

Musconetcong River Management Council

Minutes of a Member Meeting, May 14, 2024

Attendees:

Nancy Lawler
Bill Leavens
Charlie Fineran
Albert Krouse
Steve Rattner
Pam Bailey
William McQuaide
Dwight Pederson
Peter Dlugos
Robert Delpizzo
Paul Tarlowe
Casey Ezyske
Sharon Petzinger
Tom Dallessio
Bill Millette
Cathryn Schaffer
Steve Gransky
Beth Styler Barry
Judy Nelson
Jack DeGroot
Alan Hunt
Ellen Haggerty
Linda Cerceau
Ben Yaskulka
Paul Kenney
Darrin Ferguson

Alan Hunt, Darrin Ferguson, and Paul Kenney attended, representing the National Park Service. In addition, MWA employees Ellen Haggerty, Ben Yaskulka, Steven Gransky, and Linda Cerceau attended.

The meeting was brought to order by Chairman Fineran at 7:02 P.M. A quorum was achieved. There were no visitors. Notice of this meeting was published in the Star Ledger and the Express Times in accordance with the NJ Open Public Meeting Act. This was a hybrid meeting with participants at the MWA headquarters in Asbury and on Microsoft Teams

The minutes of the February 2024 meeting were approved with spelling and grammatical corrections. Steve Rattner moved to approve the minutes and Nancy Lawler gave second. The minutes were approved with Al Ivany abstaining.

New Business

Tom Dallessio was nominated as River Administrator. Ben Yaskulka was nominated to be Assistant River Administrator. Bill Leavens made a motion to approve their appointment and Steve Rattner gave second. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

There was discussion of what towns are currently missing council members. Ben Yaskulka reported that Hackettstown and Bloomsbury are currently missing both primary and alternate members. Pohatcong currently only has an alternate member listed and Washington (Morris County) and Franklin are currently missing alternate members. Ben reported that calls have been made to all three towns missing primary members and a written request was sent to Hackettstown. Alan also reported that the emails for the members from Independence are currently incorrect. Steve Rattner mentioned that he will check with Washington for a new alternate.

Discussion of distribution of minutes to municipalities followed. Charlie Fineran supported the idea of sending the minutes to the Town clerk and potentially the mayor. Bill mentioned the environmental commission as another potential group to send them to. Nancy followed with suggesting local planning boards and thought that sending locations could be different depending on town structure. Ben Yaskulka will make a list of potential emails for all towns in the council and report back at the next meeting.

Nancy Lawler discussed a project she has been working on with PEACE-NJ. She had responded to a request for assistance in removing the old cement dock in the river at Alumni Park, Hackettstown. The project goal is to create a plan with input from the town and the public. She wants to enlist the local Hispanic community for their thoughts and help. She has applied for a planning grant from NJ Audubon with an expected response in June. She would like the MRMC to offer a resolution in support of Hackettstown.

Charlie suggested that the MRMC request support of MWA on the project. Charley made such a motion given second by Steve Rattner. This motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

Tom Dallessio discussed the Watershed Vision Plan update. Stephanie McMoran is developing the document draft which will be presented next month. This is intended to be a vision for the entire watershed with full maps and ideas about what might be here. The goal is to enhance and supplement information that is available from local towns and counties. The plan builds on the 319 planning that is also underway. It will include discussions of other goals for the watershed including transportation and housing. The public will be invited to comment, and that comment period will remain open for a few months. The Vision Plan will be used to supplement the 319 plan to address protecting the Musconetcong and the entire watershed. This will be the first vision plan for any NJ watershed.

Ellen Haggerty noted that Christa Reeve is working on the draft for the 319 Watershed Implementation Plan for the middle Musconetcong River. Christa hopes to have a draft ready for the next meeting for review. Grants are available to support the work.

Mr. Dallessio then discussed the Asbury Village Vibrant Places project. MWA received a technical assistance grant which funded professional time to put together a plan to connect the village of Asbury and surrounding community. At a public meeting in January, 60 people attended and expressed interest. A meeting of the Steering Committee was held last month, and the Mayors of Franklin and Bethlehem participated. The mayors want to survey the residents on prospective improvements. The long-term thought is to bring the idea to all the hamlets in the watershed using this Vision Plan as a template to follow. Topics under consideration include speed limits, pedestrian movement, bicycling, and identifying local cultural amenities.

Charlie Fineran noted that MWA is looking beyond what the Council normally does. This project can set an example of what is possible in a well-managed watershed.

Warren County has received a grant to do a study to develop a "Complete Streets" plan with conceptual designs and demonstration case studies along county roads. Dave Dech and Ryan Conklin from the County are leading the project and Tom Dallessio is participating as a member of the Steering Committee. A final report will be issued next summer, and it should employ some of the suggestions that evolve from the effort.

Charlie noted the growing interest in rail trails which are also important for connecting communities.

The next discussion was the Beatty's Mill flood plain restoration. There will be a tree planting event along the river on Sunday the 19th. Kindly spread the word and sign up. We need volunteers. Note the QR code on the MWA web page. The site is adjacent to Union Cemetery in Washington Township.

Haberman Hampton Flood Hazard determination: Ben Yaskulka reported that the project would not move forward without a new NJDEP Flood Hazard Determination. Eastern Environmental Law Center has been engaged and is following developments.

