

**Town of Londonderry, Vermont
Williams Dam Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, August 21, 2023
Twitchell Building-100 Old School Street, Londonderry, VT**

Committee Members Present: Robert Forbes, Rachel Febbie, Richard Phelan, Paul Hendler

Committee Members Absent: Jim Ameden

Others in Attendance:

Selectboard Member: Tom Cavanagh

Planning Board Member: Heather Stephenson

Town Administrator: Shane O'Keefe (in and out)

1.The meeting was called to order at 4:30 Pm by Phelan.

2.Additions or Deletions to Agenda (1 VSA 312(d)(3)9A)): None

3. Minutes were not approved for the August 7, 2023 meeting.

4. There was continued discussion regarding hiring a hydrologist to study what would happen during a significant flood event if the Williams Dam was removed. It was suggested to call Ben Green from Dam Safety for guidance regarding the proposal for the hydrologist. Forbes discussed aspects of the study that will be considered such as changing rate of flow with dam removal, the terrain, Utley Brook, etc. Forbes continued to say what we are looking for is a little more detailed site specific research. Phelan stated that we are looking to see what the impact of removal would be on both villages. There was concern whether or not the study could be conducted within the Williams Dam Advisory timeline.

5. Ron Rhodes from the Connecticut River Conservancy presented and fielded questions to the committee and others in attendance. Rhodes oversees restoration at the Connecticut River Conservancy and has conducted 20 dam removals with one more underway. Rhodes helps dam owners with permitting, contractors, and grant writing. Of the 20 dams removed (and 1 on the way), dam owners have had to pay \$0 out of pocket dollars. The way Rhodes sees it, that is his job, he writes grants all winter long. Rhodes states that if the town chooses dam removal it is a 3 to 5 year process, first year engineering, second year permitting and grant writing, and the project starts the 3rd year. The best case scenario is a 3 year timeline. The grants come in pieces.

Phelan asked if the pond would change behind the dam, and Rhodes explained that it would, and there is a process to find the natural stream. Rhodes talked about flood evaluation level, and what the evaluation level would be if removal was to take place. Phelan, Forbes, and Rhodes had an in depth discussion about each of their theories on flood evaluation if the dam is removed.

Discussion moved from flood theories when Hendler asked looking forward will there be grants to re landscape the mud hole that is left. Cavanagh mentioned he had some photos, but could not find them in his email to share. Rhodes continued that the project is not just removal, but restoration of the channel and banks, and it would be a normal looking stream after 3 years after it heals.

Febbie asked Rhodes about his familiarity with the wetlands that exist behind the Mill Pond. Ron replied he is not.

Discussion dipped back into flooding when Forbes cited D and K hydrologist analysis indicating that the bridge is restricting water flow. Forbes believes that you get restricted flow with the dam and the bridge, and the water does not go through the village as quickly. He believes that you cannot have flooding behind the dam, and then say you do not have contained water. Rhodes replied with "but eventually it all ends up downtown", and Forbes responded with, "but it doesn't have to go down at exactly the same time". Rhodes said "yes, sure". Forbes again said he believes it restricts flow, and Rhodes responded with "to some degree". Forbes believes that if the dam is removed and the river is freed flow the water will be more instant and quick going through the center of town, where it runs into the Utley Brook, and a very flat area of town. The discussion continued until Phelan jumped in and said, "this is why we are going to hire an expert engineer because we could debate this all night". Rhodes then said, "I am not an engineer, I am project manager, a grant writer, and a lot of things, but I am not an engineer, and I don't ever want to be one."

Rhodes went on to describe old dams like the Williams Dam as "speed bumps" when we have floods it slows water down for a brief period of time, but it does not change the water level downtown or downstream. Forbes agreed with the speed bump analysis. Phelan said, "well if you remove the dam you are going to change something?"

Rhodes continues, "I think you are going to have a hard time finding an engineer that says removing the dam is going to protect downtown from flooding." Phelan responded with, "well they may say it will change the likelihood of flooding". Rhodes said, "that is correct". Rhodes believes that if you remove the dam you will have more flood storage with a lower flood evaluation level offering protection.

O'Keefe asked if it would change the dimensions of the floodway, Rhodes answered yes, and that would be part of the design as part of the project (besides removing the dam), you could move the river left or add rock veins, massive boulders to direct it to the other side. Phelan chimed in "that great, except in reality when you do something to the left something happens to the right."

Stephenson asked Rhodes, "Other than redirection have you experienced (with other towns) creating flood storage as part of their plan with their removal?" Rhodes responded that if there is room or space.

Febbie spoke of her concerns of disrupting the wetland behind the Mill Pond that offers nesting areas and homes for over 100+ years to all sorts of wildlife including 2 endangered species. Febbie asked about a timeline on wetland permitting and requirements for removal of wetlands, and asked what other permits were involved in the process. Rhodes responded that

there is an Army Corps Permit, state of Vermont Stream Alteration Permit, and the local flood plan review board is involved. The state of Vermont would study what is living in the wetlands, and the CRC has moved endangered species before. Rhodes spoke very honestly that if the dam is removed that the wetlands totally change. The permitting process takes a year and is a very regulated process.

Phelan asked if the dry hydrants would be paid for by the grant money? He responded that Wilmington just received a \$10,000 grant.

Febbie asked Rhodes if you are ever denied during the permitting process? The answer was "not no, but it is a negotiation process the entire time".

Febbie asked Rhodes from your standpoint what are the benefits to dam removal, if you are doing all this leg work, disrupting wetlands, and our biggest risk not knowing what will happen with flooding if the dam is removed, so what is the benefit to removal. Rhodes spoke to fish passage, clean water, temperature of water, and flood resistance (depending on level determined).

Cavanagh shared two photos of the dam, and in his opinion the wall holding the gate is unsound.

O'Keefe added that at that evening's Selectboard Meeting there will be a D and K proposal regarding "the dam after the flood", and it is anticipated to have the before and after the flood dam inspections soon to provide some valuable information.

Rhodes offered up a kiosk as an idea to capture the history of the dam.

Rhodes suggests finding out what the new flood evaluation would be and photo simulation.

Phelan moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Forbes, passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15pm.

The next regular meeting of the Williams Dam Advisory is scheduled for September 4, 2023 at Londonderry Town Office.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rachel Febbie

Approved
Williams Dam Advisory Committee

Rich Phelan, Chair