

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
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Draft Environmental Review Committee (ERC) Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 2, 2017, 3:00 PM
BRPC Office, 1 Fenn Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201

Committee Members Present: James Mullen (Chair), Roger Bolton, Kyle Hanlon, Sarah Hudson, Mark Smith, Eleanor Tillinghast.

Others Present: Lauren Gaherty (BRPC), Nat Karns (BRPC), Jim Lovejoy (Mt. Washington Select Board & BRPC Alternate), Emily Stockman (Mt. Washington consultant).

I. Call to Order

J. Mullen called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m. with introductions around the table.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes from July 1, 2016

K. Hanlon made the motion to approve the minutes of the ERC meeting of July 1, 2016 as written, seconded by S. Hudson; the motion passed unanimously.

III. East Street Repair ENF, Mount Washington

J. Mullen opened the discussion by saying that although the East Street project was generally pretty innocuous when compared to the type of project the ERC typically reviews, it was located within the Karner Brook ACEC. He therefore felt it was prudent to convene the ERC and review the project.

L. Gaherty summarized the project for the Committee. The project is a road culvert replacement project located in a steeply sloped area. The Town of Mount Washington proposes to repair the culvert by inserting a slip-liner pipe within the existing pipe. Although the footprint of the project is small, the project site is located within an ACEC, is within rare species habitat and the stream flowing through the culvert flows into an Outstanding Water Resource and public drinking water supply. Additionally, the culvert discharges the stream onto DCR land, adding to the list of public interests at this site. The existing culvert has broken apart and is failing, and the Town of Mount Washington proposes to repair the culvert by slip-lining it. When reviewing the project BRPC's first question was one of lost capacity due to slip-lining – would the culvert continue to pass storm flows, particularly given the expected increase in the intensity and number of severe storms due to climate change. The Town hired an engineer to look at the site and conduct stormwater calculations, and his work demonstrates that the

repaired culvert will continue to function properly. J. Mullen asked if the town's engineer used the most recent precipitation data, rather than the older, outdated data that used to be the industry norm. E. Stockman responded that their engineer did use updated precipitation data during his calculations so that it captures the more recent storm and rainfall events.

At this point E. Stockman conducted a short powerpoint presentation of the project (see attachment). The road serves as a major artery from the town to Egremont and beyond. The stream is an intermittent stream that flows down an extremely steep and rocky mountainside. The existing metal culvert is 52" in diameter and 60' in length and will be slip-lined with a 48" X 60' heavy duty plastic pipe. The culvert is suffering from a 14.5" break in the middle of the metal pipe. The existing culvert is oversized, with a median high water flow of only 6", so the proposed reduction in diameter will still allow the culvert to function properly.

The Mass. Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has received both the ENF and the wetland Notice of Intent. Preliminary correspondence with NHESP indicates that they will be reviewing the project. The Town is awaiting final comments from them.

Ms. Stockman stated that she does not typically endorse or work on slip-lining projects because she is aware of the benefits of and the scientific work done to establish the state's Stream Crossing Standards. However, she felt that the circumstances of this particular site warrant a design that does not conform to the Standards. The rare species of concern at this site is most likely a terrestrial animal rather than an aquatic one, so the continued fragmentation of the streambed will not impact that species.

The Town's Highway Foreman received estimates of approximately \$50,000 to install the slip-liner and conduct associated construction work, on the assumption that engineering would be minimal and the town highway department would do the majority of the work. In comparison, a bridge replacement project downstream on Karner Brook is costing more than \$500,000 in construction costs alone, not counting the engineering, permitting and project oversight.

Regarding the land disturbance of the project, the slip-lining is estimated to impact approximately 8,000 square feet (sf) and take four days to construct. Construction of an open-bottom culvert to meet the Stream Crossing Standards would impact more than 16,000 sf and could occur over a period of six months.

