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**Middlesex Conservation District**

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**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**Final MEETING MINUTES**

**June 9, 2020**

**Supervisors:** David Williams, Patrick Hearn, Andrew Mintz, Elizabeth Austin, Associate Supervisor. Kathie Becker could not access the meeting, and Sue did not see her communications until after the meeting adjourned. Kathie had told Sue earlier that she would be late. Neither Kathie nor David received email invitations this time for some reason.

**Contractors:** Susan Thomas, Frances Gillespie (present for her report)

**Partners:** Heidi Ramsey, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (present for NRCS report), Jim Lyons, NRCS (present for NRCS report)

**Volunteers:** Liz McGuire

**Quorum:** Chairman David Williams confirmed there was a quorum and opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. Sue had technical difficulties which delayed the start of the meeting, and David needed the information to get in, which also delayed the start.

**Minutes:** May 11<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes were approved as released with the agenda after Patrick made some name corrections. Andrew made the motion, Patrick seconded and all were in favor.

**7:04 District Conservationist Report:** Heidi reported that twelve applications were received from Middlesex County Landowners and it looks like the majority, if not all, will be funded. There is one more round of regular funding remaining this year as well as funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) which must be awarded by the end of July. Both the Holden and Westford offices are very busy handling this flow of work.

Federal offices have moved to a Level One level of closure in Massachusetts which means that while telework continues to be encouraged, offices can ramp up staffing to 50% of normal occupancy. There is some anxiety associated with returning to sharing workspace, however, the office is stocked with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and paper towels for cleaning and staff have been briefed on protocols, social distancing and will be exercising great care. Dan continues to staff the Westford office as other people start to join him.

Last month David had asked about the status of the Tyler Dam Project. Heidi asked Jim Lyons to join us this month to give an update on all of the structures in the Sudbury-Assabet-Concord (SuAsCo) River Watershed, all of which are under the care and custody of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (meaning this agency is responsible for funding and guiding the scope and pace of work) and some of which are in Middlesex County, with a focus on the Tyler Dam, which manages the flood stage of the river for forty square miles.

There are nine structures in total which were built anywhere from the mid-1960's up until 1990. All have been evaluated by NRCS. Six require rehabilitation. Of those, one, the George Nichols Dam in Westborough, is complete. Ross and Hill in Shrewsbury has a completed design and is in permitting. NRCS is assessing the condition of Hop Brook, just downstream. Lester G Ross in Berlin is in Design. Delaney Dam in Bolton is in the planning stage.

The design for Tyler Dam has been reviewed and comments are being addressed. Once those are complete and concurrence is received, permitting will start. This project is a spillway without a permanent body of water behind it, however, during floods or heavy precipitation events water does back up behind it. There are two culverts and an auxiliary spillway with eleven concrete bays. The dam is 31 feet high. Robin hill road crosses the dam. There has been development upstream which has resulted in more runoff and when at flood, river water flows over the dam, overtopping it by two feet in places. Since this structure is an earthen and grass dam, there is a potential for breaching, which would have significant downstream impacts (in Hudson).

The dam is to be remediated to the highest current standard: a 24 hour storm of 31.5 inches of rain, which represents the maximum moisture holding capacity of the air and is based on the latest National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) modeling. While a storm of this magnitude might never happen, Hurricane Irene dropped an unprecedented 17-18 inches of rain in N.Y. which caused a great deal of damage. It is important to note that this standard exceeds the standards established by the Commonwealth and is being used in order to prevent a breach in this final dam which handles all the water from the upstream fixtures and protects so much downstream property and life. The current design increases the efficiency of the existing spillway by excavating the approach. The top of the dam will be regraded and filled to raise the height approximately a foot over the length of the dam. Deteriorated concrete will be repaired and the culverts widened and modernized to withstand another thirty years of use.

David asked about an update on a meeting with OARS (Outdoor Adventures and River Seekers) approximately four years ago regarding the possibility of portaging kayaks/canoes around/over the dam. Jim responded that OARS will need to work with DCR as they have care and custody of the asset.

