



Environmental Review Committee
Meeting Minutes

Thursday March 9, 2023 4:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Roger Bolton (Chair), Malcolm Fick, Mark Smith, and Kyle Hanlon

Others Present: Melissa Provencher (BRPC) and Tom Matuszko (BRPC)

I. Call to Order

ERC Chairman Bolton called the meeting to order at 4:03pm and began roll call.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes from June 23, 2022

M. Fick made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by M. Smith. ERC Chairman Bolton conducted a roll call vote.

R. Bolton: Aye

M. Fick: Aye

K. Hanlon: Aye

M. Smith: Aye

The motion passed.

III. New England Power Company (NEP) E131 Asset Condition Refurbishment Project - Expanded Environmental Notification Form

Chairman Bolton explained that a remote site visit was held by MEPA on February 27, 2023 and attended by Chairman Bolton. Comments on the EENF are due by March 10, 2023. Chairman Bolton explained the comment schedule and informed the Committee that the Executive Committee discussed the project at their meeting on March 2, 2023 and authorized the Environmental Review Committee to submit comments.

M. Provencher presented the Environmental Review Report for the New England Power Company (NEP) E131 Asset Condition Refurbishment Project EENF. The project spans four municipalities in Massachusetts: Adams, North Adams, Florida, and Monroe. The Project's stated goals are to upgrade existing electrical utility infrastructure and construct improved roadways by which the transmission line can be accessed. These access roads will facilitate the proposed infrastructure improvements, as well as future maintenance activities and access by emergency personnel. The proposed project has met or exceeded MEPA review thresholds for a Mandatory Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the proponent has requested a Single EIR.

The proposed project will have extensive impacts including 92 acres of permanently altered land, 102,971 sf of permanently altered Riverfront Area, and new steel structures 25ft higher than the current maximum height of 85ft. Impacts will primarily result from the replacement of structures, installation of new structures and the creation of both temporary and permanent access roads. The EENF states that permanent impacts are associated with the replacement and relocation of five structures to Bordering Vegetated Wetlands (BVW) via direct embed methods. The EENF further states that these areas were closely evaluated for alternatives but designs that relocated structures outside of BVW were deemed infeasible. However, this detail is absent within the alternatives analysis. The EENF presented an alternatives analysis that was limited to a No Build Alternative and options for selective/targeted maintenance and improvements. The EENF states “No new ROW is required for the Project and no new construction is proposed other than for access. Therefore, there are no route alternatives for this Project.”

The standard which must be met to allow a Single Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) is the submission of an EENF which must include more extensive and detailed information that describes and analyzes a proposed project and its alternatives and assesses its potential environmental impacts and environmental mitigation measures. M. Provencher explained that the EENF does not include the level of extensive and detailed information that is warranted in order to grant a Single EIR. The EENF describes the proposed project, however weaknesses and deficiencies remain within the alternatives analysis and the assessment of the potential environmental impacts and environmental mitigation measures.

Examples of additional alternatives analysis and additional detail that should be provided include:

1. An analysis of alternative methods such as tracked construction vehicles and/or the use of industrial-type helicopters to carry and install; equipment, concrete, piers and poles. BRPC shares the concerns raised by the Hoosic River Watershed Association (HoorWA). Such alternatives would significantly reduce tree cutting and impacts to resource areas.
2. An alternatives analysis relative to the permanent impacts associated with the replacement and relocation of five structures to Bordering Vegetated Wetlands (BVW) via direct embed methods.
3. Greater clarification with regard to why permanent access roads that do not currently exist are necessary.
4. Clarification with regard to the selection of steel structures and/or an alternatives analysis comparing wooden versus steel structures. The current wooden structures, which are proposed to be replaced with steel structures were installed in 1925 and have withstood the test of time in standing for nearly 100 years.
5. Greater detail with regard to proposed mitigation measures including specific details related to wetland mitigation and replication.

T. Matuszko also raised the concern that it is unclear whether the proposed project makes any improvements that will address the anticipated demands on the electrical grid that are anticipated to meet the Commonwealth’s electrification goals.

K. Hanlon moved to authorize the Executive Director to send a letter on behalf of the Committee consistent with staff recommendations within the Environmental Review Report and the Committee discussion. M. Fick seconded the motion. ERC Chairman Bolton conducted a roll call vote

R. Bolton: Aye
M. Fick: Aye
K. Hanlon: Aye

M. Smith: Aye
J. Duval: Aye

The motion passed.

IV. Other Business

No other business.

V. Discussion of General Review Practices

Chairman Bolton explained that he had asked to include a discussion of the general review practices on the agenda as it has been some time since the practices have been reviewed and the written practices appear to be out of date. The Committee agreed to table discussion of the general review practices to a future meeting.

VI. Adjournment

K. Hanlon made a motion to adjourn at 5:06pm. The motion was seconded by M. Smith. ERC Chairman Bolton conducted a roll call vote.

R. Bolton: Aye
K. Hanlon: Aye
M. Fick: Aye

M. Smith: Aye
J. Duval: Aye

The motion was passed unanimously.

Materials distributed electronically:

- ERC Agenda 6/23/22
- ERC Minutes 1/10/21
- Environmental Review Report 6/23/22
- NSTAR Transmission Right-of-Way Reliability Project, Expanded Environmental Notification Form
- ENF & EIR General Review Procedures