



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT
Connecticut River Bridge Project
NH Project #12210C; VT Project # BF A004 (152)

Existing Bridges Subcommittee Meeting #10
February 22, 2021
10:00 a.m.

Join Zoom Meeting
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Meeting ID: 838 8488 7723
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AGENDA

1. Minutes of December 18, 2020
2. Project Updates
3. Guest Speaker: Dr. Shannon Rodgers, University of New Hampshire, Cooperative Extension
4. Next Meeting
5. Public Comment
6. Adjourn



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project

Existing Bridges Subcommittee Meeting #9

Web Conference Meeting

MINUTES

December 18, 2020

Co-Chairperson Lynch announced that the meeting would be conducted using a Zoom format and J. B. Mack read a document entitled *Authority for Conducting a Meeting Electronically* (copy attached). He announced that all votes would be conducted by roll call.

Subcommittee Attendees: Kathryn Lynch, *Co-Chair, Town of Hinsdale*; Steve Barrett, *Brattleboro Public Works*; Steve Diorio, *Hinsdale Board of Selectmen*; Prudence MacKinney, *Public Health Advocate*; Ed Smith, *Hinsdale Economic Development Representative*; Sharon Smith, *Hinsdale Historical Society*.

Staff and Technical Assistance: Chris Campany, *Windham Regional Commission*; Don Lyford and David Scott, *New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)*; J. B. Mack, *Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC)*; Chris Ramage, Robert Ryan, *University of Massachusetts Amherst*.

Guests: Kathy Urffer, *Connecticut River Conservancy*; Chris Chapman, *Brattleboro resident*.

Kathryn Lynch called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. J. B. Mack conducted a roll call of Subcommittee attendees.

I. Meeting Minutes of October 28, 2020

Motion: To approve the minutes of October 28, 2020.

Motion by Sharron Smith, seconded by Ed Smith. Approved by unanimous roll call vote.

II. Project Updates

Don Lyford announced that NHDOT is running behind in preparing the bid documents for the new bridge. They are still working with the railroad on a few items and finishing up plans. All of the documents need to be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration. They are probably looking at having the project go out to bid in the first or second week of February. Despite the delay, NHDOT will still be able to have the contract get started in the spring or early summer of 2021.

Don Lyford announced that NHDOT has received a new layout for solar lights for the new bridge from Solar One. It will have a solar panel on top of the light post. NHDOT has reached out to the Hinsdale-Brattleboro Bridge Project Advisory Committee for feedback on the new design. He mentioned that there have been some questions about new lights for the existing bridges and path and he thought that solar lights might be a good solution.

Sharron Smith asked if the plan for the existing bridges will be to use the light green paint similar to what is on the bridges today. Don Lyford responded that NHDOT has heard that some people feel that the bridges should be a different color, so the color of the bridges needs further discussion. NHDOT is open to considering a different color for the existing bridges. He noted that there are some problems with some colors fading compared to a green or a brown. Some bridge colors may need to be repainted more frequently to retain their color. Sharron Smith stated that from her position representing the Hinsdale Historical Society and the Hinsdale Conservation Commission, she is not in favor of an orange or yellow color for the bridge. She indicated that she'd like to see the island be reserved mostly for environmental purposes as opposed to entertainment or amusement and that the bridges should have a more subdued color.

III. Feedback on December 2nd Online Forum

J. B. Mack said that this topic was included on the agenda to give Subcommittee members an opportunity to comment on how they thought the December 2nd Online Forum went, what Subcommittee members heard, and what the big takeaways were from the meeting. He announced that there were approximately 40 people that attended the event and he noted that there has been an upsurge in survey responses about the existing bridges and island project. That survey is still open and available on the SWRPC website. There have been 244 responses to the survey at this point and more New Hampshire resident responses have been coming in. The trend with survey responses is that most people like the idea of the Island encouraging wildlife habitat, similar to the comments expressed by Sharron Smith earlier in the meeting.

Kathryn Lynch said that she is happy to hear that more survey responses are coming in from New Hampshire.

