

## NREC Meeting Minutes Monday, February 7<sup>th</sup> 2022

**Members present:** Kerrie Gallo (Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper), Claudia Rosen (Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper), Jajeon Rose-Burney (WNY Land Conservancy), Ann Ingleman (League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara), John Jarosz (Niagara Musky Association), Louis Long (Niagara Musky Association), Bob VanHise (Adirondack Mountain Club – Niagara Frontier), Don Houck (Presbytery of Western New York), Edward Sirianno (Buffalo Audubon Society), Tim DePriest (NYS Department of Environmental Conservation)

**Members absent:** Larry Beahan (Sierra Club)

### **1. Day-to-Day Business**

1. Introductions - Tim DePriest from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation joined the meeting to help present the Western New York Land Conservancy GESC application, which includes some potential involvement with the NYS DEC. Tim is also the co-chair of the GESC and can help answer questions.
2. January minutes approval
  - i. Claudia will correct spelling errors in the January meeting minutes.
  - ii. Motion by John, second by Don to approve the January meeting minutes. All members present vote in favor and the minutes are approved.
3. Chair update – Kerrie
  - i. Kerrie is attending the upcoming GESC meeting on February 15<sup>th</sup> at 10am. If other NREC members would like to attend, please email Kerrie.
  - ii. Kerrie continued the discussion of potentially funding projects using NREC earned income.
    - The first step in making this decision is for each NREC member to send Claudia an email stating if they are or are not interested in dispensing NREC funds and ideas on how that program could work (need a mechanism to answer the question of “how” not “what”).
  - iii. BNW will organize a webinar aimed at educating stakeholders about the GEF and HERF funding cycles in Q2 or Q3 of 2022.
  - iv. Bob asked about status of project at Gratwick Park (addition of a picnic shelter and year-round restroom facility). Kerrie will check on the status of the project.
  - v. NREC asked about the potential of investing NYPA monies. The HERF fund has about 6.5 million remaining, because it does not get replenished, the money will be spent down in about 3 years. NREC has asked this question in the past, and the money has not been invested in a higher interest account because of the risk.
    - Tim added that in the case of the GEF, if a balance is built up, the money can be invested and the revenue used for administrative costs of the GESC. But, so far, they’ve been spending down the funds every year so they don’t generate interest.
    - Kerrie will bring this question to the GESC/ESC meeting next week.

- Scott Kitchen (alternate NMA representative) had thoughts on how to properly invest NYPA monies to earn a return and use that money for the good of the Greenway. Kerrie will look back on meeting minutes and circle back with NREC.
- vi. Bob asked for an update on the Tern Island project. A recently submitted status report from Buffalo Audubon was shared with NREC. Ed is meeting with the GESC to determine if they'd like to put additional funds for the maintenance of tern island.
- 4. Financial update – Ann
  - i. The next financial statement is expected in March. Ann will share with NREC when she receives the new statement.

## 2. Greenway Ecological Standing Committee – Round #1 project proposals

*Action: Review proposals and vote on whether to fund*

- a. Creating the Stonehaven Nature Preserve, Western New York Land Conservancy
  - a. As a result of the Greenway Land Protection Program the WNYLC has identified a 60-acre property in Lewiston, currently owned by the Boy Scouts, as a priority property for protection because of its connection to other greenspaces, unique escarpment geology, and state listed plants. This project is time-sensitive, so the WNYLC is applying for consistency and funding from the GESC at the same time.
  - b. The NYS DEC is interested in buying the property, but their process is slower than land conservancy. To protect the land in the short-term the WNYLC can buy the land and transfer it to DEC.
  - c. The WNYLC is including money for long-term stewardship in their request. If the DEC is not able to acquire the land, the WNYLC would own and care for it long-term. If the DEC is able to acquire the land, the WNYLC will reimburse unneeded GEF / HERF funds.
    - **Motion:** Motion by John to approve the funding and consistency with the Greenway plan, acknowledging that the GESC will make the funding amount work using multiple funds, second by Don.
    - **Discussion:** Ed expressed concern about the risk and uncertainty on the NYS DEC caring for the property. Don stated that removing the buildings on the property will decrease property value. Jajeen stated that the worst-case scenario would be the WNYLC protecting 60 acres of high priority ecological habitat, which would be a win and consistent with the Greenway Plan.
    - **Ayes:** Kerrie, John, Ann, Bob, Don
    - **Opposed:** Ed
    - **Abstain:** Jajeen
    - **Motion Carries**

### 3. Niagara River Greenway Commission – project proposals

*Action: Review proposals and vote on consistency with the Niagara River Greenway Plan*

- a. The Tatler-Porter Mansion Restoration Project, Tatler Historic Preservation Foundation
  - a. Discussion about public accessibility of project and property.
  - b. This project is similar to other historic preservation efforts in the Greenway that NREC has said are consistent. If the property is not open to the public, that would change NREC's recommendation. The information in the application is not clear.
  - c. Ed stated that the applicant is a 501c3 non-profit and that the building is open to the public, there are public tours at holidays and events.
    - **Motion:** Motion by Jajeau that the project is consistent with Greenway Plan, recommend clarity on public access, second by John.
    - **Ayes:** Kerrie, John, Ann, Bob, Jajeau
    - **Opposed:** Don
    - **Abstain:** Ed
    - **Motion Carries**
- b. NCC Veterans Memorial Park, Niagara County Community College – resubmitted application
  - a. The applicant submitted an appendix addressing concerns from the Greenway Commission and NREC. NREC's previous comments stated that this project did not create a Greenway attraction and is not consistent with the Greenway Plan
  - b. Bob and John stated that the appendix did not change their minds about the projects consistency with the Greenway Plan.
    - **Motion:** by Bob that the project is still not consistent with the Greenway Plan, second by John.
    - **Ayes:** Kerrie, John, Ann, Bob, Jajeau, Ed
    - **Opposed:** None
    - **Abstain:** None
    - **Motion Carries**
- c. Lions Nature Trail and Fishing Pond, Town of Wheatfield Lions Club – resubmitted application
  - a. NREC's original comments recommended additional details about the ecological components of the project.
    - **Motion:** Motion by Don that the project remains consistent, but our previous comments were unaddressed, second by John.
    - **Ayes:** Kerrie, John, Ann, Bob, Jajeau
    - **Opposed:** None
    - **Abstain:** Ed
    - **Motion Carries**

**4. Birds on the Niagara Update:** The event went well, despite set backs related to Covid this year. The indoor events were postponed until next year. Birds on the Niagara included 18 in-person outdoor walks in 2022!

#### **5. Member Updates**

- Jajeon shared that his wife, Ana, got a new job in Washington DC. They will be moving soon. Jajeon is staying on at the land conservancy for 1.5 years but eventually leaving for an international conservation job.

#### **Action Items:**

1. NREC members will send Claudia an email stating if they are or are not interested in dispensing NREC funds and ideas on how that program could work (need a mechanism to answer the question of “how” not “what”).
2. Kerrie will check in on the status of the Gratwick Park project – including the addition of a picnic shelter and year-round restroom facility.
3. Kerrie will look into question of investing NYPA monies – bringing the question to the GES/ESC meeting and look into Scott Kitchen’s previous comments.