

Missisquoi Basin Water Quality Council (BWQC)

MINUTES

Wednesday, January 3, 2024

11:00 AM-1:00 PM

Virtual Meeting/Held Via Zoom* (computer/smartphone/tablet etc.)

<https://youtu.be/KijZxalPQgg>

A VIDEO RECORDING OF THE MEETING IS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE NRPC YOUTUBE CHANNEL (Link above). THE WRITTEN MINUTES ARE A SYNOPSIS OF THE DISCUSSION AT THE MEETING. MOTIONS ARE AS STATED. MINUTES WILL BE SUBJECT TO CORRECTION BY THE COUNCIL. CHANGES, IF ANY, WILL BE RECORDED IN THE MINUTES OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Council Members: Lindsey Wight (Q), Kent Henderson (Q), Sarah Downes (Q), Dan Seeley (Q), Barry Lampke (Q), Lauren Weston (Q), Beth Torpey (Q), , Allaire Diamond (Q), Ted Sedell (Q), (Q=toward quorum)

Staff: Dean Pierce, Sara Gratz

Others Present: Jim Pease (and "Jim's Otter Pilot" AI), David Allerton, July Medina-Triana, Karen Bates, Bridget Butler

1. Welcome and Introductions

Lindsey Wight opened the meeting as Chair at 11:04 a.m.

2. Meeting protocols

Meeting protocols were reviewed.

3. Conflict of interest declarations, if any

No conflicts of interest were declared.

4. Review/adjust and approve agenda

No amendments to the agenda were made.

5. Approval of Minutes

Dan Seeley motioned to approve the minutes and Kent Henderson seconded. Motion carried.

6. Public comment not related to items on agenda

No public comments were made.

7. Seating of any new reps or alternate(s) (if required)

Discussion followed to officially seat Bridget Butler as an alternate.

8. Policy on Budget Adjustments

Dean Pierce presented 3 different alternatives to the budget adjustments proposal that was discussed at the last meeting. The alternative proposals included caps on adjustment amounts and factored in adjustment rates according to different phases of project development. Discussion followed on the Alternative 3 option (found below).

Ted Sedell shared that having a policy for adjusting budgets is beneficial because from his own experience, costs can balloon unexpectedly, and the additional costs can create a financial hardship to organizations.

Kent Henderson felt that the proposed cap amounts were too low because he's had experiences with historical assessments costing much more than what was budgeted for, and suggested that the capped amounts be doubled; from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and from \$10,000 to \$20,000.

Beth Torpey and Sarah Downes also expressed the need for budget adjustments and the need for the capped amounts to be higher to help ensure that unexpected costs do not become a burden to an organization.

Alternative 3 was put to vote with the capped amounts being doubled. Beth Torpey motioned to approve and Sarah Downes seconded. Motion carried.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3	
Graduated percentages*	
Three levels three types	
Assessment /ID/ Project Development Projects	
<=10%, but capped at \$5,000	CWSP staff may approve
>10% and <20%, but capped at \$10,000	CWSP staff with concurrence of Chair and Vice Chair (or 2 BWQC members) may approve
20% and up, or any request >\$20,000	Requires action by full BWQC
Design Project / implementation Project costing less than \$150k	
<=10%, but capped at \$10,000	CWSP staff may approve
>10% and <20%, but capped at \$20,000	CWSP staff with concurrence of Chair and Vice Chair (or 2 BWQC members) may approve
20% and up, or any request >\$20,000	Requires action by full BWQC
implementation project costing more than \$150k	
<=10%, but capped at \$15,000	CWSP staff may approve
>10% and <20%, but capped at \$30,000	CWSP staff with concurrence of Chair and Vice Chair (or 2 BWQC members) may approve
20% and up, or any request >\$30,000	Requires action by full BWQC

9. Schedule adjustment

Dean requested a change to the BWQC meeting schedule to better accommodate project funding rounds. The new schedule would include a meeting next month, and then every other month after that.

Lindsey noted that the change would create an extra meeting within the 2024 calendar year.

No objections were made.

10. Input on Cost effectiveness

Dean initiated a conversation with the committee, per the request of Vermont DEC, to ascertain the BWQC's views on setting a threshold for the cost effectiveness of projects, according to their average cost per kilogram of phosphorous reduction. He shared a table indicating the average

costs of phosphorous reduction for various projects types. A discussion followed about concerns that the rates were too low, and that costs have increased since the table was created.

Jim Pease shared that he was involved in the creation of the table and assured that the values represented were accurate at the time when the table was created, but admitted that it did not represent the high rate of inflation that has incurred since then.

Ted mentioned using a cost curve to estimate inflation rates in the future.

Allaire Diamond expressed concern about the council attempting to estimate costs, stating that they may lack the expertise to make appropriate estimates.

Karen Bates reminded the council that the figures represented in the table do not need to be strictly enforced, but rather, can be used as a guide for determining whether a project's cost is too high according to the amount of phosphorous it will reduce.

A discussion followed concerning how funds are allocated and the need for funds to be increased due to inflation. Dean brought the conversation back to asking the council whether a threshold should be set. Lindsey stated that she did not think setting thresholds would be a good idea.

11. Adoption of completed projects

Dean gave a brief presentation on the Operations and Maintenance chapter of DEC's Guidance document, which discusses the process of adopting projects, stressing the CWSP's role to verify that projects are taken care of in all phases.

A discussion followed about the lack of projects available that would qualify for adoption, and the need for clarification about whether a project's age would disqualify it for future funding. Dean shared that funds are available according to the design-life of a project.

12. Farm Project refresher

Dean initiated a conversation about the challenges related to using CWSP funds for water quality projects on agricultural land. He shared a flowchart from the Agency of Agriculture that helps determine whether a project will require an agricultural review and whether it would qualify for CWSP funds.

A discussion followed relating to how funds are distributed and why CWSP funds are not allocated for agricultural projects. Some frustrations were expressed due to the lack of connectivity for funding opportunities between upland agricultural practices and downstream water quality projects.

13. Updates and Conclusion

Reminders were given on the following: the next meeting will occur next month, DEC is hosting a CWSP network summit in April, and the deadline for the next round of funding is January 24th.

Lauren Weston motioned to adjourn the meeting and Allaire seconded. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 12:53