David also commented that the spillway at the Delaney Dam has appeared to be in need of repair for some time. Jim replied that it probably does and that it will be looked at in the primary design when the project gets to that stage.

Patrick reiterated his understanding and appreciation of the calculation of maximum rainfall based on the maximum moisture holding capacity in the air and then asked about hurricanes and whether the standard should be boosted to take into account these extreme weather events. Jim responded that the state regulations for a high risk dam are only half of the holding capacity of the air, while the NOAA model is 100%, so the standard for Tyler Dam should take into account these extreme events.

**7:20 pm Plant Sale Coordinator's Report: Spring Sale:** Frances gave a recap of all the challenges of the spring sale as a result of Covid -19: a three week delay, extended pick up times, a new pick up procedure at a new location and the additional costs associated with the need to rent a tent, tables and chairs, as well as sending out additional communication, and then highlighted that despite all of these challenges, the sale was a success: customers were happy, the new systems worked well and sales were high. While there could not be an on-site sale, it appears that Frances will be able to sell the leftovers, which were kept as low as possible with no on-site sale, at the similarly delayed Sister Sale which she usually attends. She expects this sale may bring in as much as 500 additional dollars. The plant sale financial report does not include all of the proceeds from the sale which had not been confirmed by the bank statement as of the date of the meeting. Profits should be more like \$5,000 by the time all the money is accounted for and the sister sale is complete, which is typical, and a victory in a very atypical year.

**Fall Sale:** Frances has applied for a permit but approvals are currently on hold, so there is a possibility that a change in location will also be necessary in the fall, but she is hopeful it won't. Just in case, Frances has asked people to provide an email with their fall orders, since this form of communication seemed to work these past few months, and if they don't use email, to please provide a phone number. This measure will allow the District to avoid the printing expenses necessary in the spring to support communication of the change of venue. The flyer is at the printer and should be available as usual in July. Orders will close at the end of August.

**Treasurer's Report/banking:** Andrew made the motion to approve the reports, David seconded the motion and all were in favor.

**Office Infrastructure:** Taken out of order - Sue provided an outline of proposed technology purchases, including a new laptop and printer and Quicken Home and Business to support MCD financial management and replace the twenty year old items still in use. Her proposal totaled approximately \$800 of the allocated \$1,000 in the budget. Sue also pointed out that there might be additional expenses associated with the web site and mail list management at a later date. The Board voted in favor of Sue making these purchases: Patrick made the motion, Andrew seconded it and all were in favor. Sue also thinks she has secured a final agreement with At&T to close the telephone account, waive the additional fees for the past several months and refund one month of overpayment. She is awaiting documentation and a check.

**FY 2019 EEA Grant Review:** Sue reported that she and David secured an amended contract with the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) which changes the end date of this grant work from June 30, 2020 to June 30, 2021. This opportunity was provided to all the Conservation

Districts as a result of the complications of working under Covid 19, provided Districts completed and applied for reimbursement for as much as they could by the end of the current fiscal year. Sue instructed Amy to skip the final report and remain on hold until the contract details with EEA could be worked out. Amy's contract also has to be amended. Her current contract stipulates that she is to be paid in two installments, one at the beginning of what was anticipated to be her six month work period and the final one with the final report at the end. Sue requested permission to work with David and Amy to draft a new contract which reflects the new timeline and restructures the timing of her compensation thereby allowing District to pay her for the hours she has worked since the first payment without a final report. The Board agreed.

**FY 2020 EEA Grant Review:** Sue and David have been working with our accountant on the financial statement ending June 30, 2019 which could not be completed and reimbursed until after this grant funding was approved in March of this year. Sue needs to draft a contract for herself for the Innovative grant and will work with Patrick to really dedicate some effort to this initiative. Web site design is also a priority as we move into the summer.