2024 Spring events: Linda Cerceau noted that MWA would be engaged in tabling events. The Lake Hopatcong Block Party is Saturday, May 18. June 15 is Washington Borough. The Delaware River sojourn will take place during the week of June 17. That consists of boating and camping on a National River Trail. MWA is organizing a tree planting on Saturday, May 19. The MWA Annual meeting will be on Thursday, June 20.

River Administrators Report

Tom Dallessio asked Alan Hunt to discuss watershed wide interpretive planning. He discussed sharing information on educational and scenic sites in the region. He will support outreach efforts along with MWA personnel. He discussed building

constituencies by adopting high-level recommendations. One example is a Fishermen's Breakfast which MRMC could own to advance the Wild & Scenic agenda.

Linda Cerceau discussed the Musconetcong Education Trail. New signs are going in and a dock at the beginning of the trail is under consideration if permits can be approved. MWA also needs to replace a bridge along the trail that washed out. A permit is needed for a larger bridge to join the trail to Shurts road.

Mr. Dallessio reported on Asbury Mill exhibit planning. Hunter Research is helping us to imagine how to tell our story. A committee of MWA personnel visited the Somerset County Environmental Education Center for ideas. The group will be going to the Canal Museum in Easton, PA on June 1.

The Mill is moving full speed ahead to open before Thanksgiving. MWA met with the Franklin Township Engineer to resolve outstanding issues. We have a Certificate of Occupancy now for display and will be pulling permits shortly. We are looking for a Fall opening with heat, cooling, bathrooms, and a kitchen.

NPS Report

Paul Kenney then gave the NPS report. Paul noted that the Park Service has been meeting with NJDEP and urging them to define the existence of National Wild and Scenic rivers on their permit forms so that applicants will contact NPS for their comment on proposals. He met with NJDEP on other rivers that are under consideration for inclusion. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act specified that water quality should be improved where possible. We want the State to adopt water quality designations that specify those higher NPS standards and include Anti-degradation standards to reduce pollution levels.

Mr. Kenney also noted he had received MWA's cooperative agreement and budget package for the coming fiscal year. He will be reviewing and submitting that to NPS in expectation of Congressional approval of the NPS budget.

Committee Reports

Charlie reiterated his support for the Delaware River Sojourn, urging Council members to participate. There were no other committee reports.

Municipal and NGO Reports

Charlie reported that Allamuchy is working on a Rails to Trails project that will connect Allamuchy State Park and Jenny Jump State Park. There is interest in trails connecting south and across to the Delaware. Other trails are being considered from Phillipsburg to connect the Morris Canal Greenway to the Pennsylvania canals across the Delaware railroad bridge.

Steve Rattner noted that a Netcong Township resident wants to create an open space corridor to Hopatcong State Park. He wants a general meeting with the State to lease property so that Netcong can act as steward for the property. The proponent of the project needs permits and volunteers to develop the corridor. There is a need to upgrade and rebuild and clean up the seawall along Lake Musconetcong. Steve said that a letter supporting the project from the MRMC is premature. He wants to find out what is possible and what resources might be available. He wants to create a walkable recreation area.

Beth Styler Barry liked the idea and suggested handicap access along the corridor. Cleaning up along the river and removing dead trees can be code for 'clearing out' for increased parking. She expressed some concern for the project. Steve reported that it would start with identifying trees to be removed and invasive species. The pathway would be about four feet wide and paved with crushed stone. This is all premature. It will take three years to get permits.

Pam Bailey reported for Hampton that on August 10 the fire department will hold a duck race on the river. Craig Fleming of MWA has been planting natives along the river with some MRMC personnel. There is talk of a dog park in Hampton Borough Park.

Nancy Lawler reported for Lebanon Township. The township is having a native plant swap on June 1. Interest in native plants is expanding. PEACE-NJ is having their fourth annual Hispanic Conservation event in September. She invited MRMC member participation.

Peter Dlugos reported that Byram had hosted a presentation about septic pumping and management. The town is also working on winter road salt issues. Their Environmental Commission is looking towards multi-year planning.

Bob Del Pizzo reported that Mount Olive is looking into small dam removals. He will be discussing with MWA.

Bill Leavens reported that Washington Township is interested in purchasing the open space around the two dams on Reservoir Road.

Jack DeGroot discussed meeting with the Sussex municipalities on Rails to Trails issues.

Stephen Gransky requested volunteers for the planting along the river on Sunday, May 19. The MWA annual meeting is scheduled at Hawk Pointe on June 20.

Tom Dallessio noted that MRMC shirts are here in Asbury!! Please stop by to pick yours up!

Nominations for officers:

For Chairman, Charlie Fineran was nominated by Steve Rattner, second was given by Nancy Roberts Lawler

For Vice Chair, Steve Rattner was nominated by Charlie Fineran and Nancy Lawler gave second.

For Treasurer, Nancy Lawler was nominated by Charlie Fineran with second by Steve Rattner

For Secretary, Bill Leavens was nominated by Charlie Fineran, second by Nancy Lawler.

The Sergeant at Arms is appointed by the chair. Charlie Fineran appointed Bob Del Pizzo.

Officer elections will take place at the MRMC annual meeting June 18. This will be either a Hybrid or a virtual meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Bill Leavens