



Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

Torrington • Harwinton • Litchfield • Thomaston • Watertown • Waterbury • Naugatuck • Beacon Falls • Seymour • Ansonia • Derby

Meeting Notes

Wednesday, May 11th, 2016 - 9 to 10:30

Valley United Way Conference Room

54 Grove Street, Shelton

See last page for attendance and a roster of steering committee members.

Co-Chair Jack Walsh opened the meeting and introductions were made.

Sheila O'Malley, Chair of the Naugatuck Valley Corridor **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy** (CEDS) and Ansonia's Economic Development Director gave an overview of the CEDS process, and how it relates to the NRG. Sheila explained that the Naugatuck Valley CEDS is a regional economic development plan that is updated annually and is prepared by the Shelton Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) and the Waterbury Development Corporation (WDC). The Naugatuck Valley Economic Development District (EDD) is one of 8 federally recognized EDDs in CT, and as such is eligible to receive federal grants through the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) for local and regional economic development projects. For instance, Ansonia was just awarded \$1m to build infrastructure to help develop a new industrial park. The 20 town region includes the 19 municipalities covered by NVCOG with the addition of Newtown.

Sheila explained that the NRG and riverfront development was part of the strategy, and that trails can be an economic driver, making trail development economic development. Jimmy Ryan, the president of SEDC is retiring in August and will be replaced by Paul Grimmer. The SEDC may or may not continue to host the CEDS. More information about the CEDS process can be found here: http://www.sheltoncorp.org/regional_dev.html

The Ansonia Riverwalk extension was also discussed. Sheila explained that final design is complete to extend Ansonia's section of NRG from its current northern terminus over the Metro North tracks to Pershing Drive. The City is awaiting final comments and approval from CT DOT and the railroad. The extension would effectively connect downtown Ansonia to the NRG in Ansonia and by extension, Derby. It should greatly increase traffic on Ansonia's section of greenway by eliminating the dead end that currently exists at the rail line.

The conversation turned to coordination with railroads for the development of trails. Sheila explained that it has been difficult to work with Metro North on trail development issues near the right of way. This sentiment has been echoed across the state including in the construction of the Derby Greenway which crosses two different rail lines and runs in close proximity to Metro North's line in one section. Since many sections of NRG are in close proximity to the Waterbury Branch Line, future coordination will be inevitable. Developing "Rail with Trail" is common in other parts of the country, but there seems to be a hurdle to this type of trail development in CT. Rista Malanca explained that the Connecticut Greenways Council (CGC) is looking to help the situation by pushing for legislation that will extend existing municipal and utility company liability protections to railroads if they allow recreational use of their property. More information about rails with trails can be found here: <http://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/americas-rails-with-trails/>

Bill Purcell, President of the Greater Valley Chamber, presented on an initiative that he is leading to have the Naugatuck Valley recognized as a [National Heritage Area](#). According to the National Park Service:

"The Naugatuck River from Torrington to Derby is rich with history, stunning scenery and wildlife. Just as the river built and shaped our towns and cities, the Naugatuck River Greenway will be a driving force for the next century and beyond. Our mission is to harness the vitality and protect the health of the river for economic development and quality of life for all."

“National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. NHAs are a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. Through public-private partnerships, NHA entities support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects. Leveraging funds and long-term support for projects, NHA partnerships foster pride of place and an enduring stewardship ethic.

There are currently 49 NHAs in the program, including two in CT: The [Last Green Valley](#) in the Quinebaug valley in northeast CT, and the [Upper Housatonic Valley NHA](#) in northwest CT. Unlike national parks and monuments, the federal government does not own, control land use or manage any land in NHAs. Instead, the NPS partners with locally organized NHA management to provide technical assistance and support, and to provide matching funding from congress to promote conservation, preservation, recreation and tourism. Originally, designated NHAs were entitled to \$1m per year over ten years to develop organizational capacity. The growing number of NHAs have caused the reduction of funding to individual units because the available pot of funding for the entire program has remained stagnant. Currently, NHAs receive a fraction of \$1m annually.

The real value of being designated an NHA is the technical assistance that the NPS can offer to develop a unified and interesting visitor experience that can drive history based tourism and economic development. Bill explained that in order to be designated an NHA, congress must first order a feasibility study. The Valley Community Foundation supported efforts a few years ago to document the history of the Naugatuck Valley. With the documentation of the valley’s national importance, CT’s delegation has backed the idea and presented a bill (S.1191) in congress to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a feasibility study on designating the Naugatuck Valley as a NHA. The bill has not been given a vote in the last several sessions, and the current political environment is not encouraging. A greater push may be in order for the next session. Rosa DeLauro is currently spearheading the initiative.

NRGSC and NVCOG offered whatever assistance can be provided. Aaron Budris explained the NVCOG [Historic Resources Storymap](#) that could be altered to better represent the proposed NHA area. Bill suggested that the NHA initiative be made a regular agenda item. It was also suggested that the valley start acting like an NHA, even without the name or designation. Developing a governing body, creating a uniform identity, posting uniform signage, developing valley wide initiatives, etc. could help support the push and reflect favorably on the valley’s push for NHA recognition.