IV. Revised Conceptual Plan for Bridges and Island

J. B. Mack announced that Chris Ramage would be providing an update to the conceptual plan for the existing bridges and island area based on the public input that he has received so far. A goal of today would be to get any feedback on the conceptual elements of the plan. For people that were not able to attend this meeting, he said that he would be posting the presentation on the SWRPC website. Feedback on these conceptual elements will be due January 8, 2021. After January 8th, Chris Ramage will be moving forward with the concepts to develop more detailed plans.

Chris Ramage introduced his project called *A Living River: Balancing Recreation and Conservation along the Hinsdale Island Greenway*. He started his presentation by focusing on Bridge Street in Brattleboro, VT. He noted that in the Bridge Street drawing he had a limited number of colors to work with, and chose red as a color for the Anna Hunt Marsh Bridge. He said that he believed color was an important consideration for the Subcommittee at some point and was not advocating for one color over another.

For the Anna Hunt Marsh Bridge, Chris Ramage proposed a mixed-use multimodal transportation route with the space on the bridge split between movement and gathering. The majority of the space is allocated to movement. In the gathering spaces there would be movable installations such as standing tables, seating and planter boxes to create a separation of defined space to allow for a range of activities to take place. In the proposal, the travel width along the bridge is 12 feet wide to accommodate emergency vehicles. He suggested that the bridge be set-up in such a way that gathering spaces are modular, because it would allow for an evolution of the design to better suit community needs. He noted that he's heard ideas about the bridges being used for weddings, photography, markets, and other events. Chris Ramage showed a potential idea for art installations on the bridge including a "chalk walk" concept. The idea is to have artists take over a part of the street and paint murals on the street.

Chris Ramage said that he is proposing a wide gateway promenade on the western end of the island. The concept would use the existing pavement of the road on NH 119 as well as an existing grassy area and parking area on the south side of the road. He said that bumping out the promenade in this section allows for more flexible uses. There's about 50 feet of width available in this area. The width of the promenade area allows the area to be kept open for transportation uses while also providing room for other programming on the island whether its cultural events at the amphitheater or events along the spine of the greenway. He showed a picture of food trucks in this space.

Off the promenade to the northern side is a proposed play hill. Chris Ramage showed a low impact playhill that is naturalistic. He explained that he took out slides of typical playground equipment based on comments at the December 2nd Online Forum. The proposal is a series of rock blocks to create an artificial rock scramble for people to enjoy climbing from a lower pathway to the main greenway.

To the southern side of the promenade Chris Ramage showed a low impact design amphitheater. He noted that the siting of the amphitheater was moved inland a bit further than the last time the concept was presented to decrease environmental impact. Chris Ramage noted that there was strong support for a low impact design at the December 2nd Online Forum. He has taken away retaining walls and hardscape features. The proposed design shows a sixty to seventy foot deep space from performance area to the last row of seats with a medium grade slope from the upper most seats to the lower performance area (the grade would be 8 to 10%). He noted that he is proposing a flat area at the top of the amphitheater as well as a gently sloping path along the north side of the amphitheater space to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access requirements. Proposed vegetation management in this area should provide open views to the river.

On the southwesterly coastal area of the island is a proposed water access area which Chris Ramage is calling the Hinsdale Island Beach and Cove. This can be accessed by two gently sloping paths that connect to the main greenway in the center of the island or the ADA design amphitheater path previously mentioned. The space uses a small area of shoreline and a small cove for children to wade in the water. He showed a protected area for swimming using boulders and a handful of dock pilings that people can use to tie up motor boats. Space is set aside for boaters to beach their boats as well. Space is also reserved for picnic tables in the vicinity of where the paths meet the beach area.

Chris Ramage showed viewing platforms proposed on the island, including a deck on the northernmost section of the island, and three additional platforms to the eastern side of the island along the greenway. He noted an old bridge abutment on the eastern side of the island that would be used as a fishing spot and noted that there would need to be some vegetation clearing to improve access.

The plan for the Charles Dana Bridge would be similar to the Anna Hunt Marsh bridge with a balance between movement and gathering and a modular design, but for the Charles Dana Bridge he recommends prioritizing more heavily on areas for scenic viewing and more contemplative spaces since the project area moves to a more wild, less densely populated area. He showed a rendering of a viewing area looking downstream including a view of the new bridge.

