
**Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3)
WORKING AND NATURAL LANDS WORKING GROUP
RIVERS SUB-WORKING GROUP
MEETING MINUTES**

Meeting Date: July 30, 2020
Meeting Time: 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Meeting Location: via ZOOM

ATTENDANCE

Working Group Member	Title	Organization	Present
Alicea Charamut	Executive Director	Rivers Alliance of Connecticut	Y
Lynn Werner	Executive Director	Housatonic Valley Association	Y
Eileen Fielding	Director	Sharon Audubon (National Audubon Society)	Y
KirtMayland	Attorney/President	Reservoir Road Holdings & Mayland Energy	N
Bill Dornbos	Executive Director	Farmington River Watershed Association	Y
Andy Fisk (primary)	Executive Director	Connecticut River Conservancy	N
Kelsey Wentling (alternate)	River Steward - Connecticut		N
Jason Vokoun	Professor and Dept. Head	UConn Natural Resources and the Environment	N
Mike Dietz (primary)	Extension Educator	UConn/Institute of Water Resources	N
Mike O'Neill (alternate)	Associate Dean	UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources	N
Laura Wildman	Director	Princeton Hydro - NE Office, Ecological Engineering	Y
Virginia de Lima	Retired	USGS (retired) & CT Water Planning Council	Y
Shelley Green	Director of Conservation	The Nature Conservancy	Y
Erik Mas	Environmental Engineer	Fuss and O'Neill	N

Associated Staff	Title	Organization	Present
Rick Jacobson	Bureau Chief	CT DEEP, Bureau of Natural Resources	N
Peter Aarrestad	Director	CT DEEP, Bureau of Natural Resources - Fisheries Division	Y
Susan Peterson	Environmental Analyst 3	CT DEEP, Bureau of Water Planning and Land Reuse – Water Planning & Management Division	Y
Rosalynn Grzywinski	Administrative Assistant	CT DEEP, Office of the Commissioner, Office of the Chief of Staff Operations & Performance	Y ZOOM Set-up Assistance

Members of Public	Affiliation/Organization	Present
Mary Rickel Pelletier	Park Watershed	Y
Liza Martin	Hartford - North End (resident)	Y
Michelle Krackowski	University of Saint Joseph	Y
Brian Basso	Yale School of the Environment	Y
Martha Klein	Sierra Club (volunteer) & Norfolk Conservation Commission (Chair)	Y
Kristen Martin	University of Saint Joseph	Y
Susan Masino	Trinity College; GC3 Science & Technology Working Group (Co-Chair)	Y
Stephanie Bahramian	Town of Bloomfield (Environmental Planner)	Y
Dani Scott	(No affiliation provided)	Y
Edith Pestana	CT DEEP, Office of the Commissioner, Office of Environmental Justice	Y
Doris Johnson	CT DEEP, Office of the Commissioner, Office of Environmental Justice	Y
Anonymous	(No affiliation provided)	Y

AGENDA & NOTES

Welcome, Announcements, and Roll Call

Alicea Charamut, Rivers Alliance

(Note - There was an accidental mix-up regarding the ZOOM number to be used for this virtual meeting and the incorrect ZOOM number was posted in the public meeting announcement. This issue was discovered shortly before the meeting was to begin. Although it was too late to post the new ZOOM meeting number, GC3 Rivers Sub-Working Group (SWG) members were notified of the correct number. The meeting presenter also notified people that she had invited to attend her presentation. An effort was also made to direct people from the other ZOOM meeting (ZOOM number that had been posted) to the Rivers SWG meeting. The leader of the other meeting later reported that it did not appear that anyone looking for the Rivers SWG had tried to join his meeting. A recording of the Rivers SWG meeting will be posted for those unable to attend. The recording starts towards the beginning of the presentation and includes an auto-transcript and Chat comments.)

Charamut apologized for the technical issues. She asked Rivers SWG members to introduce themselves for the benefit of the public attending. Most of the public also introduced themselves.

Agenda Item(s)

Facilitated by Alicea Charamut, Rivers Alliance

- **GC3 Updates**

GC3 leaders recently provided a new template format to Working Groups for drafting recommendations. Charamut discussed the new template in a separate meeting with the sub-group of Rivers SWG members who volunteered to help pull the draft recommendations together. While the new template simplifies things, it throws off plans to provide recommendations following the original draft outline. As a result, the Rivers SWG is not sure if it will be able to meet current deadline to provide draft recommendations by August 15. It is most important to outline the big concepts and not worry about word-smithing.

The Working and Natural Lands Working Group (WNLWG) met last week with Rebecca French (Director, CT DEEP Office of Climate Planning). Charamut was not able to participate because it was scheduled while she was on vacation. However, she has made a separate appointment to speak with French.

