



Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee

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

Meeting Notes

Wednesday August 11th, 2021, 9am Via Zoom

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

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

Funding Opportunities

[DEEP Recreation Trails](#)

Aaron Budris announced that a new round of funding for \$3 million has just been released by DEEP. The RFP was just published with a deadline of November 1st. Looking at awards from previous rounds, \$300,000 appears to be the upper limit for grant size, so may be more appropriate for planning studies or design of multiuse trails like the NRG. Mr. Budris invited members to talk about any projects they may wish to propose. Sheila O'Malley explained that she had been speaking with Anne Marie Drugonis and that Ansonia and Seymour are interested in securing funding to design a trail connection between the two communities. Mr. Budris pointed out that, in the past, the NRGSC has endorsed individual projects, and letters of support could be provided, but a special meeting would need to be set up for that to comply with the submission deadline. He invited any interested parties to approach him offline. NVCOG can also offer regional support.

[American Rescue Plan](#)

Mr. Budris stated that all communities are receiving funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) – he is reasonably confident that they can be used for outdoor recreational trails. Final guidance is not yet out to confirm this. In most states funding is being provided to States, Counties and Municipalities. In Connecticut, without county government, the county share is being directed to municipalities. COGs do not receive any funds because they are not “counties”, making regional projects more difficult.

The State, which also received ARPA money, has released information about some competitive grant programs funded by ARPA. For one of them, the “CT Communities Challenge” competitive grant program, trail projects are eligible, according to a [DECD factsheet about the program](#). Grants will range from \$1M to \$10M with a special focus for distressed communities. More detail about the program is expected, but the fact sheet indicates that a call for proposals/ intent to apply is expected in the fall with a deadline to apply in the winter. Jack Walsh pointed out that there are several distressed municipalities along the NRG.

Mayor Dziekan asked if the funds could be used to complete a fencing project along the greenway, since it is the #1 used greenway in the state. Aaron replied that it should be eligible for DEEP Recreation Trails grant funds, but he wasn't certain about the Communities Challenge grant. Mark Nielsen noted that the municipal ARPA funds appear to be pretty flexible as related to COVID recovery. Since trail usage increased markedly during COVID, NRG projects could be seen as a positive for resiliency. As with most grants, Mr. Nielsen pointed out that it is important to use the right key terms to justify need: “economic resiliency,” “health and welfare,” “active recreation,” etc. ARPA money has to be obligated by December 31, 2024 and expended two years later.

Susan Peterson asked if the Communities Challenge was also open to nonprofits; Aaron replied that it is open to “municipalities or regional consortia.”

Vincent Siefert asked for an update on a congressional directed spending grant from June that could fund the Naugatuck segment of the NRG. Mr. Nielsen confirmed that the proposal has received positive feedback from

“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.”

Senator Murphy's office, but it is still in the works. Mr. Walsh asked about the infrastructure bill, but Mr. Nielsen replied that trails were not specifically included in the program. It would be very difficult for a trail to compete against, for instance, a highway. Also, due to proceedings in the House, it could be many more months before funds are allocated. Mr. Nielsen advised all communities to be proactive about preparing for these grants so that they can apply right away once funds become available.

CT Trail Finder

At the last NRGSC meeting, Kim Bradley from UConn presented on the CT Trail Finder initiative. This new website, which is now live, hosts information on Connecticut trails that is curated by the trail managers themselves. NVCOG Staff has been assisting members with getting trails included on the website, and has prioritized open sections of NRG Trail. Several sections of the NRG are already up on the site: the Derby Greenway Trail, Ansonia Riverwalk, and Watertown Greenway, with a couple more pending. Mr. Budris demonstrated the website and visited a profile to walk through the features, such as points of interest on the map, user comments that are moderated by the managers, and a link to Google Maps directions. Mr. Walsh thanked Mr. Budris and the NVCOG. Ms. Peterson praised the website and wondered if there was any information about waste disposal stations for pets. Mr. Budris said this was a great idea and would pass it along to the CT Trail Finder staff. Mr. Nielsen wondered if there was a rules or regulations section. Mr. Budris replied that there is trail etiquette information on the site, but it is not a bad idea to also have rules for each section of a trail.

NVCOG Active Transportation Plan

Transportation Planner Richard Donovan announced that NVCOG is in the early stages of developing an Active Transportation Plan for the region. An advisory committee will be assembled, and Mr. Donovan invited NRGSC members to either join or recommend members. The goals for the plan are to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety, economic development, and options for mobility beyond cars. The biggest focus will be on engineering roads and sidewalks to be safe and to separate cars from cyclists and pedestrians. Expanding connections throughout the region, building on the work of the NRG, is another important target. NVCOG is planning to put together the project advisory committee before mid-October and will roll out a robust community engagement strategy. For anyone who is interested in becoming part of the committee or would like to share thoughts about the Plan, contact Rich Donovan at rdonovan@nvcogct.gov. Mr. Nielsen reiterated that they are really looking for someone from NRGSC to serve on this committee – possibly Ms. Malanca, to have an outside-the-region perspective as well. Mr. Walsh expressed that this is a very good fit for the work that the NRGSC is doing.

