



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project

Existing Bridges Subcommittee Meeting #5

**Hinsdale Police Station
10 Main Street
Hinsdale, NH 03451**

MINUTES

August 29, 2019

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*; Todd Faulkner, *Town of Hinsdale Police Department*; Prudence MacKinney, *Formerly of Vermont Department of Health*; Frank Podlenski, *Town of Hinsdale Public Works*; Ed Smith, *Hinsdale Economic Development Representative*; Sharon Smith, *Hinsdale Historical Society*.

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

Guests: Michael Fairchild, *Brattleboro Resident*; Jack Lilly, *Connecticut River Joint Commissions*; Samantha Loch, *Connecticut River Conservancy*.

The meeting began at 10:31 a.m.

I. Meeting Minutes of July 16, 2019

J. B. Mack noted two mistakes in the draft minutes for July 16, 2019. The location of the meeting should read Brattleboro, VT instead of Hinsdale, NH and the motion to approve the minutes of May 23, 2019 should read “to approve the minutes of May 23, 2019 as presented.”

Motion: To approve the minutes of July 16, 2018 as amended.

Motion by Sharon Smith, seconded by Steve Diorio. Approved by unanimous vote.

II. Project Updates

Don Lyford reported that NHDOT is not likely to hear about the status of New Hampshire and Vermont’s most recent federal Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant proposal for the Hinsdale-Brattleboro Bridge project until December 2019. He reported that NHDOT is in the process of doing a cost analysis comparing the life cycle costs of solar lights versus conventional lights on the new bridge. Trent Zanes announced that project staff are trying to finish the final design for the project. The arrangements for right of way in New Hampshire are almost done. There is one more owner that NHDOT is still working with on the New Hampshire side of the project. Vermont is currently negotiating with

Barrows and Fisher, High House LLC and 28 Vernon St LLC on the Vermont side of the river. Ed Smith asked if Vermont doesn't obtain right of way before May 2020, is it going to hold up the project? Don Lyford responded that it could happen. He explained that in order to move forward with federal funding you have to have right of way issues addressed. However, Vermont does have the option to go to condemnation. He indicated that the Town of Brattleboro would be responsible for condemnation, not VTrans. Don Lyford stated that 90% of projects do not go to condemnation. Still there is a potential hurdle with finishing work by May. Chris Baker agreed with Don Lyford's assessment.

III. Goal Development

J. B. Mack reminded the Subcommittee that at the last meeting, the group agreed to refine and finalize a draft statement of the goals it would like to use to present to the public as a starting point for establishing a vision for the redevelopment of the Charles Dana and Anna Hunt Marsh bridges and Hinsdale Island. He referred the Subcommittee to the minutes from the meeting on July 16, 2019.

Chris Campany suggested that we may want to adjust "maintain area social and economic relationships" to "strengthen area social and economic relationships." He wondered if the Subcommittee had discussed the idea of involving the Donohue Institute from the University of Massachusetts Amherst as a consultant to help understand economic and tax impacts of the bridges and island. Patrick Moreland responded that at a previous meeting, the Subcommittee learned that there are pretty limited development opportunities on the island. No permanent construction is likely to occur on the island and ownership of the bridges remains unresolved. Chris Campany suggested that there may be an opportunity for private investment to support operations and maintenance of the area.

Prudence MacKinney suggested changing "provide a bicycling and pedestrian commuting option" to "promote active transportation". She also suggested that "enhance local recreation" could be merged with "enhance river access (cartop boating and swimming)". There was some discussion about boating to the island, tying it up, and visiting the area, but several people noted that the silted area makes it difficult to do that with larger boats with higher drafts.

Michael Fairchild observed that it will be difficult to meet the goal that it should be "clean and safe." He stated that Brattleboro is having a great deal of issues with the homeless population. He noted that the south end of Brattleboro is going through tough times, including the Brattleboro Co-op. He believed the island would be an uncomfortable place for people to visit. Mark Carnigan responded that this is precisely why "clean and safe" is such an important goal. He noted that there are a number of issues that need to be worked out regarding lighting, access, policing, etc., however, "safe and clean" has to be an overarching goal. He added that a lot of environmental design can be done to make the island safer and emergency call boxes should be considered.

Todd Faulkner added that there is a need to clear vegetation on the island and clean it up. He suggested that before the Subcommittee talk to the public about visions for the island, there should be some kind of cleanup effort. Otherwise it will be hard for them to envision a future for the area other than what they see today. He explained that he is talking to NHDOT District IV and Cheshire County House of Corrections about obtaining work release programs to clear the island, but there will be ongoing maintenance after a cleanup effort. If the area is cleared, Hinsdale can start to patrol it better and keep illegal activities from occurring on the island. Mark Carnigan said that some changes to local laws and mutual aid agreements are likely needed steps to effectively patrol the island.

Michael Fairchild suggested that the bridges be torn down. Don Lyford explained that funding for the new proposed Connecticut River bridge is tied to an environmental assessment which made a finding that the

existing bridges are part of the historic area and must remain. Frank Podlenski asked if the bridges could just be blocked off restricting access. Todd Faulkner responded that people will find a way to get around, especially an island of that size. There are already homeless encampments along the river and homeless using boats. He said that patrolling an island doesn't just have to be by police. Patrols can be conducted by citizens as well with the use of call boxes, for example. Mark Carnigan added that the more lighting and more people, the safer the environment will be. Frank Podlenski suggested making it into a camping area where people would pay for overnight camping. Chris Campany suggested there could be concession based private camping.

Kathy Urffer stated the island could be incorporated into the Connecticut River Paddler's trail which starts in Canada and connects to the Atlantic Ocean. There are 50 some odd campsites already. The island could be a stopping point for canoeists. Perhaps there could be a composting toilet.

IV. Public Outreach

J. B. Mack directed attendees to the July 16th minutes and read out the different public outreach ideas that were discussed at the previous meeting.

Kathy Urffer suggested that potentially the Runnings and Sam's Outdoor Outfitters stores could provide assistance to the effort. Todd Faulkner said they may be able to fund signage or help fund a banner or board. Patrick Moreland suggested that with staff's help, the Subcommittee could finalize the one-page questionnaire that Marion Major shared at the previous meeting. He also suggested the idea of placing surveys on the Town of Hinsdale and Brattleboro websites. He threw out the idea of having meetings in Brattleboro and Hinsdale to get initial feedback on a vision and then going through a second round with landscape architecture students to develop concepts.

Todd Faulkner suggested that public engagement be held off until the island is cleaned up and cleared. He talked about his efforts coordinating on a cleanup effort by reaching out to NHDOT, Triple T (the waste management company), and the Cheshire County House of Corrections to enlist work release inmates to help with the cleanup effort.

V. Next Steps

The Subcommittee agreed to finalize the flyer and assist Todd Faulkner in coordinating a cleanup. The idea of developing a survey for the town websites stating "we're working on cleaning up the island" as a way of introducing the survey. The Subcommittee agreed to reconvene and report back with the flyer and cleanup experience after those items are addressed.

Representative Abbot agreed with the approach decided by the Subcommittee. He stated that none of this work should delay new construction.

VI. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be called by the Co-Chairs based on the progress of the flyer, survey and cleanup of Hinsdale Island.

VII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. B. Mack
Principal Planner