



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project

Existing Bridges Subcommittee Meeting #6

Web Conference Meeting

MINUTES

April 30, 2020

Subcommittee Attendees: Kathryn Lynch, *Co-Chair, Town of Hinsdale*; Patrick Moreland, *Co-Chair, Town of Brattleboro*; Steve Barrett, *Town of Brattleboro Public Works*; Jason Cooper, *Friends of West River Trail*; Mark Carignan, *Brattleboro Police Department*; Steve Diorio, *Hinsdale Board of Selectmen*; Adam Grinold, *Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation*; Prudence MacKinney, *Formerly of Vermont Department of Health*; Frank Podlenski, *Town of Hinsdale Public Works*; Charles Rataj, *Town of Hinsdale Police Department*; Ed Smith, *Hinsdale Economic Development Representative*; Sharon Smith, *Hinsdale Historical Society*.

Staff and Technical Assistance: Chris Campany and Susan Westa, *Windham Regional Commission*; J. B. Mack, *Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC)*; Tony King, Don Lyford, Bill Saffian, and Trent Zanes, *NHDOT*; Christopher Baker, *Vermont Agency of Transportation*.

Guests: Representative Michael Abbott, *NH Cheshire District 1*; Kathy Urffer, *Connecticut River Conservancy*.

The meeting began at 9:00 a.m. Patrick Moreland conducted roll call of all of the meeting attendees including Subcommittee attendees, staff and technical assistance personnel and guests.

I. Meeting Minutes of August 29, 2019

Motion: To approve the minutes of August 29, 2019.

Motion by Steve Diorio, seconded by Prudence MacKinney. Approved by unanimous vote by roll call.

II. Project Updates

Don Lyford reported that the new bridge is moving forward. Many permits are in place, but there are a few remaining permits that still need to be obtained. He said they should be ready by the time NHDOT is ready to advertise the project. The advertising date is scheduled for August 2020. There is a possibility it could slide into September. There are a couple of things that need to be addressed including acquiring the right-of-way needed in Vermont. There is one piece of right-of-way in New Hampshire that still needs to be acquired in front of the George's Field property. NHDOT is in contact with the owner and sending updated plans. NHDOT has updated some of the plans on the Vermont side for some of the property owners.

Don Lyford reported that for the existing bridges, NHDOT has hired the consulting firm, Hoyle Tanner and Associates (HTA). They will be recommending a course of action for rehabilitating the bridges, provide

cost estimates for rehab and ultimately provide cost estimates for ongoing maintenance for the two bridges. He said that the information will be used to talk to the Towns about a future path for maintaining the bridges. Representative Abbott noted that he had spoken with Kristin Higgins from VTrans, who is supervising right-of-way activities on the Vermont side. He reported that Ms. Higgins said the only right-of-way issue that needs to be addressed with the existing bridges is access to the utility lines and there would need to be vehicle access to get to the utility lines. For the new bridge, there are 13 parcels of land in Vermont that they are negotiating. Some of the issues that VTrans is dealing with include relocating a doggy daycare and relocating people with housing because there is not a lot of housing available in the area.

Don Lyford reported that NHDOT applied for a \$20 million federal BUILD grant for the Hinsdale-Brattleboro project and NHDOT received \$12 million. NHDOT's intent is to apply most of that grant to the new bridge, mostly because existing bridge rehabilitation efforts can't start until 2024. NHDOT is still working with FHWA to come to a formal agreement, but he doesn't see that holding up the project.

J. B. Mack reported that since the last Existing Bridges Subcommittee meeting in August 2019, there has been an effort to try and clean up Hinsdale Island. He reminded the Subcommittee that former Police Chief Todd Faulkner had suggested that it would be difficult for the general public to envision changes to Hinsdale Island until trash and hazardous materials were cleaned up and vines, brush and invasive plants were brought under control. There have been a number of efforts to clean up the island since August, including work done by the Brattleboro Rotary Club and a volunteer effort led by Jason Cooper. NHDOT's District 4 office was also brought into the conversation. John Kallfelz, the lead engineer for District 4, indicated that he would likely be able to have a crew come in and do some brush clearing.

Charles Rataj said that a one-time clean-up is great, but we would need to sustain efforts and have an ongoing clean-up plan. Chris Campany remarked that he was also going to check in with the Windham County Career Center forestry program, which may have an interest in clearing brush on the island. J. B. Mack responded that SWRPC has asked John Kallfelz if the Windham County Career Center could come in and do brush clearing and John has given the green light. Kathy Urffer remarked that the Connecticut River Conservancy has been organizing "Source to Sea" events over the years and for at least the three past years part of that effort has involved cleaning the island. She expects that to continue into the future, at least once a year.

