

## **Mystic River Watershed Steering Committee**

Meeting Focus: Highlights from 2020; Looking Forward to 2021

December 3, 2020

Held online via Zoom

### **Meeting Summary**

#### **Meeting in Brief**

Presenters and other meeting attendees shared accomplishments from this past year, and updates about new initiatives for 2021, with a particular focus on new restoration projects that are planned in the watershed. Presentation slides from the meeting are available at <https://mysticriver.org/epa-steering-committee> and <https://www.epa.gov/mysticriver/mystic-river-watershed-initiative#MeetingsEvents>. A list of meeting participants can be found at the end of this document. For more information about the steering committee and current efforts to restore the Mystic River watershed, please visit [www.epa.gov/mysticriver](http://www.epa.gov/mysticriver).

#### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 4 at 10am on Zoom.

#### **Welcome and Introductions**

Patrick Herron, Mystic River Watershed Association and Mel Coté, EPA Region 1, expressed their thanks to everyone for attending the meeting, and for their ongoing work in the watershed.

#### **Celebration of 2020 accomplishments**

Meeting attendees shared a variety of accomplishments:

- Malden River Works had four public meetings this year and has completed the concept design for the project and is moving into the engineering phase.
- Friends of the Malden River held several small cleanups and removed thousands of water bottles and many pounds of Styrofoam.
- Resilient Mystic Collaborative organized a storm simulation with infrastructure managers and others that was very successful in starting regional conversations about climate change preparedness. They will also be looking at social vulnerability issues.
- The towns of Lexington, Arlington, and other upper Mystic communities are working with MyRWA to identify sites for wetland restoration and flood storage. They are currently surveying three sites and have an RFP out to do work on these sites in the next six months.
- Friends of Alewife Reservation became part of Green Cambridge, a relationship that positions them strategically to move their priorities forward in a holistic way.

Newton Tedder, EPA Region 1, reviewed the Mystic phosphorus reduction-related work that was accomplished this year. The alternative TMDL was completed and released in January, and there was a very intentional effort to engage communities to begin implementation early in the process. With an Urban Waters grant and additional funding from MassDEP, EPA was able to work directly with two Mystic municipalities at first, and then four more in 2019-20. Recently, EPA hosted a series of three workshops on themes that came out of this implementation work on the topics of structural solutions, nonstructural controls, and funding. EPA is committed to continuing to provide support for improving stormwater management strategies to tackle nutrient issues in the Mystic moving forward. Mystic communities are regional leaders on this kind of work.

State Representative Paul Donato was in attendance, and expressed his admiration for the work happening in the Mystic and noted that he is advocating to fund DCR to do invasive species removal in the 2022 budget. He also encouraged participants to contact his office if there are additional funding needs.

### **What's coming in 2021?**

Patrick Herron introduced the Mystic Street Trench project, which will expand installation of infiltration trenches designed by Wayne Chouinard in Arlington throughout the watershed. The trenches allow water entering catch basins to infiltrate before entering the storm drain system. They cost between \$2500-\$5000 each and remove about 1 pound of phosphorus per year each, making them very cost effective. Jamie Houle of the University of New Hampshire Stormwater Center has developed a calculator to calculate the benefits of these installations. In 2019-2020, Arlington installed 34 infiltration trenches. By next year, another 20+ will be installed in Arlington and Lexington. In 2022, MyRWA hopes to install another 20 in Arlington, Lexington, and Winchester, and MyRWA now has funding to site additional trenches across the watershed in the future. This project has been funded by the Office of Coastal Zone Management as well as the 319 and 604b programs.

Q: What are the O&M needs for the trenches?

A: Catch basins need to be cleaned out anyway, so the trenches do not require much additional maintenance. They do have ports that allow for observation of whether infiltration is still happening, so this requires some additional monitoring.

Q: To what extent are municipalities trying to prevent runoff from getting to the streets/catch basins in the first place (ie through rain barrels, etc)?

A: In Arlington, the stormwater bylaw requires that any project that increases impervious area must include infiltration. They have developed some additional trench structures (in grass strips and tree boxes) that can be suggested to developers.

Q: Would DEP allow these trenches to be installed in critical areas? This is an improvement to no pre-treatment, but does not provide the standard that DEP requires in these areas.

