

**Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed
Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council**

**Draft Minutes
Meeting held on December 14, 2022**

In Attendance: Exeter: Nan Quinlan; Hopkinton: Chip Heil; North Kingston: Ahren Cohen; North Stonington: Elaine Caldarone, Madeleine Jeffery; Richmond: Antonia Bryson, Pete August; Stonington: Fred Wagner; West Greenwich: Chris Grube; Westerly: guest Richard Smith; WPWA: Andrew McNulty, and guests Mike Mowry and Alan Desbonnet; NPS: Lauren Bonatakis, and guest Jackie Dias; Kassi Donnelly, Coordinator.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

Guest Presentation:

C. Grube presented the potential path forward for the Council given both the pending change in K. Donnelly's employment status, and the desirability of assessing past performance at the half way mark of the cooperative agreement with NPS, as well as assessing how best to improve operations going forward with the objective of better serving the Council mission. He recommended using a facilitator to work with members on staffing and programmatic possibilities for the next two and a half years. He hoped such a facilitated process would result in positive outcomes and make the job easier for the next chair. Improving the Council's relationship to WPWA will be an important part of the process. There is room for synergy between the organizations as both are working for the watershed with the Stewardship Plan as backup.

L. Bonatakis provided the NPS perspective on the relationship of the two organizations. Legally the relationship is minimal—WPWA is the fiscal agent which holds funds and disseminates them. Beyond that basic framework, it should be a joint decision as to how to operate. NPS prefers there be some relationship but not a total fusing of the two. The Council should remain functionally independent from WPWA. The two should focus on implementation of Stewardship Plan and on designing how to work together with partners in the community.

M. Mowry, Chair of the Board of WPWA, described his personal connection to and interest in the watershed. WPWA's strength is its membership, but its workplan is identical to the Stewardship Plan. He voiced hope for opportunities to work together with the Council for betterment of watershed, and noted the historical importance of WPWA's role in bringing the Council into being.

A. Desbonnet, Vice President and Board member of WPWA, emphasized the genesis of the Stewardship Plan in years of work by D. Poyer reflecting the existing goals and objectives of WPWA. That work is now embodied in a Plan which both organizations seek to implement. He noted there can be a diversity of models for going forward together and mentioned some projects that are well suited to partnering, such as the implementation of the 2017 flood resiliency plan. That plan was masterminded under the guidance of WPWA but needs more connection to towns for further work. He hoped a facilitator would help work this out.

The WPWA budget is approximately \$250,000 per year, the majority of which is from large grants. The priorities for an upcoming year are set annually.

A discussion followed on the role of a facilitator. It is expected that the process will yield three outcomes: how the Council will move forward programmatically, what its staff needs will be, and how it will work with WPWA. The facilitator will help shape the outcomes as the process proceeds. Its timing is yet to be determined.

M. Mowry and A. Desbonnet left the meeting.

Secretary's Report:

A. Bryson presented the draft minutes of the October 26, 2022 meeting. N. Quinlan moved to approve the minutes as presented, and A. Cohen seconded. There being no discussion, the motion passed unanimously, with F. Wagner abstaining, and the minutes were approved.

Financial Report:

P. August presented the bi-monthly financial report. F. Wagner moved to approve the report as presented, and C. Heil seconded the motion. There being no discussion, the motion passed unanimously and the report was approved.

Council Discussion:

There followed discussion of the path forward. Members voiced concern about the timeline for hiring a new coordinator given the role of the facilitator in helping scope future staff needs. A. Cohen suggested following parallel tracks of hiring and the facilitation process. A. Bryson suggested seeking interim help on the parallel track while the facilitation process was proceeding. There was discussion of use of contracting procedures to hire interim staff for greater flexibility. L. Bonatakis advised the Council to be aware of NPS has rules regarding contracting.

It was noted members need a description of K. Donnelly's duties and responsibilities. It would be helpful to seek job descriptions of other W & S coordinators. A Project Manager as a contracted position will be explored. This will allow for certain projects to be accomplished, with a set time frame. There was some concern expressed about the use of a facilitator. It was felt that members may not have worked sufficiently on sorting out issues among themselves. The suggested person to act as a facilitator has worked with P. August and comes highly recommended.

P. August moved that the Council take immediate steps to hire an interim coordinator as a contracted position, and initiate the hiring of a facilitator to work with the Council on its programmatic and staffing needs and its relationship with WPWA. F. Wagner seconded the motion. It was approved by unanimous vote.

N. Quinlan volunteered to assist the executive committee with the interim hire, and A. Cohen volunteered to assist with the hiring of a facilitator.

Committee and Project Updates:

Projects: K. Donnelly reported on the status of the community grant program. The Projects Committee has heard interest from potential applicants. The committee will meet 3-4 times once applications are submitted. The full application packets will be provided to the Council in February. The Committee needs more members to accomplish its work. A. McNulty volunteered for the job.

Advisory: The Committee prepared a letter at the request of E. Caldarone supporting the town of North Stonington's application for a Climate Resilience Fund Grant to develop flood resiliency in town. The letter was provided with the agenda. P. August moved to approve sending the letter, A. Cohen seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. A. Bryson informed the members that the Committee has prepared a response to RIDEM on the issue of cessation of stocking of hatchery-raised trout in the upper Wood River. RIDEM had declined to cease stocking at this time, but had offered to work with the Council on RIDEM's future efforts to study and support the Native Brook Trout population in the Upper Wood.

Town/Community Updates: tabled due to time constraints

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Next Meeting or Workshop: The next meeting or workshop will be held on January 25, 2023 from 6-8 pm at the WPWA campus.

Adjournment

There being no other business, N. Quinlan moved to adjourn the meeting and C. Heil seconded. The motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.