

Climate Change Resiliency Committee meeting minutes 12/7/2022, 5:30 pm

1910 Building, Town Offices, 1st Floor Hearing Room

Present: Liz Callahan, Michael Dacy, Nancy Pau, Elisa Grammer, Chip Wallace, Rick Parker. Also present: Department of Public Works Project Manager Christine Wallace; Michael Bacher, who works with the Clean River Project, a Methuen-based nonprofit and is a resident of Groveland.

Newburyport sea level rise estimates

At Ms. Callahan's request, Mr. Parker summarized the meeting held earlier in the day with Newburyport Engineer Jon Eric White. Mr. White described Newburyport's process to evaluate sea level rise projections. Mr. Parker explained that the study group in Newburyport confined itself to considering two independent methods of estimating sea level rise: the Boston Research Advisory Group (BRAG) Report and the NOAA/FEMA 100-year flood maps. He said that the group in Newburyport working on this had a range of views, including some who were unconvinced of the immediacy of sea level rise. For purposes of planning sea level rise, the group agreed to add 6' to the FEMA 100-year flood zone to identify areas of concern. This will be a moving target as the FEMA maps are updated. Mr. Parker noted that as new climate change data comes in, what had been a worst case scenario reliably becomes the middle case scenario.

Ms. Grammer said that in addition to protecting critical infrastructure, Mr. White discussed Newburyport's efforts to control misguided development in areas likely to flood as sea level rise continues. Newburyport used more cautious, pessimistic assumptions about sea level rise when considering projects to protect critical infrastructure. Ms. Grammer said that it seems more likely that West Newbury will focus on critical infrastructure like River Road and not keeping development out of areas threatened by climate change.

Ms. Pau and Mr. Bacher discussed the situation in Essex, where a major state road connecting parts of the town is now subject to tidal nuisance flooding several times a month. Even though the bridge is being worked on, the state is doing nothing about the road because raising the road would make the existing businesses (still at lower elevations) along it unreachable.

Ms. Pau said that the Woods Hole sea level model is close to being available. Even when it is final, the state takes a very long time to post this on the web, but *she will reach out to see if we could get a copy*. This model is more focused on infrastructure, and may provide a more sophisticated approach. Mr. Dacy said that the model will include the Merrimack where we are.

River Road Action Grant

To provide background for Department of Public Works Project Manager Christine Wallace (who will be the key Town person working on this), the Committee provided information about the processes used to acquaint the Select Board with this project and receive approval from the Select Board and voters at Town Meeting. We have a vetted scope proposal from Consultants GEI. The proposal's budget includes sufficient funding for GEI to help prepare the grant application. Because this is a contract for a consultant, further procurement selection processes are not required and we can go with GEI.

It was agreed that GEI's help with the grant application, particularly as concerns the budget information, is very important. They might also help with the [RMAT tool](#). Mr. Parker, Ms. Wallace, and Department of Public Works Director Wayne Amaral will hold a phone call with GEI about our status and grant application plans.

Ms. Pau wondered if the scope for GEI was clear enough. Ms. Callahan expressed interest in staying very focused on the River Road matters identified. Ms. Grammer noted that the GEI scope was discussed at the last meeting, whose minutes state in part that it was decided that “it should be very clear that the study scope will include 1) Evaluation of all water runoff outflow at River Road, including but not limited to pipes and culvert and seepage under the road, etc. and 2) Consideration, in the shoreline study, of underwater aquatic plants, such as eelgrass or other plants.” *It was decided that refinement of the scope, if needed, can occur when the detailed budget (which requires specific identification of tasks, their timing, and their costs) is developed for submission as part of the grant application.*

With respect to potential use of consultant Geoff Wilson in addition to GEI, Ms. Pau explained that Mr. Wilson has recently been tasked with extensive work and may not have time for this project. Ms. Pau suggested that he be asked to review and offer ideas about the report that GEI produces.

Letter of Intent to the state

The period for submitting a Letter of Intent to the state has already begun, and the final submission deadline is January 20, 2023. The sooner the Letter of Intent is submitted, the more time the state will have for review and feedback. The Committee has the Letter of Intent we previously submitted, as well as notes summarizing the feedback we received from Michelle Rowden, our state representative. The Committee discussed that the Letter of Intent is not binding and that some adjustments may occur in the process of preparing the grant application—which *is* binding.

After discussion, it was decided that the Letter of Intent will

- *essentially summarize the GEI proposal, reusing some of the prior Letter of Intent’s background discussion about the importance of River Road and need for the project*
- *include the GEI proposal as an attachment*
- *report the Town’s vote to approve \$50K in matching funds for a potential \$200K grant*
- *mention that the Town is now undertaking an update of our regional Hazard Assessment Plan, making the study of River Road timely in terms of coordinating with that project and grants that may be available as a result of that project.*

Ms. Wallace will draft the Letter of Intent with help from Ms. Grammer. With the guidance having been given at this meeting, Ms. Wallace can submit the Letter of Intent without another meeting of the Committee.

Community support--letters

The Committee discussed the draft letter templates prepared by Ms. Pau and Ms. Grammer and the draft lists of potential groups to be asked for letters of support. After discussion, *it was decided that a very broad group of supporters, including Town departments, should be approached.*

Ms. Wallace said that in her experience with a Safe Routes to Schools grant for Page School, letters from Police and Fire Departments helped. She noted that asking for the letter and informing people about the project is a good way to build support. The Committee brainstormed additional potential recipients of requests for letters of support:

- Merrimack Valley Planning Council
- State Senator Bruce Tarr

- State Representative Adrian Ramos
- Federal officials
- Nearby municipalities
- Boating groups (e.g., Plum Island Kayaks, marinas)
- Birding groups
- Neighbors dependent on River Road (*Ms. Callahan will recirculate the list from the Assessor's Office*)
- Bicycling groups

Ms. Wallace also suggested that the group could use social media to ask for letters of support.

Ms. Wallace will set up a project webpage about the River Road Action Grant, which can be linked in the requests for letters of support. Ms. Grammer will revamp the Committee webpages to consolidate old information about the planning grant and highlight the River Road Action Grant, with links to the project webpage Ms. Wallace will set up. Ms. Grammer will provide Ms. Wallace photos of River Road to use on the webpage.

Grant items that can be done early

The Committee reviewed the grant application items that could be done early, even before the grant application materials become available in March. *It was noted that in addition to the letters of support from the community, work might be done on the [RMAT tool](#) and the GEI budgeting form.*

Upcoming meetings

The next Committee meeting will be January 4, 2023 at 5:30 pm. *At that meeting the Committee will 1) finalize the template letters of support and 2) allocate responsibility among Committee members for reaching out to recipients of requests for letters of support.*

The Committee will also plan to meet as soon as possible after the grant application materials are released.

Committee organization

Ms. Callahan, the Committee's acting Chair, is extremely busy and can no longer continue in that role. *The Committee voted unanimously to elect Ms. Grammer as Chair.*

Minutes

The Committee voted unanimously to accept the minutes of November 9, 2022, as amended.

Adjournment

7:15 pm

Meeting materials

Draft letter templates & recipient lists

State materials about Action Grant applications

Last year's letter of intent & feedback