Representative Abbott said that one of the things that the Subcommittee will need to look at is who is going to maintain the island in the future. Patrick Moreland responded that he wasn't sure that was the Subcommittee's responsibility and that our main focus is articulating a vision for the area. The ensuing discussion included talks about whether the Subcommittee's charge in crafting a vision for the area should include a stance on the ownership and maintenance issues. Chief Rataj expressed that it would be important. Representative Abbott said that it's important to point out that the bridges and island are owned by New Hampshire. Don Lyford said that at this time NHDOT would rather not maintain the bridges and bike path. He suggested that this does need to be discussed further, and it will be easier to discuss when HTA provides information about the ongoing maintenance costs. Ed Smith remarked that he thought it was important for the Subcommittee to go beyond defining a vision for tomorrow, but also into the future. Jason Cooper said that he thought it would be important to focus more on developing a vision at this time before determining how it would be maintained.

III. Updates on Student Assistance with Visioning and Public Involvement

J. B. Mack explained that WRC and SWRPC have been working with an undergraduate landscape architecture studio class from University of Massachusetts, Amherst which is taking a first look at challenges and opportunities with repurposing and redeveloping the island and existing bridges area. He

noted that he and Chris Campany met with the students about a month ago to talk about the Existing Bridges Subcommittee project and they did a site walk and answered questions from the students. The student's involvement in the project was very sudden and last minute, but the students have done some great work despite the tight time constraints. He began a powerpoint presentation that summarized the objectives of the students' studio class, some of the research they performed as a group to study the challenges and opportunities with the area, and then finished up the presentation showing examples of three of the students' work.

At the conclusion of the presentation, J. B. Mack noted that University of Massachusetts, Amherst would like to continue working on the project by perhaps offering some graduate students to work with the Existing Bridges Subcommittee to help develop a vision informed by relevant stakeholders and the general public. He noted that representatives from the University have expressed interest in starting as early as this summer going into the fall. He asked if anyone had any thoughts or comments about moving in this direction. Many Subcommittee members remarked that the students' ideas were inspiring, several members asked for copies of the presentations and Don Lyford asked to put the presentation on the NHDOT project page website as well as share the information with the NHDOT Commissioners. Representative Abbott said that Senator Shaheen, members from the Executive Council and others might find it helpful to see these ideas. At the conclusion of the discussion, J. B. Mack suggested that WRC, SWRPC and the Co-Chairs get together to work on defining a scope so that graduate students would have a handle on Subcommittee's expectations as to what kind of work would be most helpful to the communities.

IV. Public Involvement Brochure

J. B. Mack reminded the Subcommittee that one of the items that was discussed at the last meeting in August was the idea of developing a public involvement brochure or flyer that could be used to describe the Existing Bridge Subcommittee's effort to develop a vision for the island and bridges area. He presented a first draft of the brochure and asked for comments.

Representative Abbott said he supported the idea of a brochure, but thought the contact people on the brochure should be representatives from the regional planning commissions. He said that it was important to have public involvement tools to say "this is what is going to happen with the new bridge, and what do we want to do with the old bridges?" Mr. Abbott suggested a brochure also be put on the NHDOT project webpage. Don Lyford suggested that the brochure say "for more information, go to the NHDOT webpage" and put the website address on there. Steve Diorio asked if there was a way to bring in a picture of the new bridge somewhere in the brochure. Prudence MacKinney suggested that we may want to use something different for websites and social media especially if this would be put on-line since a trifold brochure is specifically a paper format. Patrick Moreland suggested that we may want to take advantage of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst students and incorporate their work into our public outreach materials. Ed Smith said he thought that one side of the pamphlet should show the old and one should show the new, to show the possibilities of what could be. At the conclusion of the discussion, the group agreed to fold the public involvement materials and strategy into the part of the scope of work that is given to the graduate student or students assuming that goes forward.

V. Next Steps

It was decided that one of the next steps would be to develop a scope of work for the University of Massachusetts, Amherst graduate students. Prudence MacKinney recommended that students should take into account social distancing guidelines into their designs when communicating expectations to the students. Don Lyford stated that HTA may be ready to present some of the information it has developed on the existing bridges and bring that to the next Subcommittee meeting. Patrick Moreland suggested that

when we get a tentative scope of work put together it should be shared at the next meeting for feedback. Tony King suggested that the Towns have links to the NHDOT's project webpage. Representative Abbott suggested that Hinsdale might want to consider putting up the powerpoint presentation on the Town website and Kathryn Lynch said she could look into it.

VI. Next Meeting

It was suggested that J. B. Mack send out a poll to the Subcommittee for some dates and times for a meeting during the third week of June.

VII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. B. Mack
Principal Planner

DRAFT