



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

Existing Bridges Subcommittee Meeting #11
March 25, 2021
1:30 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting
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Meeting ID: 875 4892 6325
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AGENDA

1. Minutes of February 22, 2021
2. Project Updates
3. Existing Bridges Subcommittee Report Development
4. Conceptual Plan Update
5. Next Meeting
6. Public Comment
7. Adjourn



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project

Existing Bridges Subcommittee Meeting #10

Web Conference Meeting

MINUTES

February 22, 2021

Co-Chairperson Moreland 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*; Patrick Moreland, *Co-Chair, Town of Brattleboro*; Steve Barrett, *Brattleboro Public Works*; Jason Cooper, *Friends of the West River Trail*; Steve Diorio, *Hinsdale Board of Selectmen*; Ed Smith, *Hinsdale Economic Development Representative*; Sharon Smith, *Hinsdale Historical Society*.

Staff and Technical Assistance: Don Lyford, *New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)*; J. B. Mack, *Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC)*; Bill Saffian, *NHDOT*; David Scott, *NHDOT*; Susan Westa, *Windham Regional Commission*; Trent Zanes, *NHDOT*.

Guests: Representative Michael Abbott, *NH State Legislature*; Chris Chapman, *Brattleboro resident*; Mike Kowalczyk, *Monadnock Region Rail Trails Collaborative*; Dr. Shannon Rodgers, *University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension*.

Patrick Moreland called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. J. B. Mack conducted a roll call of Subcommittee attendees.

I. Meeting Minutes of December 18, 2020

Motion: To approve the minutes of December 18, 2020.

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

II. Project Updates

Don Lyford announced that there is another delay in advertising Project #12210C. He said that NHDOT had some last minute items to tie-up before sending it on to review to the Federal Highway Administration. The new advertising date is March 23, 2021.

Ed Smith observed that the last time NHDOT moved the advertising date, the advertising publication noted that Vermont needed additional time to acquire a drinking water permit. He asked what a drinking water permit had to do with the project. Don Lyford said the he wasn't sure why the note said a drinking water permit, but it was probably meant to describe an arrangement in which the contractor will conduct some drilling on the Barrows and Fisher Oil Company land for the 12210C project and will pump any ground

water into the Brattleboro sewer system after going through a pre-treatment process. Steve Barrett added that the Town of Brattleboro has approved the permit.

J. B. Mack announced that Chris Ramage, the University of Massachusetts student providing assistance to the Subcommittee on a conceptual plan for the bridges and island area, has submitted some deliverables associated with the project including a grading plan and a parking and access plan. He noted that he would forward those on to the Subcommittee for their review. He also announced that Chris Ramage would soon be submitting a planting and restoration plan, lighting plan, cost estimate and other design details and schematics associated with the project. He also reported that Chris Ramage is looking to present a final draft concept on April 1, 2021 and wrap-up final revisions to the conceptual plan by May 3, 2021.

J. B. Mack noted that he will be meeting with Patrick Moreland and Kathryn Lynch on February 25th to discuss a report outline that would be used to present the findings and recommendations of the Hinsdale-Brattleboro Existing Bridges Subcommittee.

III. Guest Speaker: Dr. Shannon Rodgers, University of New Hampshire, Cooperative Extension

Patrick Moreland welcomed Dr. Shannon Rodgers from the University of New Hampshire (UNH), Cooperative Extension to talk about economic development opportunities associated with the Hinsdale-Brattleboro Existing Bridges project. J. B. Mack added that at the last meeting, the Subcommittee had requested that he look into bringing in economic development professionals to speak with the Subcommittee about potential economic opportunities and resources. Specifically, the Subcommittee had suggested he reach out to UNH Cooperative Extension, NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs Division of Travel and Tourism Development and the NHDOT Public Private Partnership (P3) program. He reported that in speaking with the Division of Travel and Tourism Development, they would be looking to come in and partner with the towns and other stakeholders after the project is completed and ready for visitation. After speaking with a representative of NHDOT's P3 program, he learned that the program is not accepting applications at this time and does not offer technical assistance, but the program would be open to learning about any P3 initiatives pitched for the project.