On the New Hampshire side of the river, Chris Ramage noted an area where NHDOT is proposing stormwater retention west of Mountain Road and he showed a concept for a pathway around the retention area for kayak access and another old bridge abutment that would be used as a fishing pier. He proposed some on-street parking spaces on Mountain Road to improve access to the kayak launching area and fishing pier, however, it would require shifting the water retention area about 10 to 13 feet westward. This concept would need to be taken up with NHDOT. He noted that there is enough room for an ADA grade path to provide access to the water.

Chris Ramage provided information about the conceptual path systems, which constitute three levels of accessibility. Level I paths would represent the majority of the paths including the main spine and some of the major paths to community amenities such as the amphitheater, water front access, viewing platforms, and fishing piers. Level I paths would be ADA accessible. Most of the surface would be asphalt or concrete, but where there are more environmentally sensitive areas, he proposed a deployable boardwalk or a helical pier boardwalk. Level II access would be on the western side of the island wrapping under the promenade area and under the Anna Hunt Marsh Bridge. Surface materials for Level II pathways are proposed to be a packed gravel path. This would include a raised boardwalk under the Anna Hunt Marsh Bridge supported by pilings. The Level III access would be on the northernmost part of the island providing access to a viewing platform. Surface material for this path would be packed earth.

The final piece of the conceptual plan that Chris Ramage reviewed included shoreline stabilization measures on the northern and southern sides of the island. He suggested that there was an opportunity to test out some erosion control and stabilization measures. One concept that he presented was “log spurs” for the southern side of the island, which are a pile of logs that reach out of the island into the water at an angle and deflect the higher velocity water flow away from the island while creating an area that improves sediment deposition along the shoreline. He explained that this strategy is often paired with the planting of willow and alder trees which support the structure in place and provide good wildlife habitat. The second concept is a “leaky dam” on the northern side of the island which involves bundles of logs perpendicular to the channel which trap sediment, and slows down the flow rate in that area. He noted that these ideas are something to consider for the project in the long term.

Sharron Smith asked if he had any areas in mind for restrooms. Chris Ramage indicated that he is proposing a small restroom facility adjacent to the amphitheater at the level of the main greenway. He is currently proposing a two level composting toilet system that will not require extending sewer and water lines to the island. The idea would be to place the facility along the ridge line where there would be access to manage the waste at a lower level of the facility. He talked about a drafting system that would manage odor issues by venting above the restroom facility.

Ed Smith noted that many years ago there was an attempt to install a boat launch on the island and that over the years, sediment built up over a paved boat launch ramp. He asked if the log spurs are meant to prevent that from happening. Chris Ramage answered that the log spurs are actually meant to prevent erosion, and there actually may be a little more sediment build-up with this strategy. Kathy Urffer said that Great River Hydro, which owns dams upstream and downstream of this site, is proposing a fairly radical change to its operations and that these changes in operations may end up creating a situation where sediment buildup isn't as much of a problem. The whole dynamic of how sediment moves through the river may be very different in the next 5-10 years. She noted that if this was proposed, the next step would be to hire a hydrologist to study this idea further. J. B. Mack asked if there is a possibility that Greater River Hydro could be approached to study this issue through the dam relicensing effort. She responded that the Connecticut River Conservancy is going to be asking Great River Hydro to pledge doing more active river monitoring and encouraged stakeholders to comment on this issue as part of the permitting process.

Steve Diorio asked if some of the shoreland stabilization measures were ice proof, when ice is running down the river in the winter. Chris Ramage stated that he is not an expert on these systems, but he noted that the measures had been used in climates where ice flos occur. He added that every riverine system is unique and it would need to be looked at closer by a hydrologist. He noted that the systems would probably need to have a robust anchoring system.