Oxford Route 67 Alternative Transportation Plan

Mr. Budris expressed that the Route 67 ATP is wrapping up. The purpose of the study was to make Oxford's "Main Street", Route 67, friendlier to pedestrians and cyclists by developing a master plan for increasing bike/ped access along Route 67, and to study transit options in the corridor. He explained that a lot of the information developed for the study may be useful when other communities are planning multiuse trails. One transferrable finding from the report was a list of linear foot costs for different types of trails, including trails in developed areas, along steep slopes, needing retaining walls, or needing rock cuts. The consultants also created evaluation criteria to prioritize competing routes. The study recommends developing a multiuse side path/trail mostly along the west side of Route 67 with crossings where there are already a signalized crossings. Each segment of the trail was broken into fundable projects with renderings and cost estimates. A draft report is published on the project webpage, and the comment period is open until August 15. After the revisions are incorporated, the plan will go to the Board of Selectmen for endorsement and finalization. For more information, visit www.nvcogct.gov/oxfordroute67

Project Updates

Waterbury Phase I

Judy Mancini announced that the notice to proceed for Waterbury's Phase I was issued July 29th. Construction is expected to begin in September, with final completion expected September 2022. It is a stretch of about two miles from Platts Mills up South Main Street to Eagle Street. Everyone is excited to hear the good news.

Ansonia Riverwalk Segments 3 & 4

Ms. O'Malley reported that phase 3 and 4 of the Ansonia Riverwalk, about 2,500 linear feet of trail on the east bank of the river is nearing completion. Along with the completed trail on the west bank and sidewalk connections, it will complete a two mile loop adjacent to downtown. The first coat of pavement is down. The rest stops and railings are back-ordered, so the construction is a little behind schedule. A decorative "lighthouse" is planned for the observation deck on top of the levee, and it has been getting a lot of positive feedback.

Ansonia Routing Study

Ms. O'Malley explained that the City's routing study, funded by a previous round of Recreational Trails program funding, is continuing, and completion is expected this fall. The study is looking at routing between the existing trail on Pershing Drive north to the Seymour line. Mr. Nielsen added that the city asked NVCOG to submit an application to CT DOT on a planning corridor study in that same area and looking at the possibility of relocating State Route 334 to provide better connection to downtown from Route 8. He expects a response from DOT in November. The trail is going to be part of that.

Watertown/Thomaston

Paul Bunevich explained that in June there was a site walk with DOT representatives, but the thick Japanese knotweed and the presence of ticks prevented them from getting very far up the trail. The railroad reps said that if there is enough brush and trees between the trail and the railroad, fencing could be avoided, and it could save up to \$100,000 in fencing. Mr. Budris expressed that the water line is one of the big concerns, and Waterbury's Bureau of Water Superintendent was also on the walk. DOT has expressed concern about the proximity of the water line to the trail route and has withheld LoTCIP funding for projects in Thomaston and Watertown, awaiting a thorough documented plan to protect the water main. Potential for a recreational trails application to fund parts of trail design that Watertown cannot take on themselves was discussed, and that design would further address concerns about impact to the water main. Mr. Nielsen and Mr. Budris noted that funding has been tied up because of hesitance around Watertown, so moving Watertown ahead will give DOT confidence to approve Thomaston's NRG section which is already fully designed.

Derby

Mr. Walsh shared that the City of Derby and CT DOT signed off the [Route 34 Derby Main Street Reconstruction project](#). It will go out to bid in about two months. It has been twenty years in the making. This is a huge milestone for economic development in Derby. Mr. Nielsen added that construction on the [Derby-Shelton Bridge Pedestrian and Bicyclist Enhancements project](#) is imminent, but complex utility work may delay construction a bit. That project will connect the Shelton Riverwalk to the NRG Trail.

Kinneytown Dam

Mr. Budris shared that Kevin Zak has done a lot of work documenting flows at the dam and fish below the dam. This season has been a total failure in terms of fish passage. The owner has not made any of the FERC-mandated improvements. A new FERC docket has been opened to look at fish passage. US Fish and Wildlife Service engineers conducted a field visit at the dam, but was unable to get some critical measurements due to high flow rates—in the meantime, an interim engineering report is expected. NVCOG is following the proceedings and will be searching for ways to move this towards a resolution. Mr. Budris noted that all documents associated with the FERC docket and an abundance of other information on Kinneytown are available through the [NVCOG's Story Map](#).

Ms. O'Malley moved to adjourn. Ms. Mancini seconded. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Next meeting November 10, 2021 (with potential for a special meeting sooner).

Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee (present in BOLD)

Municipal Representatives

Torrington	Rista Malanca*
	Jeremy Leifert
Litchfield	Cleve Fuessenich
Harwinton	Suzanne Stitch
	Joan Kirchner
Thomaston	Stacey Sefcik
Watertown	Paul Bunevich
Waterbury	Kenny Curran
	Judy Mancini
Naugatuck	Jim Stewart
	Vincent Siefert
Beacon Falls	Liz Falzone
	Josh Carey
Seymour	Rory Burke
Ansonia	Sheila O'Malley
Derby	Jack Walsh*

Stakeholder Representatives

Aaron Budris – Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments
Bill Purcell – Valley Chamber
Christopher Way - US Army Corps of Engineers
Chuck Berger – Retired Watertown Town Engineer
Clifford Cooper - Litchfield Community Greenway
Dave Faber –Naugatuck Valley Outdoors Club
Anna Bergeron – CT DOT
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
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 Rangers

Also Present

Mark Raimo – Watertown Town Manager
Richard Crowther – NVCOG
Richard Donovan – NVCOG
Richard Dziekan – Mayor of Derby
Bill Champagne - CT DOT
Christine O'Neill - NVCOG