**FY 2021 EEA Grant Letter of Inquiry:** Sue, Patrick and Liz M drafted a Letter of Inquiry for two years of both a Basic and Innovative Grant. If the letter is accepted, a full proposal will be due in July.

**NACD Technical Assistance Grant/Education:** Sue reported that she did not apply for this grant given the short time frame and apparent mismatch with the requirements and our intentions, however she did follow up with Amy and the Westford Public Schools. She has a meeting with the curriculum coordinators scheduled later in the month. Amy mentioned a database of Foundation grants that is currently available for free through public libraries that might serve as a good starting point. Sue will forward the details to Andrew. Amy also shared that one of her Board Members at the Littleton Community Farm is very interested in providing on-site education offerings, so Sue thought if in the future MCD wants to pursue a project that partners with a conservation organization rather than the public schools, there might be opportunities to collaborate and secure funding with other organizations in the county.

Liz and Patrick both reached out to Britta Dempsey, with Mass Envirothon. Liz also may try to contact Will Snyder. Andrew also spoke to Britta and Tim McGillicuddy regarding his school which backs up to a refuge – see Andrew's notes attached. It was not immediately clear if Envirothon educators might serve as volunteers in this effort, either as educators or with the development of a curriculum. David spoke with his Friends group about education in Maynard and at the refuge in conjunction with the Sudbury Valley Trustees. The Board also discussed the possibility of using grant money to hire a Terracorps educator, either ourselves or in conjunction with a nonprofit conservation partner who already participates in this program for other functions. Everyone contacted by the Board saw a need for this sort of education, although each person had a slightly different slant on how it might be provided or piloted. It was noted that private schools and other organizations are not subject to the same constraints and state standards that public schools are. The Board agreed to continue researching this topic.

**Training and recruitment update:** Sue asked that the Supervisors keep a log of their time dedicated to MCD outside of meetings with her so she can document and report on their contributions for grant reporting and match requirements.

Patrick shared his draft of a Supervisor job description to be used for Recruitment. It was favorably received. Liz A asked that a distinction be made in the document for the types of Supervisors (Associate and Junior as well as Supervisor) in order to spark interest among all eligible age groups. The Board asked Sue to finalize it (make the requested edits, add Equal Opportunity language, confirm it is in accordance with the Supervisor manual, and put it on district letterhead) and distribute it back to the Board and post it on the web site, along with a notice that interested parties are welcome to attend our meetings and functions to learn about us.

## **New Business**

**Revenue Generation/service ideas:** Sue related that she had come across three items in the preceding month that might be of interest: **Soil testing, equipment rentals and a scholarship.** **Soil testing:** A resident of Middlesex County asked Worcester County Conservation District (WCCD) to test their soil. Joel, WCCD Conservation Planner, and Sue worked together to educate this resident and help them get satisfaction from the vendor who sold them the soil, however, it highlighted the fact that WCCD, having a full time employee, provides assistance with soil testing and education as a service while MCD does not. They charge \$40 per visit. The soil is tested at the same lab available via mail to the general public for about \$18, but customers like the reassurance of an experienced person taking the samples and appreciate the education that comes as part of the visit. It is also an opportunity to uncover any need for additional NRCS work. Liz M pointed out that Middlesex Conservation District (MCD) used to provide this service, in conjunction with the plant sales, but that interest declined and it wasn't worth the labor. Currently the District refers people directly to the labs. The Board was not sure if the recent increased interest in food production and gardening in the County might make it worth trying again. Patrick expressed a willingness to do some testing and agreed that some people might find the collection and interpretation of results a little bit intimidating. Andrew also said he might have time to help depending on the time of year. Sue had done a little research with NRCS and had learned that farmers tend to test in the fall so they have time to prep the soil, whereas gardeners often wait until the spring.

