed to allow the NRWI to have a display at the Library. She thought the exhibit we had at the Festival would be fine. Ingersoll will meet with the Director at the Library to get more detail and see the available space.

c. Green Car Wash

During the festival a previous member of the Norwalk Harbor Commission visited our exhibit and suggested we consider developing a "Green Car Wash" program to encourage fund raising groups, such as students, scouts, athletic teams, to hold their car wash events on soil or grassy areas and use environmentally friendly products. Ingersoll suggested pursuing this idea in late winter and consider supporting these green car wash events with advertising, signage, product and securing appropriate locations for these events in watershed towns.

d. ShopRite Parking Lot Rain Gardens

Ingersoll met with Dominick Cingari, owner of ShopRite in Norwalk and exhibitor at the Live Green CT Festival. In recent years, the company has made great strides in sustainability including composting, recycling, employee "Green Teams", consumer advocacy, and volunteer work. Mr. Cingari had expressed an interest in incorporating storm water management at his Norwalk store, adding that it would be a good fit with their overall sustainability program as well as providing outreach for customers and employees. He requested more information and an informal meeting on possible options, particularly raingarden islands. Ingersoll obtained a GIS flow map from Carl Zimmerman at WestCOG and met with Mike Dietz at the site for a first look. Mike Dietz did some preliminary measurement of slope and determined that current topography would allow for 3-4 rain garden island locations in the front parking lot where current storm drains are located that can be raised to accommodate overflow. Mike felt that a cost for this type of project based on his experience would run about \$10-12 thousand for each island. Only 1 or 2 existing island locations may make sense to convert to rain gardens. He also said that he is always looking for volunteer opportunities for his employees with local conservation efforts. Next step would be to pull together some information for Mr. Cingari. Alexis Cherichetti asked if we had looked at the rear of the building where she felt there was opportunity for storm water management and added that a reduced number of parking spaces could be a legal issue. She will check on this and take another look at the rear of the building which we could incorporate in our response to Mr. Cingari.

e. Merwin Meadows LID 319 Grant Project

A meeting was held with Steven Pierce, Mike Conklin, and NRWA representatives on the status of Wilton's progress on a master design plan for the park. Parks and Rec, together with the landscape architect, are planning to meet with the new First Selectman of Wilton to discuss the project and begin the process. The group discussed the timing issues between the grant deadline and the probability of finalizing and implementing a master design plan for the park, particularly in the parking lot. Steve Pierce asked whether we could substitute another LID that was less dependent on the parking lot which may be re-designed. Mike Conklin suggested a possible bio-retention area off the northeast corner of the lot in the woods near the trail entrance to capture flow from Lovers Lane. The group agreed that this would be a good option for managing run-off with little interference with the lot, yet close enough to the trail for exposure for educational purposes. Ingersoll will check with Chris Malik on this idea and confirm deadline for grant.

A meeting will be scheduled in January with Parks and Rec, the landscape architect and the new First Selectman to discuss the project which has been on-hold to date. Mike Conklin re-iterated that this Master Design Plan will be looking at a re-design of the entire park to include the area around the pond and outflow to the river. He said that the Town plans to incorporate additional LIDs, perhaps 2 more in addition to ours, and would like to work in partnership with NRWI, NRWA and NRVT. They would welcome suggestions from these groups for consideration at the January meeting. NRWI and NRWA and will be attending the meeting. Ingersoll will gather suggestions from the Initiative to relay.

f. Silvermine Residential Rain Garden 319 Grant Project

Nothing to report. The Southwest Conservation District is still waiting on contracts. Cherichetti added that she has not heard of any 319 funds being awarded in over a year.

g. Gretchen Yengst Presentation for NRWI meeting

The group would be happy to have photographer, Gretchen Yengst, present some of her work at a regular monthly meeting. Ms. Yengst is a longtime advocate for the Norwalk River and has been photographing the watershed for many years. She has been kind enough to donate her time to help design our new NRWI banner and has allowed use of some of her images for our website. Ingersoll will make arrangements to set something up for early spring and use this as an opportunity for a press release.

h. Other topics

Ingersoll reported on a potential outreach opportunity at Hotel Zero regarding the Flock Process Dam removal project. Patrice Gellespie attended a Live Green CT “Green Drinks” event sponsored by the Hotel which was well attended by local businesses. She had spoken to Meaghan Rosenblatt, Director of Sales for Hotel Zero, and Stephanie Odenath, Development Director for the parent company RMS Co. about the benefits of returning rivers to their natural state and the trend towards dam removal. The women expressed interest in leaning more from the Initiative. Ingersoll will discuss this further with Cherichetti and possibly the NRWA who may also be interested in reaching out.

Members who has attended the CACIWC Annual Conference, Mike Conklin, David Pattee and Cathy Minter, reported on their workshops and said that the conference was well attended. Conklin found the workshop on “Smart Phone Apps for Mapping” to be particularly useful for the municipality. This may be helpful for projects involving mapping or delineating streams, monitoring river banks, and data collection for the Norwalk River.

