



Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

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

Meeting Notes

Wednesday February 12th, 2020, 9am

NVCOG Conference Room

49 Leavenworth Street, Waterbury

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

Co-Chair Jack Walsh was attending by phone, and asked Aaron Budris to lead the meeting. Aaron opened the meeting, and introductions were made. Aaron noted that the meeting was inadvertently scheduled on a state holiday, and several state agency representatives had sent their regrets that they could not attend.

Aaron introduced **Susan Smith, Executive Director of Bike Walk CT** (www.bikewalkct.org), and asked that she give an overview of her organization and discuss some of their legislative priorities in the current legislative session.

Susan explained that Bike Walk CT began as the Central Connecticut Bicycle Coalition, focusing on bike safety. In 2010, they changed their name to Bike Walk CT, expanding statewide, and broadening their focus to include pedestrian safety. They concentrate on three main areas; working with legislators on legislation to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists, teaching bicycle safety and skills, and promoting biking and walking. The organization hosts an annual dinner every fall, usually at CCSU.

Susan discussed activities Bike Walk CT has been involved with recently. The organization owns a fleet of bicycles that they make available as part of education efforts at various events as part of education outreach. They have also set up bicycle parking “valet” service at events including Sailfest in New London to allow bicyclists to leave their bike in a safe location at the event and avoid the common motor vehicle traffic around the event. They organize Discover Connecticut bike tours annually. Falls Village on July 19 and Bloomfield on May 30 are the host communities in 2020.

BWC has developed a 4th grade Physical Education curriculum, provides training to PE teachers, and is promoting adoption in schools across the state. It also conducts Smart Cycling (Traffic Skills 101) workshops and advanced licensing courses to certified League Cycle Instructors.

Susan gave an update on legislative priorities in 2020. She explained that 5 bike/ped related bills were up in 2019, but none passed, although two of those have been reintroduced in 2020. She discussed the recently held BWCT Legislative Reception, and gave an overview of current bills:

- **Pedestrian Safety at Crosswalks (H.B. 5934, Raised Bill 7203)** – Amends crosswalk law to require motor vehicles to stop for people at a crosswalk.
- **Speed Limits in Municipalities (Committee Bill 6590)** – Allows municipalities to lower a speed limit by 15 mph on any OSTA roadway with current speed limit of 35mph or less (in municipal jurisdiction).
- **Make Dooring of a Bicyclist or Pedestrian Illegal & Establish Penalty Progression** – requires degree of awareness and care when opening a car door.
- **Penalties for Distracted Driving When Violation Results in a Motor Vehicle Accident (H.B. 5282)**
- **Make Traffic Impact Studies (TIS) review of bicycle and pedestrian access and safety mandatory.**

“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.”

Susan also discussed secondary focus aimed at Trails:

- **Establishment of a Greenways Account (H.B. 7058)** – Dedicates funds raised through the greenways license plate sales to trail projects (it was previously diverted to the general fund).
- **CT Recreational Trails Bonding** – Returns state bond funding to the state Recreational Trails Program.

Additional information about BWCT's legislative priorities can be found here:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/xlhvg03kubhpxge/Legislative_Reception_BILL_Summary.pdf?dl=0

Susan discussed or promoted:

- The League of American Bicyclists National Bike Summit <https://www.bikeleague.org/summit>), scheduled in Washington DC in March.
- Smart Growth America's inventory and evaluation of Complete Streets Policies: (<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/publications/policy-development/policy-atlas/>)
- UConn Radio's Bicycle Talk with Ron Manizza: <https://whus.org/category/podcasts/bicycle-talk/>
- Bicycle Friendly America (<https://www.bikeleague.org/bfa>)

Mark Nielsen discussed NVCOG's upcoming Regional Bicycle Plan development and said that the COG looks forward to working with Susan and her organization during that process. Some conversation about funding and autonomous vs. connected vehicles followed.