**Equipment rental:** A Middlesex County farmer was looking to rent a roller crimper this month. Sue had fielded a similar request a few months back and didn't have a good resource for either person. This is a relatively new, but relatively expensive, type of equipment used with no till soil practices, and something a farmer might want to try before buying. Liz M. explained how this process generally works: A willing farmer is found who stores the equipment and manages the loan program. The District acquires a grant to fund the purchase and provides the insurance? The problem is that it is labor intensive for the host farmer to manage the process and keep the machinery in good working order, and everyone wants the equipment, including the host farmer, at the same time. Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) had a no till seeder. Liz M recommended

MCD speak with Heidi and the Berkshire Conservation District (BCD) before making a decision. BCD may have gotten a grant to buy a no till planter.

**Scholarship:** WCCD has a scholarship program. This year they have received at least three requests from Middlesex County applicants and referred them to us. While this is a great idea and service, no one had an immediate idea about how to fund one. Sue has started a list (of one so far) of relevant scholarships for Middlesex County residents so MCD can refer people to other resources in this situation and asked the group to forward any scholarship information that they encounter to her. If we do accumulate a list, we can post it on the web site with the redesign.

**FY 2021 Annual Plan and 5 year plan update:** Sue reminded the Board that we are rolling into a new fiscal year and that we need to revisit and update these guiding documents to celebrate District successes and inspire future endeavors.

**Annual Meeting – Covid date change** While the Annual Meeting is scheduled for December and both the restaurant and the speaker are confirmed, Sue suggested we might want to consider how the Coronavirus might impact a December meeting at a restaurant and think about the possibility of a remote meeting, or an outdoor meeting in September or October. Her reason for bringing it up in June, is that given the lack of a meeting in August, it would be helpful to know if MCD wants to pursue an earlier outdoor function instead of the one planned by the July Meeting in order to make the change. Sue also pointed out that the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) conference has at least one workshop on Hemp/Marijuana, if the Supervisors want to get information on this topic earlier. Patrick agreed to share what he learns. See below for the NOFA discussion.

**Envirothon** Sue asked for an explanation of how it fits into the work of MCD, knowing Liz M. has played a big part in the event for many years. Liz M. explained that it is a volunteer Conservation Education program sponsored by MACD and coordinated by Brita Dempsey which is open to all high schools in the state. Schools form competitive teams who do research in 5 topics around a current issue: forestry, water, wildlife, soils and air. Public schools usually have a club and private schools may offer it as a class. It was cancelled this year, although some virtual programming was offered. 30-50 teams participate, and the top high schools are usually in Middlesex County. The winner goes to an International competition often located in the United States. Anyone can volunteer. David has volunteered as have other MCD people over the years. Patrick is interested in volunteering this year. The theme is sustainable safe water supply.

**Budget and recognition** Liz M pointed out that a draft budget should be ready by the July meeting. She also asked that the Supervisors make an explicit effort to express their thanks to Frances for her extraordinary effort and success with the plant sale this year. Sue echoed these sentiments.

**MOU/Statement of Work with NRCS:** Sue inquired as to whether the entire board wanted to review this before signature or if David, Liz M. and she could go ahead and make any edits and sign. Since these documents are new to some of the Supervisors, Liz M. explained that this cooperative agreement is updated every 10 years or so and suggested Sue summarize the documents for the Board. The board agreed.

**Important Dates:**

**State Commission Meeting July 9, 2020.** Please keep in your calendar for interest or if you need to be sworn in (**Patrick, Andrew and Liz A**). Still in person in Westborough.

**Next Supervisor's Meeting: July 13, 2020.** No Meeting in August

**NOFA Conference – July 20, 2020-August 9, 2020.** Tim Lasalle is the Keynote Speaker and his address is entitled Climate Solutions are Grown in the Soil. Virtual participation is \$100 for members/\$125 for non-members and \$50 for video access after the fact. Sue was going to ask for funding to attend, but Patrick is already registered and will share his materials.

**Fall Plant Sale September 18 and 19 with setup in the days before.**

Andrew made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:58 p.m. David seconded, all were in favor.

Minutes recorded and respectfully submitted,

Susan Lavigne Thomas

District Administrator

CONSERVATION – DEVELOPMENT – SELF-GOVERNMENT