- **Presentation: The Value of Urban/Suburban Riparian Corridors (Mary Rickel Pelletier – Park Watershed)**

Mary Rickel Pelletier (Park Watershed) provided a presentation on the value of urban/suburban riparian corridors, using the North Park River as an example. The information she presented has been gathered as part of the New England Landscapes project which has been funded through a grant from Harvard Forests. Rickel Pelletier said that she hoped to offer some recommendations to GC3, through her presentation. She has also put together a strategy of suggested pilot “Green Zone” projects for urban rivers and watersheds. She will share these strategies with Charamut.

Key points from Rickels Pelletier presentation include:

- Need to look for opportunities in urban landscapes to improve high density living areas. Riparian corridors and open spaces are important and beloved in urban communities, even if not protected.
- Many opportunities for revitalization exist along the North Branch Park River (often in narrow riparian areas associated w/ parking lots); Conditions observed in this watershed apply to other urban/suburban areas across the state.
- Grant programs such as federal CWA Sec. 319 NPS grant program offer opportunities to create watershed plans and implement low impact development projects. However, this program has very narrow guidelines and doesn't capture other natural resource benefits within watersheds. For example, other benefits associated with urban riparian corridors include: large trees that capture carbon and reduce heat island affect; habitat for insects which also serve as food for migratory birds; migratory bird pathways, etc.
- Many urban/suburban parks have become ball parks, tennis courts, etc. Leagues are very organized and want places to play. Many also want synthetic turf, removal of older, mature trees being due to liability, etc. Replacement trees not providing same benefits or capturing needs associated with Climate Change. Local tree commission focused on planting street trees and not necessarily on capturing the value of existing trees in riparian corridor.
- There are schools, research institutions, hospitals, and other public institutions along river corridor and in areas of the watershed with tree growth that could provide opportunities for public access and climate change mitigation. However, these places are not necessarily protected and could be lost over time.
- Interdisciplinary changes are needed. Ideas discussed intersect with redlining, poverty mapping and other equity issues.
- Urban/suburban issues can be addressed in a more holistic way that looks at construction of nature within cities. More money goes into development versus Green Infrastructure (GI). There is a problem with constant infilling.
- More information at: New England Landscape Futures Explorer
- GC3 needs to provide direction on future of urban/suburban rivers.

Charamut and other River SWG members thanked Rickel Pelletier for her interesting and insightful presentation. This led to a general discussion about the information presented.

Public Comments:

(Comment in Chat read by Charamut) Martin – Some specific state level riparian conservation policies for economic equity and ecological reasons would be helpful. In the southern part of the Scantic River, the development and abandonment process seems to be the norm. Green spaces turn into paved spaces, then contaminated spaces.

(Comment) Masino – Related to the recommendation question ... Thinks a bold recommendation that recognizes the reality that we are in and the multiple values

that these corridors and watery areas provide, would be to recommend that unless you have a variance, there should be full protection for these riparian corridors, wetland areas, etc. because of the many layers of values. If want to affect cultural change and make the real course corrections, we need to start with our public resources and our public policies leading the way. Also, main area of interest and expertise which is really an accelerating value, is the value to mental health. Mental health issues are something we are all thinking about now as we manage this whole situation but rates of mental illness are higher in urban areas. Just like with conservation, if can prevent a problem, that's the most valuable thing to do. So, protecting healthy buffers and restoring unhealthy buffers ... and preventing mental illness and preventing ill health is the best thing we can do. This relates to funding or another type of recommendation. CT DEEP has just started a collaboration with the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to help people get out in and experience nature - pulling in that value and recognizing that people need a place to get away and can count on to get some respite from everything. That's another critical value that these urban/suburban riparian corridors can provide. This is something that people need across the state but there are a lot of pressures on people in urban areas who really need a place to go.

(Comment) Bahramian – Is the Environmental Planner for the Town of Bloomfield ... Their Conservation and Development (POCD) is in the process of being revised for 2022. This is a wonderful opportunity for Bloomfield to try to get things right. The more input we get from people who have visions about how we should be doing POCDs, the better we will do. This is an opportunity for great change but also an opportunity for us to get things wrong. Many things discussed in the presentation – overwhelmed by the information and all the things to talk about. Would like to reach out to people in this group to see how might better write POCD, especially since would like to do that in-house, rather than get outside company do it. Thinks will meet the needs of the POCD better that way. Also, speaking of the value of trees, is concerned how many municipalities do not give the tree warden position to someone who actually understands trees. Position often goes to Director of Public Works and it seems to go to that person by default, regardless of expertise. We need to take a look at this as a practice and see if municipalities can do better job with this.

(Comment) Rickels Pelletier – Many communities are very risk adverse. This is not an innovative approach with regard to design, etc.

