

Westmoreland Conservation Commission Meeting
August 5, 2021 (unapproved minutes)

Present: Marshall Patmos (Chair), April Ferguson, Perry Sawyer, Jeannette Hubert, Dick Schmidt, Kathy Urrfer (guest - River Steward, Connecticut River Conservancy)

The meeting was called to order at 8:40 AM.

Kathy Urrfer provided a review of the relicensing of the Connecticut River hydroelectric dams by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). This relicensing is performed every 40 years and is nearing the end of their five-year relicensing process. The dams in our area are Wilder, Bellows Falls and Vernon.

The primary issue discussed was the intentional daily fluctuation of water levels (now typically 2' to 3') by Great River Hydro to provide for "peaking" operation to maximize power output in the 4 pm to 10 pm period. This daily fluctuation increases riverbank erosion, disturbs the flora and fauna that live along the riverbank, and causes sediment-dropping during the low-flow part of the day.

As a result of negotiations, the daily fluctuation is to be reduced to about 1' in the future, with some allowance for peaking operation. Great River Hydro will operate in more of a "run of the river" mode, with less peaking capability, at a cost of about 1% in revenue.

When FERC completes its questions of the hydroelectric operator, public review will begin, but timing is undecided. With this major change, other improvements like fish ladders, recreation improvements and public facilities are less likely.

The regular meeting resumed at 9:35, and the minutes of July 1, 2021 were reviewed. The fact that a community member pledged \$5000 towards the purchase of a new fire station site will be added, and the minutes were approved.

Regarding the rail trail, Perry provided a zoning map of East Westmoreland with the trail highlighted. With some modification of the map we can possibly include it in the letter to abutters.

Regarding Marshall's draft letter about the fire station, Jeanette suggested that it more clearly separate the issues of toxic waste and location. With that in agreement, attendees decided to continue in a future meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 AM.

The next WCC meeting will be held at 8:30 AM on Thursday, September 2 at Town Hall.

Submitted by Richard Schmidt