At this point Chairman Mullen opened the discussion to the ERC members. R. Bolton stated that he would like the draft comments to be amended to reflect the conditions that have been described today. He would like the comments to note the large cost difference between the slip-liner and the open-bottom culvert alternates, and the fact that the slip-liner has a much smaller construction footprint and will still be able to handle storm flows. E. Tillinghast agreed with R. Bolton's suggestion, particularly emphasizing that the slip-liner option has less environmental impacts from construction activities. She has been watching the Karner Brook open-bottom culvert construction in the Egremont Flats and it's extraordinary what is being done there. Also added should be the shorter construction period. J. Lovejoy also expressed his concerns that once you open up a site during construction you never know what you'll find. It is his understanding that the Egremont site is undergoing a lot more engineering because they are having a hard time finding solid ground to put the culvert's footings into. It was noted that blasting may have been required to install an open-bottom culvert on the ledge at the East Street.

J. Lovejoy closed the discussion by saying that the Town of Mount Washington has another 30 or 40 culverts that will need replacing in the near future, like many other towns in the Berkshires. The costs of repairing these will be significant – this project alone is \$50,000 to a town that has an annual budget of \$800,000. Consultant costs are probably 20% of the total cost due to the environmental review required. The high costs incentivize small towns to defer repairs and face washouts and emergency conditions.

ERC members discussed the high cost of culvert repairs partially due to the Stream Crossing Standards. It was agreed that it was a topic that the Regional Issues Committee could look into. N. Karns reminded the Committee that this small culvert replacement project is only in MEPA due to the fact that it is in an ACEC. The vast majority of culvert replacements occur all across the county without such review. E. Stockman, who is a proponent of the Stream Crossing Standards, stated that due to a lot of public education most DPW foremen are now aware of the benefits of the Standards and want to do the right thing. At the same time she does acknowledge the greater cost of complying.

K. Hanlon made the motion to accept the draft comments as amended, seconded by R. Bolton; motion passed unanimously.

E. Tillinghast closed the discussion by saying that the site is within the ACEC and rare species habitat, and that as a Mount Washington resident and taxpayer she is sensitive to the cost issues. However, she appreciates that this project was reviewed by the Committee.

IV. Cleveland Reservoir Diversion Maintenance Project, Hinsdale

L. Gaherty summarized the project, saying the Committee had originally reviewed the project through the MEPA process in 2012. Cleveland Reservoir is one of the main drinking water supplies for the City of Pittsfield. There is an aqueduct system that directs from two streams into the reservoir. The aqueduct system diverts almost all the water from these streams, preventing water from flowing through their natural channels to their natural destination. Water flows through these natural channels only during spring melt or high flow conditions. Sediment has built up near the intake structures of the aqueduct and is flowing into the reservoir during storm events. The project before us involves dredging of the sediment and construction of a permanent access road to be able to more easily conduct maintenance of the system.

During the previous MEPA filing the state's Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) staff commented that they would prefer to see more continuous low flows in the streams to support cold water species. This Notice of Project Change notes that the two main changes for the project are:

- An increase in impacts to Land Under Water because of more sediment removal from the stream bed
- The temporary access road location has been slightly altered and will now become a permanent road
- The mitigation for wetland impacts has been changed; rather than creating a new wetland the City is proposing to divert 10% of the two streams' flow down their natural channels for a more consistent flow.

This last change is unusual but is being supported by DFW. L. Gaherty stated that she had not yet drafted any comments. The project will be going through local and state wetland permitting and she was unsure if there would be any value that the ERC could provide. She asked the Committee if they felt the project warranted ERC review. N. Karns suggested that there was little value that our review could

offer given the wetland review process that will be undertaken for the project. R. Bolton recommended that the ERC review the project because the wetland mitigation seemed rather novel. E. Tillinghast agreed with Mr. Bolton that the mitigation was interesting enough that review could be warranted, but she was unsure that BRPC staff and the ERC had the technical expertise to add value. J. Mullen wondered if our prior MEPA comments were negated by the changes in the project. L. Gaherty responded that the issue of lack of low flow in the streams was raised by DFW back in 2012, and perhaps that is why the mitigation was changed. J. Mullen proposed that the ERC review the project because the inventive “environmental horse trading” is interesting. The Committee agreed to invite the proponent to present the project and its changes, and form comments at that same meeting. March 9th and 10th were chosen as possibilities for the meeting. L. Gaherty will contact the City’s consultant.

V. Update on Recent BRPC comments to MEPA

The updates on recent BRPC comments to MEPA was tabled until the next meeting.

VI. Adjournment

K. Hanlon made the motion to adjourn at 4:07 p.m., seconded by E. Tillinghast; the motion passed unanimously.