

NREC Meeting Minutes: Friday, July 24th 2020

Meeting held virtually 2 – 4:30 pm

Members present: Kerrie Gallo (Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper), Claudia Rosen (Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper) John Jarosz (Niagara Musky Association), Ann Ingleman (League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara), Jajeon Rose-Burney (WNY Land Conservancy), Larry Beahan (Sierra Club), Bob VanHise (Adirondack Mountain Club - Niagara Frontier)

Members absent: Don Houck (Presbytery of Western New York), Edward Sirianno (Buffalo Audubon Society)

1. Day-to-Day Business

- a. June minutes approval - Motion for approval of the June minutes made by Larry, second by Jajeon. All in favor and the motion passes.
 - b. Chair update- There have been three regional issues that involve the greenway explored on behalf of NREC.
- i. Tonawanda Coke: Recently submitted a sampling plan for public comment. This issue involves impacts to the water quality of the Niagara River. The current sampling plan is inadequate. Waterkeeper will be submitting detailed comments that relate to a further need for sampling, particularly for groundwater. The clean air coalition is developing a technical comment that Waterkeeper will also review.
 - Deadline for public comment is August 31st
 - ii. Project Olive on Grand Island: This project proposes to build the second largest warehouse in the country on Grand Island. The site is located on a greenfield property and the project would have wetland impacts. There has been significant concern from the Grand Island community and objection to the project. The planning board was asked to consider a PDD designation – this would allow Project Olive to circumvent a zoning issue. The planning board did not recommend that it receive the designation. Waterkeeper looked at the project from an environmental point of view. The proposed site has five DEC classified wetlands as well as USACE wetlands, grassland, and forest habitats. It is located within the IBA, proximity to RAMSAR site, and is surrounded by coastal fish and wildlife habitat. Waterkeeper has not provided written comment and is only monitoring the project as it develops at this point.
 - Discussion of opportunity to speak out as NREC. NREC should define what the group is asking members to support. The challenge of public comments for NREC is timeliness – each member needs to go back to their organization for approval.
 - Waterkeeper is developing a letter regarding Project Olive. Kerrie will use that as a starting point to draft a letter from NREC and circulate that draft to members for review.
 - The Town Board was going to vote, but the request was rescinded before the board was able to. There is still the option to submit a letter to planning board, conservation advisory board, and Town Board.
 - iii. Outer Harbor Slip #3: Waterkeeper has been involved for 5 years in this project.. There has been a well- vetted stakeholder process that informs where the project is to date.

- John (NMA) has been involved in meetings with the USACE. NMA was involved in the design of the fishery – suggested it include emergent and submerging vegetation, spawning area for fish, some complexity in bottom, passageway with some waterflow going into the harbor that would allow fish passage in and out of the harbor, and shoreline access.
- Public comment period ends on August 13th

2. Greenway Ecological Standing Committee – Greenway Ecological Fund -Actions: Review proposals and vote to fund/not fund

- The situation with this funding cycle is unique but not unexpected. There are more applications for funding than available in the GEF funding pot for this cycle. Because Waterkeeper and the Western New York Land Conservancy are both applicants there is a need to eliminate the perception of bias. NREC will discuss proposals on a merit-basis first and then have a financial discussion. John (Niagara Musky Association) will attend the GESC meeting to participate in discussion on behalf of NREC.
- Generally, the GESC does not “spend forward” or allocate future years funding. Because of the gap in funding applications and available funding, the GESC will be exploring this option at the committee meeting. Kerrie (BNW) suggests avoiding this option as a best financial practice for the committee.

Town of Porter, Fort Niagara Beach Shoreline Restoration Project

- Requesting funds for a shoreline restoration project that would contribute to erosion control and mitigation of future flooding impacts. The Town of Porter installed rip rap at the bottom of the slope. The funds in this application would be to conduct vegetative stabilization exercises including hydro seeding and planting shrubs.
- Concern is that although this is a worthwhile project, it is not an ecological project. The project would be protecting the greenway from degrading, but not necessarily adding to the ecological assets in the greenway.

Western New York Land Conservancy, Creating New Publicly Accessible Nature Preserves on Grand Island

- These projects are a result of the Grand Island Land Protection Program funded by GESC. This application includes three opportunities for land protection on Grand Island - the Love Road preserve, Funk preserve, and the Alt preserve.

