

MEETING MINUTES
NEW HAMPSHIRE WATER SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION
June 7, 2011

Commissioners in Attendance:

Chuck Souther	Glenn Normandeau
Alison Watts	Tom Burack
Martha Lyman	Kris Blomback
Cliff Sinnott	Michael Licata
Denise Hart	Dave Allen
Amy Manzelli	Bob Beaurivage
John Gilbert	

The meeting opened with a discussion of the minutes from the prior meeting. Commission members requested that the minutes be revised to provide more description of the content of the Governor's remarks with regard to his objectives for the Commission and his rationale for its establishment. Because of the changes requested, action on the minutes of the meeting of May 26, 2011 was tabled.

Paul Susca of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) presented a summary description of the status of water issues in the State based on the 2008 Water Resources Primer document. A copy of the presentation will be made available to the public. Following the presentation, there was a brief period of questions and answers. In response to a question regarding experience with bridging of local political boundaries to address water issues, Mr. Susca noted that a pilot project is currently in progress to develop a Water Management Plan for the Souhegan and Lamprey Rivers that involves several towns in cooperation. In response to a question about identifying required stream flows, Mr. Susca noted that it is a highly complex issue; for example, differing forms of aquatic life require different amounts of water flow at various times of the year to survive. A brief discussion of hierarchies of use for water resource allocation vs. riparian law followed. Mr. Susca noted that the Ground Water Commission had attempted to address the hierarchies of use question, but had not reached a resolution. In response to a question regarding surface water quality monitoring, Mr. Susca replied that it is limited and currently heavily reliant on the work of volunteers. In response to a question regarding coordination with other states, Mr. Susca stated that there are not typically major conflicts among states regarding quality issues in shared rivers.

Steve Norton, Director of the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies, presented to the Commission regarding approaches to systems analysis of public policy issues, using the New Hampshire Gaming Commission as an example. A copy of his presentation materials will be made available to the public. For the work of the Commission, Mr. Norton suggested that there are several key elements to be considered:

- future changes in the demographics of the State, which must address both the New Hampshire resident population and visitors to the State and is likely to be complex (e.g., simple projections of a compounded population growth rate may be oversimplified and tend to overestimate);
- clearly and fully identifying costs vs. benefits and positives vs. negatives of options for managing water resources;
- employing the findings of other water-related commissions, particularly with regard to economic analyses that they have completed; and
- careful assessment of social impacts and costs associated with management options.

With regard to demographics, Mr. Norton suggested that New Hampshire's population is still growing, but at slower rates than in the past. He suggested that population changes be evaluated on watershed-specific data and that the data be focused on housing units rather than on numbers of people. Anticipated demographic changes will be affected by the retirement of the "baby boomers" over the next 25 years, potentially affecting "amenities" areas of the State (e.g., the Lakes Region) more than current population centers.

In developing a model for managing water in the State, Mr. Norton suggested that there are several key questions to ask:

- What will the state look like in 25 years?
- What are the primary drivers of questions about water needs and use?
- What can be expected for technical innovation over the 25-year period?
- What other, indirect factors will affect the State's ability to manage the quantity and quality of its water resources?
- What information is critical to the Commission's work that is not currently available?
- Who are other, outside actors in water management issues, and what leverage does the State have in dealing with them?

Mr. Norton suggested that the work of the Commission focus on identifying a set of principles and goals to guide management of the State's water resources over the next 25 years. Development of this model should focus on understanding the points of greatest leverage; for example, is it possible that local zoning and planning boards provide the greatest leverage in managing potential impacts on water quality?

The Commission then turned to a discussion of its next steps. Several members noted that they felt it important to develop a consensus definition of key terms, e.g.,

“sustainability” and “quality.” Others noted that they felt it was critical to develop a common vision within the Commission and that it would help the Commission to focus on the larger picture and put the pieces together. Commission members noted that the process is innately political in the sense that it will likely require additional regulation, for example, which will trigger the question as to why it is necessary. Education will, therefore, be a key to accomplishing the goals. Fundamentally, water is not a local resource issue, but rather a State-wide issue, and New Hampshire’s citizens need to understand this point in order to bridge local political boundaries and mind-sets. It will be important to bring together towns on a watershed basis and make it a community focus that people can rally around. How do we frame the issues in a way that ideological differences and issues are not a consideration? Points that Commission members suggested we needed to embrace included:

- everyone uses water;
- we will always need it;
- global issue with sometimes severe consequences in areas with climates different from New Hampshire’s, indicating the need to do something before it becomes a problem;
- water as a connector for all the people in the State;
- articulate both the interesting and not-so-interesting aspects of water issues in a public campaign; and
- invoke the community service ethic in addressing water-related issues, i.e., drawing parallels to donating to food banks, helping the homeless and elderly, etc.