Member’s Implementation Activities

a. Water Quality Report

A summary report below was read by Ingersoll, as the Harbor Watch representatives were unable to attend. E. coli test data and an updated trend graph for the Norwalk River were distributed. Ingersoll will circulate the Harbor Watch Summer Report which can also be viewed on our website.

***‘Norwalk River:** In summary, 5 of the 12 sites we monitor on the Norwalk River exceeded one or both of the state criteria for E. coli bacteria. Despite low rainfall this monitoring season, oxygen levels met state criteria (with the exception of two sites in the upper section of the river by the Great Swamp on a three monitoring days). Monitoring will continue monthly throughout the winter months. Next steps involve stream walk to identify any visible pipes or leaks into the river that can be causing high bacteria counts. Additional sites may be added to narrow down the areas of concern. Full report is available upon request.*

***Storm Water Outfalls:** Continuing to monitor 9 continuously-flowing storm water outfalls into the lower Norwalk River and Norwalk Harbor. Results have identified the outfall by the Norwalk River Rowing Association as an area of high pollution. Source detection work on the system has been on going. Since April, Harbor Watch has identified 3 sewer laterals leaking into the storm sewer system, a major structural issue within a large section of the sewer main, and a cross connection through deteriorating pipes between a sanitary and storm sewer. These issues have all been reported to the City and most have been remediated. The remaining are in progress as we speak. The City has been very responsive to the data we provide to them and are working in a timely matter to resolve any identified sources of pollution.*

***Silvermine River:** Monitoring was conducted during the 2015 monitoring season. Report writing is currently in progress and it will be distributed upon completion. In summary, 8 of the 15 sites exceeded one or both of the state criteria for E. coli bacteria.*

***New Laboratory:** The new lab is up and running and excellent. The added space has been wonderful to work in and has allowed us to hold numerous meeting, provided more work space to conduct nutrient testing, and most importantly has been a classroom for 21 student interns since May.*

Future outlook:

- *Currently applying for an Urban Waters Small Grant which will focus on monitoring storm sewer systems in Norwalk.*

- *Continuing to monitor the Norwalk River and storm drains, as well as the fish survey, and oxygen profile surveys in 2016.'*

Although the geomean for 7 of the 12 monitoring sites tested below the State maximum for a relatively dry season, test results on a rainy sampling day were extremely high with E. coli counts of 33,600 CFU/100mL at Steep Brook (NR23) headwaters which diluted down to 6500 CFU/mL below the Ridgefield WWTP, and at Ash Creek Grille in Norwalk (NR1) at 50400CFU/mL. Cherichetti noted that the previous work on Steep Brook by Harbor Watch did indicate that extremely high E. coli counts were observed in the area regardless of rain fall.

b. Other Member Implementation Activities

Mike Law reported that the State did not attempt to stock this fall due to low water levels from a relatively dry hot season.

Geoff Steadman, from the Norwalk Harbor Management Commission, gave a very comprehensive overview presentation of two large multi-year CT Department of Transportation projects. The first to replace the entire railroad bridge which crosses the lower river, called the "Walk Bridge Project" and refurbishment of the Yankee Doodle Bridge on I-95 just north and upstream from the railroad bridge. The project is currently in the early design phase. The City of Norwalk and the Norwalk Harbor Management Commission are working together with DOT and CT DEEP to ensure economic and environmental impacts are mitigated. Concerns discussed included the continuation of water dependent users and businesses such as the rowing club, Norwalk Seaport and the Maritime Aquarium and impact on wetlands, intertidal areas, marine life, and water quality and water quality monitoring, particularly as a result of dredging under the railroad bridge with removal of the center support stanchion. Currently plans to refurbish the Yankee Doodle Bridge do not take into consideration any mitigation of storm water runoff from the bridge. Ten storm drains on the bridge currently discharge polluted runoff directly into the river and harbor where past dredging found such a high level of contaminants that dredged material needed to be buried below the channel rather than disposed in Long Island Sound.

The group agreed to allow information on the project to be posted on the NRWI website. Steadman asked if the Initiative could provide a letter of support to help ensure preservation of water quality during construction and upon completion of the project. Cherichetti agreed but asked for Steadman to forward any additional information regarding the work to be done on the Yankee Doodle Bridge portion of the project. After which we will draft a letter to the DOT as to whether the project is consistent with our Norwalk River Watershed Based Plan. To find out more about the replacement of the railroad over pass go to walkbridgect.com.

Alexis Cherichetti asked that the group come up with additional funding sources and refer to our watershed plan to come up with fundable projects for 2016 for our next meeting in January. She reminded municipal reps that NRWI funding request letters will be going out.

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be Wednesday, January 20nd, 2016, at 2:30PM in Wilton.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Ingersoll – Coordinator Norwalk River Watershed Initiative