The NRG Economic Study is nearing completion. Aaron Budris explained that UConn Center for Economic Analysis has completed their economic modeling and the project team is putting together the final report. Once the report is complete, the economic study subcommittee will be called on to help review it. NVCOG will be preparing individual municipal summaries for each of the 11 NRG communities. Information can be found at <http://nvcogct.org/content/naugatuck-river-greenway-economic-impact-study>

UPDATE: following a conference call with the project team and Steering Committee members, UConn has agreed to re-run the model to address some concerns brought up by COG staff and Steering Committee members.

The NRG Signage and Wayfinding Study is moving along albeit slowly. Millone & MacBroom and COG staff have been exchanging draft layouts and comments. Once a more developed layout is presented, the signage subcommittee will be convened to review it.

The **Thomaston Watertown Recreational Trails Grant** has been delayed by issues in developing a work plan and cost estimates with the selected consultant. Since so much of the potential work is dependent on whether the Trolley Bridge can be rehabilitated or what features will be designed in Watertown (which depends on what is actually found in the field), the project may have to be phased. For example, the first phase may investigate the

trolley bridge and features in Watertown, and the second phase cost and scope would be dependent on what the first phase revealed.

UPDATE: A preliminary field walk was conducted on 5/17 with representatives from Thomaston, Watertown, NVCOG and the selected consultant. The intent was to identify and map critical features in the field to better focus the scope of the project and enable a better cost estimate. An interactive map was developed featuring the identified critical features, and it can be viewed here: <http://arcg.is/1rUjBUJ>

The 2016 Recreational Trails Grant awards have been announced, and they include several projects related to the NRG that may be of interest:

- Torrington received funding to construct a section of NRG trail along a USACE levee from Franklin street south to Bogue Road.
- Watertown was funded to construct a section of the Steele Brook Greenway that would extend from French Street to Main Street in the Oakville section of town, including a pedestrian bridge over Steele Brook.
- NVCOG received funding to develop a statewide trail user count and survey program in partnership with the Connecticut Greenways Council, UConn Extension and the Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) at UConn.
- Waterbury received funding to improve trails at Fulton Park.
- Naugatuck received funds to develop trails on town land.

Potential NRGSC organizational changes were discussed. Co-Chair Ingrid Manning has brought up the potential need for changes to the committee, and some of these were briefly discussed. The discussion centered on the current schedule of 6 meetings annually and whether this is working well, as well as if there is a need to elect new chairs. The idea of creating a 501(c)(3) was also brought up to enable the group to collect donations. The conversation was tabled due to time constraints, but members were asked to think about it for further discussion at the July meeting.

Upcoming **Trails Day** events were discussed, including the one held in Watertown at Black Rock Park that was sponsored by Thomaston and Watertown and featured info about the NRG (UPDATE– see photos [HERE](#))

Recaps of recent Naugatuck River related events were presented. Kevin Zak described the very successful Naugatuck River and Rail cleanup that was held on April 2nd that cleaned up hundreds of tires and tons of other debris from along the river and rail line. Details can be found [HERE](#). Aaron Budris discussed the Naugatuck River Festival and fun run held in Linden Park on April 30th Photos [HERE](#). The event was small, but there was a lot of enthusiasm about the NRG. NRG Information tables were present at both events.

Rista Malanca announced that a groundbreaking will be held for the southern section of the city's NRG on June 22nd at 10:30 am at the John Toro Sports Complex.

The meeting was adjourned, and a few attendees joined Jack Walsh for a tour of the Shelton Greenway. Photos have been posted [HERE](#).

Next Meeting: July 13th

NVCOG Conference Room, 49 Leavenworth St, Waterbury.

Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

Present in **bold**

Aaron Budris – Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments

Bill Purcell – Valley Chamber

Bob Gregorski - Naugatuck River Watershed Association & Trout Unlimited

Christopher Way - US Army Corps of Engineers

Chuck Berger - Watertown Town Engineer

Clifford Cooper - Litchfield Community Greenway

Dave Faber – Connecticut Outdoors, LLC/ Naugatuck Valley Outdoors Club

Dominic Sorrentino – Beacon Falls

Fred Messore - Town of Seymour

Ingrid Manning – formerly of CT Community Foundation

***Chair-Jack Walsh - Valley United Way**

Jim MacBroom – Milone and MacBroom

Jim O'Rourke - Waterbury Y

Jim Stewart - Naugatuck Borough Engineer

Joan Kirchner - Harwinton Conservation Commission

Jolene Podgorski - Watertown DPW

Josh Carey – Connecticut Community Foundation

Kathy McNamara - City of Waterbury

Kevin Tedesco - CT DOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator

Kevin Zak – Naugatuck River Revival Group

Laura Wildman – Princeton Hydro

Laurie Giannotti - CT DEEP Greenways

Liz Falzone- Beacon Falls

Mike Jastremski - Housatonic Valley Association

Mark Nielsen – Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments

Rich Minnick – Beacon Falls

Rista Malanca - Torrington

Sal Porzio – City of Waterbury

Sheila O'Malley – City of Ansonia

Susan Peterson - CT DEEP Watershed Management Program

Suzanne Stitch – Town of Harwinton

Vicki Barnes - Watertown - Steele Brook Rangers

Vincent Gualtieri - US Army Corps of Engineers

Will Cummings – Thomaston Trail Committee