Rivers SWG member discussion of the presentation included the following comments:

- Peterson - Wondered how to balance protection of riparian corridors and open spaces that may raise property values while keeping places affordable for people who already live in these communities?
- Fielding – Inquired about suggestions for how agencies, organizations and funding sources might be tapped in urban/suburban areas to tackle overlapping goals related to both conservation and equity, diversity and inclusion with regard to restoring rivers and communities.

- Wildman – Agreed that urban/suburban issues very important. Noted that with regard to Climate Change, these areas tend to lack resiliency. Rivers are “hard locked” with development. Suggested we need to think in terms of long term planning & zoning (P&Z) concepts and “flag” critical properties to try to obtain in the future, as they become available.
- de Lima – Recommended establishing a process for properties to be identified for protection going forward that includes appropriate personnel.
- Werner – Remarked that current system for developing (federal Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source) Watershed Based Plans is laborious and time consuming. After implementation projects have been identified, proponents must then seek additional funding on a project by project basis. She wondered how to make the process happen more quickly? P&Z tagging could take a long time. It sounds like we need a process that allows for accelerated watershed planning that involves state leadership. There are many small scale projects that add up but need to find other ways to fund them.
- Werner – Remarked on Peterson’s earlier comment and concern, and suggested that one way to avoid that issue might be to build smaller scale, nature based restoration projects that have a neighborhood-lead and are properly designed and funded.
- Wildman – Noted that when people see development, they think that is the only thing that can be there on that site. People have a hard time envisioning other uses for such properties.

- **Request from the New and Emerging Funding and Financing SWG**

(Note - Due to the length of the foregoing presentation and follow-up discussion, there was not time to discuss this topic.)

5 MINUTE BREAK

- **Working Draft – Solicitation of Input**

Charamut noted that Basso was available to assist Rivers SWG with writing up report recommendations through the end of next week.

The original plan had been for the (aforementioned) sub-group of Rivers SWG member volunteers to boil down all of the Rivers SWG’s recommendations to present and discuss at this meeting. However, since the new GC3 recommendations template was just received, there was not enough time to switch gears and turn things around for this meeting.

- **Working Draft – Next steps and Assignments**

Charamut will be sending around the draft recommendations that the WNLWG Wetlands SWG put together, as an example.

Once the Rivers SWG draft recommendations are pulled together, Charamut will be sending these around for review. Will need to meet again.

Public comments

Masino – Really excited about this work and thinks discussion today has hit upon key framework. Need aspirational, holistic, long-term vision. Then need a way to break it down into bite-size chunks and get some practical projects off the ground that aren't too expensive or controversial. That way, should be able to make some progress and gain some momentum. Now that GC3 process is broken down into Phase 1 and 2, can keep Phase 1 focus on framework and get into more detail in Phase 2. Right now, it's important to help people wrap their mind around the vision and co-benefits. Also, it's not just urban/suburban, it's also rural. Water is the backbone of our state. Going to next level, we need to look at complementary co-benefits is the next phase of the water plan. It could thought of as a way to build out natural infrastructure. Trying to carry this message very strongly in GC3 Science & Technology Working Group. Recommendations need to be simple, comprehensible, specific and clear about what we need to do.

Charamut – Agreed. Don't want to see really general recommendations that can't act on. Original climate change plan too broad. Need to identify what can do right now and what need to strive for in future.

Rickel Pelletier – There is a list of projects for the North Branch Park River and also for the West River (New Haven area). There are other cities with groups that also have "wish lists". Pursuing place-based, pilot projects would help prove that these things work.

de Lima – Thinks our role is to work on a very systematic level, as opposed to specific level. Need to set up mechanism. However, this may contradict desire to avoid general recommendations.

Peterson – Similar to the Housatonic Valley Associations "Green Print" program for open space, perhaps need "brown to green print" for urban areas? CT DEEP Open Space Grant program doesn't allow for purchase of properties with "brownfield" issues, although some of these may make great urban open spaces, once cleaned up. Need to either amend Open Space Grant program and/or work with Brownfields Program to create urban open spaces.

Werner – Need to create a climate resiliency corridor. Need to be able to pursue projects that are ready to go.

Wildman – Cautioned that there is a development and design aspect to most projects.

Werner - Agreed but said that we need to be more agile and think about what we need to do to move forward.

Rickels Pelletier - All communities along the North Branch Park River are part of Sustainable CT.

Fielding – All of this ties in with quality of community and family life.

Bahramian – If want to engage Sustainable CT, must engage public. They have reached out to Sustainable CT to help figure out how to get matching funds.

Next Steps and Adjourn

Charamut said she would reach out by e-mail regarding next steps. Will also share draft recommendations within the next few weeks.

She also thanked Grzywinski, Aarrestad and Peterson for scrambling to help make for tonight's meeting happen, once technical issues with ZOOM discovered.

Next meeting: August 20, 2020; 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 pm. ZOOM meeting notice information posted for that meeting is correct.