A: No one from DEP was present at this point, so speculating that improving existing conditions is a good idea, but Arlington has only installed these in streets, not critical areas.

Ona Ferguson from the Consensus Building Institute spoke about the Trash Free Mystic project, which will bring focus to the need to reduce trash in the river. In the late summer/early fall, the CBI team interviewed representatives from eight Mystic municipalities about this issue. In most cases, trash in the river is not a high-priority issue, and municipalities are not directly linking trash on land to trash in the water. People interviewed were interested in the idea of working across municipal boundaries on this issue and would like to learn more about strategies for preventing trash from entering waterbodies and removing it once it's there. The next phase will be a three-meeting series for Mystic municipalities and other local groups focused on nonstructural solutions (January), structural strategies (February) and developing a region-wide trash reduction initiative that will be supported by EPA and MyRWA (March). Please refer anyone interested in this work to the planning team (CBI, EPA, MyRWA, Urban Waters ambassador).

Patrick Herron (MyRWA) and Roseann Bongiovanni (GreenRoots) introduced two new funding sources that have come to the Mystic. 2006, there was an oil spill by Exxon-Mobil that affected the Mystic River

and Island End River. After several years, a plea agreement resulted in \$5.6 million going toward community projects through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), which provides funding for restoration projects, but mostly for duck habitat. After a presentation at a Mystic steering committee years ago about NAWCA, GreenRoots, MyRWA, Conservation Law Foundation, and others decided to advocate for bringing some of this funding to the Mystic, knowing that typically all of this funding would go to pristine duck habitat elsewhere. Ultimately, the Mystic-area partners were able to bring \$1.3 million of this funding to the Mystic, after Patrick and Roseann went to DC two years in a row to advocate for this. This is a really difficult process, requiring many hours of preparation of the application and a huge amount of matching funds (\$2.6 million for the \$1.6 million of funding).

Ultimately, the grant funds 8 projects, 6 of which are in the Mystic:

1. Restoration and access at **Mill Creek**, a marsh between Chelsea and Revere that is close to where the oil spill damage occurred. The City of Chelsea is a key partner on this restoration project.
2. A living shoreline at **Draw Seven Park** in Somerville, as well as other park renovations that will provide flood protection.
3. Updated trash booms in the **Malden River** to be deployed this spring.
4. Fish passage for river herring at **Scally Dam** in Woburn (also leverages funds from the National Resources Damages fund)
5. Restoration, water quality treatment, and community education at **Shaker Glen**, the site of a former bowling alley.
6. One additional project, in partnership with DCR, is in the process of identifying a new site.

After experiencing the challenges of bringing these funds back to the Mystic, the partners have established a fund for Mystic restoration at The Boston Foundation, and will advocate that any future funds be directed there or to the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, to allow for funding to be invested back into the watershed.

Elisabeth Ciancola from the MA Department of Fish and Game noted that the In Lieu Fee Program has taken in funding for mitigation in the Mystic watershed, but none of those funds has gone out to projects yet, so she is here to learn more about projects that might be a good match for this funding.

Catherine Pedemonti (MyRWA) shared information about another restoration project being planned for Belle Isle Marsh, the largest remaining salt marsh in the Mystic River watershed and a designated Area of Environmental Concern by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. It is bordered by Winthrop, Boston, and Revere. Over the years, changes to the hydrology have led to erosion and marsh collapse, and there is ongoing development along the borders of the marsh, leading to stormwater runoff into the marsh and limiting the ability of the marsh to migrate (for example, in response to sea level rise). Invasives are also an issue, as are climate change impacts such as intense storms and sea level rise. However, it is an incredible habitat, with 250 bird species identified there. Belle Isle has been under-resourced for many years. About a year ago, DCR, MyRWA, and Friends of Belle Isle Marsh decided to work with Woods Hole Group to do an environmental inventory (happening now), followed by hydrodynamic modeling leading to a list of prioritized restoration projects and recommendations. Recently, MyRWA, The Nature Conservancy, and the MBTA applied for a NOAA grant that will look at rising sea levels and public transit at Belle Isle, which will include an emphasis on improved regional collaboration between Climate Ready East Boston, Suffolk Downs redevelopment by HYM, the Woods Hole Group study, and other initiatives.