Aaron Budris announced the publication of the DRAFT **NRG Trail Thomaston to Torrington Routing Feasibility Study** report. The report with appendices and an interactive project map have been published at the project webpage (<https://nvcogct.gov/nrg-thomaston-to-torrington-routing-study>). Comments will be collected through the link on the project page until March 13th. Aaron gave an overview of the report and methods that were used to develop it. The preferred route presented in the report was agreed upon by consensus at a meeting of the project steering committee held in September. The Committee consisted of representatives of the 4 municipalities, the Naugatuck Railroad, The USACE, and the COGs. Comments will be addressed, and a final report is expected probably sometime in early 2020. Aaron also explained that the project team had met with the USACE and an OHV representative prior to the Project Steering Committee Meeting, and a compromise route had been agreed upon that would avoid most of the OHV area, with a physical separation concept along a section of Old Route 8 that satisfied the USACE and would not negatively impact OHV traffic flow or eliminate trail overall. It was that compromise route and trail concept that was ultimately selected as the preferred route.

Mark Nielsen discussed the **Watertown Thomaston Design and Construction project**, funded by a Recreational Trails grant. VHB, Inc. is wrapping up design of a new pedestrian bridge over Branch Brook. NVCOG and town staff are currently reviewing the final design documents. Design of a new bridge was made necessary due to the poor condition of the existing trolley bridge and was funded by shifting Rec Trails funds originally intended for construction of the trail segment behind the WPCA to bridge design. Thomaston applied to the Local Transportation Capital improvement Program (LoTCIP) to fund Construction of the trailhead, trail and bridge at a cost of approximately \$600,000. NVCOG has approved that application, but the town is still waiting to hear back from DOT on the notice to proceed. Watertown applied for LoTCIP funding to construct the adjacent section of trail to Frost Bridge Road and is also waiting to hear from DOT.

Mark Nielsen briefly discussed the **Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside Program**. The program is part of the Federal Transportation Act. Typically, TA funding is used for non-motorized transportation related projects, and the funding can be used for design and construction of multiuse trails or sidewalks. While a new federal transportation bill has not been passed, CT DOT is anticipating that the TA set-aside program will continue in future legislation and has assumed that the program will essentially remain the same as specified in the current FAST Act. Draft language that was passed out of the senate Environment and Public Works Committee included

an approximately 40% increase in funding to the TA program, and also gives more control to small MPOs with urbanized areas with population under 200,000 (like Waterbury UA) . There is still a long way to go before a bill is passed, but this is a bipartisan proposal and may indicate good things in the future. If the changes remain NVCOG would have more control over project selection, and there would be more funding available to complete larger projects or more projects. CT DOT is currently reviewing proposals submitted in May, including projects in Thomaston, Beacon Falls/ Seymour and Naugatuck on the Naugatuck River Greenway Trail, and proposals from Watertown on the Steele Brook Greenway and in Oxford for bike ped improvements along Route 67.

Aaron discussed the CT Trail Census which just wrapped up its third full year of data collection. Derby remains the busiest trail among those being studied, despite some serious data loss due to hardware and software issues on the counter in 2019. The program is now fully staffed and will be debuting a new data visualization portal soon. The program has also applied for funding to develop a central trails portal similar to [Maine Trailfinder](#), and will be working with trail groups statewide if funding is received. More information: www.cttrailcensus.uconn.edu

Aaron mentioned that NVCOG had recently purchased its own infrared counters to begin a more thorough count program in the region, and would be using CT Trail Census methods and data to gain a fuller picture of trail use on the NRG trail and other trails in the region.

Aaron presented a [letter](#) that the Co-Chairs authored supporting UConn Assistant Professor Sohyun Park's application to the 2021 Competitive Capacity Grants Program to advance multi-year research into the benefits of trails, parks and green spaces as important assets for family and community resilience. If receive, the project team will be selecting trails on which to conduct research looking into the impacts of the trail on the local community. The team is very interested in Derby as a research site since NVCOG and the CT Trail Census has been collecting data on the trail for several years.