Dr. Shannon Rodgers provided a presentation entitled *Rivers and Economic Development: Overview and Case Studies in New Hampshire*. A pdf and recording of the presentation are available at http://www.swrpc.org/hinsdale-brattleboro_planning. Dr. Rodgers explained that her specialization is in nature-based economic development. She noted that she's on the faculty of the University of New Hampshire in Durham and teaches courses for the environmental and resource and economic program. Her presentation began by discussing the role of the Cooperative Extension which is the main outreach arm of UNH. A small department within Cooperative Extension is its nature based economy program which was started in response to hearing from many rural NH communities requesting technical assistance to help bring vibrancy back in their downtowns and leverage plentiful natural and recreational resources like trails, rivers, etc. to enhance economic development. She noted that this is a growing field of applied research and she has developed some resources and findings which she has been sharing with rural towns in New Hampshire.

The presentation featured information about how many communities are trying to evolve from a "mill town" to a "river town". Dr. Rodgers talked about the different aspects of economic development to consider with respect to river towns including employment, wages, tourism, local spending, and property values. She noted some research that was done in Georgia river towns finding that local spending was between \$34 and \$63 per day by paddlers, but also noted that wages are below average compared to other similar studies conducted in Utah. She discussed research that shows property values decrease near the water particularly

within a ½ mile of a river. However, higher riparian scores and superior wildlife habitat increase property values. Higher property values are also observed where there is public access to the water.

Dr. Rodgers talked about an economic development program in Pennsylvania called the River Town Program that provides towns help in marketing their natural resources and developing regional brands relating to their nearby rivers. The presentation covered lessons learned from the program including reasons for having a successful river town and sources of failure. River town characteristics that are critical to assess include boat launching, parking, wayfinding, businesses that support or complement water recreation, river walks, lighting, sightlines to the river, open space areas/parks, and water quality.

Dr. Rodgers shared information about Nashua, NH's downtown riverfront development project which has largely been focused on creating a riverwalk, eliminating invasive species and cutting down dead trees to better open up sightlines on the river, creating a mix of housing and commercial development and the development of a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district to help finance riverfront development. She also described a project in Dover, NH called the Cochecho Waterfront Development which was made possible with a TIF district and involves a mix of housing and commercial development. The project has plans for a riverwalk, amphitheater and a public access boat launch area. Dr. Rodgers also talked about economic development planning being conducted by Wilton, Franklin and Berlin, NH including efforts to create river-related events to draw people to their communities to shop and eat in their downtowns.

Following the presentation, Dr. Rodgers shared the UNH Cooperative Extension's web page and walked through some of the resources that can be found relating to economic development and rivers and rail trails. The website features case study research about developing nature-based economies as well as fact sheets.

Steve Diorio asked if the presentation could be shared for future reference. J. B. Mack and Dr. Rodgers confirmed that they would make the presentation available on the SWRPC website.

J. B. Mack noted that Dr. Rodgers's presentation stated that "river remoteness" was one of the factors for a river town's success. He asked her to explain what she meant by that. She explained that remoteness may determine the kind of economic development a community might have. For example, if a river town is remote, one might expect visitors to stay overnight. If it's close, then the community may want to cater to day trippers. Economic development strategies may differ depending on people's access to the local economy. The cases she's discussed today have mostly been day trip economies. She pointed out that she's found that rivers that are less remote and more easily accessible generally tend to have more economic development opportunities.

Sue Westa asked if Dr. Rodgers could discuss her finding that properties tend to decrease in value on rivers ½ a mile from the river and asked why that was. Dr. Rodgers said that the increase flood risk and insurance requirements are largely why property values decrease. They also talked about development not necessarily being cheap on rivers, however, Dr. Rodgers said that her findings are nuanced, but a trend that holds up nationally based on numerous studies. Where there is good flood control and greater certainty for developers, riverfront property may be more desirable and therefore less affordable.

J. B. Mack stated that the project that the Subcommittee is working on may need to find grant funding to implement. In his research he noted that some of the resources for funding include U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development, Northern Border Regional Commission and U.S. Economic Development Administration. In order to access federal funding, the project may need to demonstrate potential economic impact. What are some ways to demonstrate potential economic impact of nature based economic development? Dr. Rodgers noted that it can be difficult to monetize economic impact, but there is a lot of good case study information available that UNH can share. There are also opportunities for

surveying visitors to gain an understanding of what people spend money on. Surveys can also be used to ask visitors what goods or services they would like to spend money on but there is a lack of in the community. Dr. Rodgers also spoke about public restrooms being a key economic development tool to keep people in town to spend money. She said a research driven process that looks at existing assets and potential needs are often enough to show potential opportunities for economic development.