Jay Corey, City of Woburn, provided more detail on the two Woburn-based projects Patrick Herron mentioned earlier, at Horn Pond Brook and Cummings Brook. Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness-funded projects will include a rain garden, tree planting, and Horn Pond brook improvements, including fish passage and improving the channel for better flood protection. The City must work with land owners – the City does not have easements on these properties, which can be a challenge and may impact the scope of the project. They also plan to work on a fish passageway above the dam. The Shaker Glen property is currently owned by a private individual, but the City is negotiating to purchase the property so that restoration work can begin, including removal of existing pavement and foundations on the site. The project would provide both environmental and recreation benefits, including water quality improvement at Horn Pond.

### **Announcements, Updates, and Funding Opportunities**

Ellen Mass shared information about a \$25,000 settlement that Friends of Alewife Reservation has received for habitat restoration work on the Little River. An assessment has been done by Horsley Witten Group, and a youth camp participated in the survey work over the course of several years. Ellen is seeking a nonprofit or other entity that could use these funds for restoration work on the river. She has shared information about the project plan with several steering committee participants and encourages anyone interested to follow up.

Alana Spaetzel from USGS shared information about updates they've been making to StreamStats, a resource for delineating watersheds, getting stream statistics, etc. They are updating the Mystic watershed with stormwater data provided by municipalities in order to more accurately represent how water flows in areas with stormwater systems.

Darya Mattes (Urban Waters ambassador) shared that the biennial science forum, which would typically be scheduled for spring of 2021, will be postponed to either fall 2021 or spring of 2022.

Patrick Herron shared that [a harbor seal](#) has been sighted in Lower Mystic Lake!

### **Steering Committee topics for 2021**

The meeting broke into smaller breakout groups to brainstorm and discuss steering committee topic ideas for next year. Each group took notes on a shared Google Doc. These ideas, along with others that have been compiled by the coordinating team, will be combined in a survey that will be sent to everyone on the steering committee email list. Watch for that and vote on the ideas that would be of greatest interest to you!

### **Wrap Up and Next Steps**

2021 Mystic Steering Committee meeting dates:

- March 4
- June 3
- September 9
- December 2

## Meeting Attendees

Name	Affiliation
Jeff Barbaro	USGS
Roseann Bongiovanni	GreenRoots
Todd Borci	EPA Region 1
Karen Buck	Friends of the Malden River
Larry Childs	Green Cambridge
Wayne Chouinard	Town of Arlington
Elisabeth Ciancola	MA Department of Fish and Game
Eileen Coleman	Town of Burlington
Jay Corey	City of Woburn
Mel Coté	EPA Region 1
Rep. Paul Donato	MA State Representative (Medford, Malden)
Ona Ferguson	Consensus Building Institute
Justin Gould	Weston and Sampson
Patrick Herron	Mystic River Watershed Association
Lucica Hiller	City of Somerville
Alicia Hunt	City of Medford
John Keeley	Town of Burlington
Colin Kelly	Schnitzel Steel
Jennifer Letourneau	City of Cambridge
Denis MacDougall	City of Medford
Lise Marx	MWRA
Ellen Mass	Friends of Alewife Reservation
Darya Mattes	Urban Waters ambassador, Groundwork Somerville
Theresa McGovern	VHB
Hillary Monahan	MWRA
Leo Olsen	Empower East Boston
Chris Orvin	EPA Headquarters
Catherine Pedemonti	Mystic River Watershed Association
Stephen Perkins	MyRWA volunteer
Tony Rodolakis	Wood Environment and Infrastructure Solutions
Alex Rozycki	Town of Reading
Rep. Dan Ryan	MA State Representative (Boston, Chelsea)
Beth Rudolph	Town of Winchester
Laura Schifman	MassDEP
Matthew Schuman	City of Watertown
Alana Spaetzel	USGS
Michael Sprague	Town of Lexington
Emily Sullivan	Town of Arlington
Newton Tedder	EPA Region 1
Kathy Vandiver	MIT Center for Environmental Health Science
Elaine Vreeland	Town of Winchester
John Walkey	GreenRoots
Catherine Woodbury	City of Cambridge

For questions regarding this meeting summary, please contact Darya Mattes ([darya@groundworksomerville.org](mailto:darya@groundworksomerville.org)).