Chris Chapman praised Chris Ramage's conceptual design and said that he expects there will be a great deal of support for the project. He suggested making part of the plan to eradicate the poison ivy along the edge of the roadway on the island. He asked if you could eradicate it by lowering the acidity of the soil. He also indicated that he wanted to address a comment at the previous Online Forum where there was a concern raised about maintaining the bridges and island. He said that there are many civic groups that would probably lend a hand in support. He noted that the West River Park, recently created near Interstate 91 was paid for entirely with donations and the West River Rail Trail has robust volunteer maintenance activity. He noted that there may be other groups that could serve as an organizing entity such as the Brattleboro Downtown Alliance. He went on to say that he believed that with the proposed improvements, there will be a greater amount of respect for the island and an appreciation of the wildlife habitat. In addressing Sharron Smith's comments earlier in the meeting, he didn't think bridge color would affect wildlife habitat or activities such as nesting or migration. He suggested that historical plaques be recommended and incorporated into the conceptual plan, including information about Anna Hunt Marsh and Charles Dana. He noted that the Brattleboro Historical Society would be a great resource for plaques. He said he sees the two bridges as symbols of cooperation and community and would see color enhancements as a way to capitalize on this iconography. He said that this was an opportunity to do something more spectacular in an economical way by substituting a drab color for a brighter color.

J. B. Mack noted that at an earlier meeting, there was discussion about lighting on the bridges and island and he asked Chris Ramage to talk about his current thinking about lighting. Chris responded that he'll be presenting a lighting plan later on in the spring of 2021, however, he does have some thoughts today. He said that he feels that its extremely important that the main pathway is lit to some degree, but he would suggest minimizing light trespass. In general, he's against introducing light to other parts of the island just because of the affect it could have on wildlife species. He said that we should think about lighting heights that are much closer to the ground than what you typically see along highways. He also said that especially for bridges, we may want to look at highlight lighting for architecture on the bridges or art installations. Don Lyford noted that the solar lights that NHDOT is using on the new bridge are 15 feet to the top of the pole.

Prudence MacKinney asked about the spatial dimensions of the pathway and wanted to confirm that there would be enough space for pedestrians and bicyclists. Chris Ramage responded that on a normal day he didn't expect there to be a lot of conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians. He thought that if it got too busy, most bicyclists would choose to dismount. J. B. Mack noted that the proposed pathway is twelve feet wide and noted that there are some multi-use pathways that are as narrow as eight feet wide. Eight feet is not ideal, but twelve feet is a comfortable width in his opinion.

J. B. Mack reminded the group that Chris Ramage would be seeking any additional comments on the conceptual design by January 8, 2021. He will forward the presentation and video to the other Subcommittee members that were not able to attend today's meeting and remind them of the deadline for submitting comment.

V. Next Meeting

J. B. Mack noted that attendees at previous Subcommittee meetings expressed an interest in bringing in economic development professionals to talk about economic opportunities associated with the island and existing bridges project. He spoke with Shannon Rodgers, an economist at the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension who specializes in nature-based economic development to come and speak to the group and she has offered to visit with the Subcommittee. Kathy Urffer suggested that J. B. Mack also get in touch with the NH Division of Tourism and Ed Smith suggested that he check in with

NHDOT's lead on their Public Private Partnership Program (P3). J. B. Mack confirmed that he would check in with these contacts and would try to set up a meeting in February 2021.

VI. Public Comment

There was no additional public comment.

VII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. B. Mack
Principal Planner

DRAFT

To stay compliant with NH public meeting guidelines when using a remote meeting format, we are obliged to read the following script.

AUTHORITY FOR CONDUCTING A MEETING ELECTONICALLY

In **Emergency Order #12**, issued by the Governor of the State of New Hampshire pursuant to **Executive Order #2020-04**, certain provision of **RSA 91-A** regulating the operation of public body meetings have been waived during the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency.

Specifically:

The requirement that a quorum of a public body be physically present except in an emergency requiring immediate action under **RSA 91-A: 2, III (b)**;

The requirement that each part of a meeting of a public body be audible or otherwise discernible to the public at the location specified in the meeting notice as the location of the meeting under **RSA 91-A: 2, III (c)**.

Provided, however that the public body must:

Provide access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means;

Provide public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting;

Provide a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access; and

Adjourn the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting.

This meeting will be conducted using the online meeting platform, Zoom. The public may view the meeting online by going to **www.zoom.us/join** and enter the **Meeting ID: 873 8454 6724**
Passcode: 501 044.

If you are unable to, or wish not to attend the meeting on line, you may call the toll free # **(888) 475-4499** and enter **Meeting ID: 873 8454 6724** to listen to the meeting.

If you are having trouble accessing the meeting, you may call **(603) 357-0557** for assistance.

The meeting will now be called to order.