

2023.08.17 Plainfield Hazard Mitigation Committee

MINUTES:

Members present - Maggie Baird, Jennifer Guarino, Bram Towbin, Joanne Szwed, Michael Billingsley

Guests present - Paul Sahba, Graham Bradley, Pär Winzell, Charlie Cogbill

Meeting convened 7:05 p.m. (Temporary Chair, Michael Billingsley)

1. Introductions - members and guests - and history.

History of the Committee covering its origins - brief overview of the Great Brook bridge washouts and landslides, home buyouts, McLaren Farm and Rec. Field road washouts, the Barre Hill gully, Health Center gully, recent Winooski flooding and the possible dangers from the Molly's Falls dam #6. Bram also summarized the post-2011 flooding and bridge-road washout events (including 2011, 2015 and 2023) as well as the hydro-geologic and engineering studies leading up to the recent FEMA Hazard Mitigation funding of a replacement bridge in the village on Brook Road.

Also a summary of dam-related actions including Public Utility Commission rulings, Green Mountain Power (GMP) renovations and outstanding shortcomings with the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) and the stop log Emergency Spillway gate as well as the underlying problems of dam liability, oversight, public notice, emergency response and lack of funding.

Looking ahead to a new regulatory & oversight climate (ANR instead of PUC?) as well as more interaction with GMP.

2. Election of Officers

Chair - Maggie Baird (nominated by M. Billingsley, second by J. Guarino)

Secretary - Michael Billingsley (nominated by M. Baird, second by J. Szwed)

3. Examination of Zoom-enabled attendance for (a) public guests, and (b) remote committee members.

Discussion concluded that the committee meet in person until late fall, and that we revisit the question in our November meeting. There are certain aspects of the meeting ie. consulting maps, charts and various reference documents that are best accomplished in person, and also that remote attendance by Zoom would allow members of the committee to participate during travel or winter weather, as well as to provide a convenience to the public.

Moved by B. Towbin and seconded by J. Guarino, that during the November meeting we will talk about whether to invite the public to participate by Zoom, starting in December.

4. Concluding discussion as to what potential costs are or will be borne by Plainfield with respect to the Molly's Falls #6 dam, as well as what are the downstream consequences to Plainfield (vis-a-vis danger to the the public and buildings, evacuation, impact upon flood insurance, emergency response and impact on infrastructure). The was also a technical discussion about what situations and procedures affect when the spillways are opened, with the conclusion that many of those details are in GMPs Emergency Action Plan for the dam.

5. Move to adjourn at 8:35 - moved by Bram and seconded by Jen.

The meeting concluded with a review of post-flood conditions in the Winooski floodplain, from Naismith Brook in Marshfield, downstream through Plainfield to Cate Farm in East Montpelier... assisted by aerial imagery (July 2023 satellite from Airbus, and earlier years for comparison) as well as drone (LIDAR, photos and flood modeling by UVM's Spatial Analysis Lab, and drone video from Pär Winzell).

Lots of discussion with our guests on the sources and extent of flooding above Plainfield, and the impact of meanders and high water upon the floodplain transected by Route 2 (and a narrow bridge opening) at the Plainfield - East Montpelier line.