Western New York Land Conservancy, Expanding the Niagara Escarpment Preserve

- WNYLC owns 36 acres on the Niagara Escarpment. The WNYLC was funded 7 years ago by the GESC to find new places to protect- this is the first property that has come to this stage of protection as a result of that project. The proposed project is the purchase 9.5 acres of restored grassland, hedge rows, and forest edge that is adjacent to the preserve that the WNYLC already owns.

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, Raymond Klimek Veterans Park Living Shoreline Project

- Project to improve the shoreline at Raymond Klimek Veterans Park. Proposal includes in-water habitat structure, erosion control, and a berm to deflect debris and redirect it out towards the channel. The project will enhance the shoreline and provide intentional access for people to fish.

Town of Niagara Farmland Conservancy, The Joseph Sutherland Farm and Nature Preserve

- Discussion of project and concern over risk because the Town of Niagara Farmland Conservancy is a new all-volunteer organization. Concern over potential issues with using volunteers and students for long-term maintenance. Restoration that depends on volunteers at this scale will need a more robust maintenance plan.
- Most of the request is for the restoration, but some components are not necessarily ecological components. The ecosystem value of the pond is unclear.

Pollinator Conservation Association, Niagara River Greenway Pollinator Demonstration Gardens (Multiple Pollinator Conservation Sites.)

- In other states this is a common best management practice to reduce mowing and maintenance. Once these projects are established, they are fairly easy to maintain.

Funding discussion

- The project that has the least ecological components is the Town of Porter project.
 - Prioritize acquisition for the Town of Niagara Farmland Conservancy project.
 - Voting based on merit – intend for the GESC to work out the budget details.
- Town of Porter, Fort Niagara Beach Shoreline Restoration Project
 - Motion made by Jajeon not to approve the request for funding, second by Larry
 - **Additional comments:** NRECs reasoning comes from a prioritization perspective. The ecological benefits of this project are lower than the other project applications received during this cycle.
 - Ayes (In favor not to fund): Ann, Jajeon, Kerrie, John, Bob, Larry
 - Opposed: None
 - Abstain: none
 - **Motion Carried**
 - Town of Niagara Farmland Conservancy, The Joseph Sutherland Farm and Nature Preserve
 - Motion made by Kerrie to approve request for funding for the acquisition phase of the project only and direct the applicants to return to the committee later with a more developed restoration plan, second by Jajeon
 - **Additional Comments:** This is an ambitious restoration project and may be more complicated than the applicants have considered. NREC suggests that the applicants return to the committee later with a more developed restoration plan that considers invasive species management and long-term stewardship.
 - Ayes: Larry, Ann, Jajeon, Bob, Kerrie, John
 - Opposed: none
 - Abstain: none
 - **Motion carried**

- Pollinator Conservation Association, Niagara River Greenway Pollinator Demonstration Gardens (Multiple Pollinator Conservation Sites.)
 - o Motion to approve request for funding, second by Ann
 - o Ayes – Larry, John, Bob, Kerrie, Ann
 - o Opposed: none
 - o Abstain: Jajeon
 - o **Motion carried**

- Western New York Land Conservancy, Expanding the Niagara Escarpment Preserve
 - o Motion to approve request for funding by Kerrie , second by John
 - o Ayes – John, Larry, Kerrie, Ann, Bob
 - o Opposed: None
 - o Abstain: Jajeon
 - o **Motion carried**

- Western New York Land Conservancy, Creating New Publicly Accessible Nature Preserves on Grand Island
 - o Motion to approve request for funding for all three projects on Grand Island by Kerrie, second by Larry
 - o Ayes: John, Ann, Kerrie, Larry
 - o Opposed: None
 - o Abstain: Jajeon
 - o **Motion carried**

- Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, Raymond Klimek Veterans Park Living Shoreline Project
 - o Motion to approve request for funding by Jajeon, second by John
 - o Ayes: John, Larry, Ann, Bob Jajeon
 - o Opposed: none
 - o Abstain: Kerrie
 - o **Motion carried**

Action items:

- John will attend upcoming GESC meeting.
- Kerrie will draft a letter from NREC regarding Project Olive and circulate to members for review. The letter will include a list of concerns that need to be considered.
- Claudia and Kerrie will develop a detailed written report on NREC activities for the next meeting.