Aaron and Mark discussed an upcoming update to the [2015 NRG Project Priorities document](#) that NVCOG developed with the NRGSC. The document has been helpful in supporting funding requests since it was published, but it is now 5 years old, and progress has been made on many of the highlighted priorities. NVCOG is planning an update to the document this spring to reflect that progress and incorporate recently developed routing and data. The update will include updates to NRG Trail Route mapping. COG staff will be reaching out to municipal representatives to ensure that local priorities are incorporated. Expect a draft update to be shared at the next NRGSC meeting, with discussion.

Roundtable Discussion

Torrington – Jeremy Leifert explained that development of Franklin Plaza is in progress. An apartment complex is set to start construction in 2020 along part of the future NRG route, and construction of part of the trail is included in that development.

Waterbury – Judy Mancini reported that an RFQ is currently out for construction administration and resident engineer inspection services for NRG Phase I in Waterbury, stretching from Bristol Street to Eagle Street. DOT is handling ROW, and offers are all expected to be sent to impacted property owners by March 4th. Permitting is on a priority track at DOT. Expected to begin construction this spring/summer. All funding has been obligated.

Thomaston – Stacey Sefcik reiterated the release of the routing study previously reported on. Aaron explained that the town had sent notices to property owners along the preferred route as presented in the report, and he had received a few inquiries. They were more curious about the process, and there didn't seem to be any opposition.

Litchfield – Cleve Fuessenich explained that there is a new administration in town with Denise Raap having been elected as First Selectperson in November. He said that the new administration seems very supportive of the NRG and trails in general, but that funding will remain to be a hurdle. He asked if a presentation about the trail and routing study would be offered to communities, and Mark said that something could certainly be set up.

Watertown – Roy Cavanaugh briefly discussed efforts to extend the trail north of the bus maintenance facility on Frost Bridge Road. The town has a LoTCIP application pending at DOT to construct the section of trail between Frost Bridge Road and the Thomaston WPCA. Watertown also submitted a Transportation Alternatives application to extend the Steele Brook Greenway.

Derby – Mark Nielsen said that the design for pedestrian and bicycle improvements on the Derby Shelton Bridge will be complete in August, with construction expected in early 2021. The improvements will connect the NRG Trail in Derby to the Shelton Riverwalk.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45

Next Regular Meeting: May 13th, 2020 at 9:00 am
Location – TBD

Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

*Indicates Co-Chair - Present in **BOLD**

Municipal Representatives

Torrington	Rista Malanca* Jeremy Leifert
Litchfield	Cleve Fuessenich
Harwinton	Suzanne Stitch Joan Kirchner
Thomaston	Stacy Sefcik
Watertown	Roy Cavanaugh
Waterbury	Kenny Curran Sal Porzio
Naugatuck	Jim Stewart
Beacon Falls	Liz Falzone Josh Carey
Seymour	Rory Burke
Ansonia	Sheila O'Malley Bill Luneski
Derby	Jack Walsh*

Stakeholder Representatives

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 – Retired Watertown Town Engineer

Clifford Cooper - Litchfield Community Greenway

Courteny Morehouse – Housatonic Valley Association

Dave Faber –Naugatuck Valley Outdoors Club

Jim MacBroom – Milone and MacBroom

Jim O'Rourke - Waterbury Y

Jolene Podgorski - Watertown DPW

Josh Carey – Connecticut Community Foundation

Kevin Zak – Naugatuck River Revival Group

Laurie Giannotti - CT DEEP Greenways

Mark Nielsen – Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments

Melanie Zimyeski – CT DOT

Rick Lynn – Northwest Hills Council of Governments

Steve Casey – Railroad Museum of New England

Susan Peterson - CT DEEP Watershed Program

Vicki Barnes - Watertown - Steele Brook Ranger

Also Present

Judy Mancini, City of Waterbury

Susan Smith, Bike Walk CT