J. B. Mack asked if Dr. Rodgers has noted any river town communities that implemented concessions on their riverfronts and the feasibility of renting, leasing or permitting activity on the riverfront could create revenue that could be used to maintain the riverfront. Dr. Rodgers did not have any examples of concessions and noted that in her research, maintenance is often volunteer driven or town staff driven. She said that maintenance is an important aspect of economic development and she can see the need for more research on the topic. Mike Kowalczyk emphasized that funding agencies are really going to want to know that there is a plan for maintenance and that it is an important factor to consider. Dr. Rodgers brought up the idea of allowing advertising in the area that could be used to help pay for maintenance.

J. B. Mack noted that there are a lot of development constraints on the Hinsdale side of the river, but was intrigued about Dr. Rodgers point about creating economic activity around commercial enterprises that support waterfront activities. He noted that on the Hinsdale side of the river, Norm's Marina already does that, but wondered if there is more that could take place on the property such as providing a place for people to eat, drink or shop. He also wondered about future redevelopment opportunities in the George's Field area. Are there economic opportunities that are a higher and better use in terms of catering to waterfront users and visitors? Ed Smith responded that there are many regulatory and deed restrictions associated with developable property on the Hinsdale side of the river and most of the other land is undevelopable. He said he believed that George's Field is built out according to current zoning and that Norm's Marina has an interest in connecting to Brattleboro's waste water treatment facility but was not sure of the status of that request. Dr. Rodgers said that in her studies, economic development doesn't necessarily need to be abutting riverfront activity, but good wayfinding signage linking people to those opportunities is needed even if they are a few miles away. She noted that cell phone reception is also important so that people can look up things to do on their phones.

In response to Ed Smith's observation about Norm's Marina and wastewater connectivity, Steve Barrett noted that there have been discussions with Hinsdale businesses about connecting to the Brattleboro wastewater treatment facility. He noted that the use of the old trestle bridge may be the best way to achieve connectivity and he said that the trestle bridge would also be a good way to connect to the rail trail in Hinsdale.

Jason Cooper asked if there were any plans to connect the Fort Hill Trail to the existing bridges and island. J. B. Mack talked about an option that he has spoken with others about that involves getting an easement or other permission to cross land from the Fort Hill Trail terminus to NH 119 and developing an on-road facility that leads to the existing bridges and island. Jason Cooper noted that travel along NH 119 may be precarious especially for families with young children and views or access to the water would be more desirable. He said he's walked along some parts of the river north of the Fort Hill Trail and noticed that there were terraces along the river that might work well for trails. He talked about the idea of a trail passing along the river through Norm's Marina and under the new bridge as a possible opportunity.

Patrick Moreland thanked Dr. Rodgers for her presentation. Dr. Rodgers offered to provide follow up technical assistance if needed to further discuss economic development opportunities for the project.

IV. Next Meeting

J. B. Mack asked the Subcommittee if it would like to hold a meeting before the scheduled April 1st Online Public Forum to review and ask questions about Chris Ramage's most recent plans associated with the conceptual plan for the existing bridges and island. There was consensus among the Subcommittee to hold a meeting during the last week of March and asked J. B. to send out a poll.

V. Public Comment

Chris Chapman thanked Dr. Rodgers for her presentation. He observed that, except where there are steep slopes and land is unbuildable, he doesn't think that property values decrease along the river in Hinsdale or Brattleboro. He spoke about the area around the mouth of the West River where several businesses seem to be very healthy including the Marina. He said that the more we can connect Brattleboro and Hinsdale with signage the better it will be. He noted that there are places like Pisgah Park and the Fort Hill Trail that could see significantly more activity if there was more signage and awareness about them. Jason Cooper followed-up that he thought the Fort Hill Trail would be used even more if it could be connected to Brattleboro directly.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. B. Mack
Principal Planner

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

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: Meeting ID: 838 8488 7723 Passcode: 355 603

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: 838 8488 7723 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.