Members of the Commission noted that there is a need for better information regarding water quality and that it may be necessary to look at laws that require revision to address a watershed-based approach to management. A Commission member suggested that perhaps we already know much of what needs to be done to accomplish the Governor’s goal and that the focus of the work should be directed more toward how to get change made, asking why haven’t we accomplished the things that we know need to be done.

Discussion of land use and development issues ensued. Commission members noted that sprawl development continues because the costs for impacts on water associated with it (e.g., non-point pollution) are not assessed to the people creating them. Instead, they are lumped into a general category without assignment of specific responsibility. Commission members noted that the current local regulatory efforts regarding development are constrained by existing policy approaches that are weighted in favor of findings reasons and ways to get projects done as a consequence of 1) historical perceptions of individual rights to use properties as the individual sees fit and 2) impetus to increase the local property tax base and revenue. In projects with regional impacts, there are processes for including other affected communities, but the host town controls

the process, invitations for input, and decisions, often with the local tax base incentive previously noted. Commission members noted that there are some initial efforts at cross-border collaboration in progress that warrant examination in more detail, particularly efforts of some sub-regional groups. Activities that involve commercial uses of water, including international entities, add another pressure on the State's water resources and are a special case of these concerns. In general, the State's land use laws and institutions may not be designed to support doing what needs to be done to protect the State's water resources.

Commission members then participated in an initial vision conversation. Key aspects of a "working hypothesis" for a vision were preliminarily identified including:

- NHDES regulatory programs should be organized by watersheds rather than by other policy or political districts;
- New Hampshire's citizens should recognize their mutual co-dependence and accountability for protecting the water resources of the State, recognizing that we are all in this together;
- fewer water quality impairments - water quality should be no less than it is now for wastewater discharges and significantly better for non-point pollution;
- there would be an adequate volume of safe, affordable drinking water for New Hampshire's citizens;
- all wastewater in the State should be adequately and affordably treated, including septic systems, within then-existing technological constraints;
- water use should be efficient, i.e., conservation should be widely practiced in the State; and
- the State's aquatic and wildlife communities and ecosystems should be healthy.

After this discussion, members of the Commission agreed that a more focused, facilitated vision process was important to develop a working vision that can then be tested against the findings of other commissions and studies and revised as appropriate. The Commission agreed that a discussion of at least 30 to 60 minutes at the next meeting was a good next step. Kate Hansen at UNH was identified as a potential facilitator, as was Beth Henner of New Directions. The Chair requested suggestions for facilitators to be made to him by the close of business on June 8 to allow adequate time to identify and brief a facilitator. The Commission agreed that the initial vision effort should then be followed by briefings from members of other water-related commissions.

Members of the public in attendance at the meeting were offered the opportunity to provide input to the Commission. Keith Robinson of the U.S. Geological Survey noted that New Hampshire is, in general, a water-rich state, but that it will be important to

manage seasonal availability, suggesting impoundments as a concept to consider. In so doing, he suggested using natural features rather than engineered structures, to the degree practicable. He also recommended focusing on an overarching structure to get where we want the State to be in 25 years.

Jim Ryan of the Northwood Conservation Commission recommended Tom Ballesteros of UNH as a potential resource to the Commission. He also noted the existence of a Lamprey River source water protection effort (from runoff) and that a watershed commission was applying for recognition by the State.

Boyd Smith of the Newfound Lake Region Association urged the Commission to consider storm water conveyance infrastructure in its work and to work toward a cohesive water resource management structure that addresses the current bifurcation of the State controlling water and towns controlling the land, which in turn affects the water. He offered to describe the Association's watershed management experience with the Commission, if it would be helpful.

Steve Norton of the Center for Public Policy Studies, who noted that costs for a detailed evaluation of State demographic patterns and trends could be substantial and offered to work with the Commission on this aspect and to assist in identifying funding sources for it.

Paul Susca of NHDES noted that Sarah Pillsbury of NHDES should be credited for preparing the presentation that he made to the Commission.

Chairman Gilbert thanked the members of the public present for their comments.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

Attachments:

New Hampshire Water Sustainability Commission Meeting Agenda - June 7, 2011
Sign-In Sheets – June 7, 2011