

Housatonic River Estuary Commission (HREC)

HOUSATONIC RIVER ESTUARY COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, April 23, 2009

***Parson's Government Center-Conference Room B
70 W. River St, Milford CT 06460***

1. CALL OF THE MEETING/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Gesullo called the meeting to order at 7:05 P.M.

All in attendance pledged allegiance to the flag.

ATTENDANCE

Robert Gesullo, Chairman, Shelton
Lori Romick, Vice-Chairman, Milford
Jay Blake, Commissioner, Orange
Phil Marcucio, Commissioner, Derby
Bill Urban, Commissioner, Ansonia

Also in attendance:

Marianne Chaya, Clerk, HREC

2. PUBLIC PORTION OR GUEST

None

3. APPROVAL OF THE November 29, 2008 MEETING MINUTES

Commissioner Marcucio MOVED to approve the November 20, 2008 meeting minutes. SECONDED by Vice-Chairman Romick. All were in favor, MOTION PASSED.

4. FINANCE REPORT

Commissioner Blake reported that Ansonia and Orange have not made a contribution to the Commission. I don't think that is going to improve based upon everyone's current budget situations. We have about \$1700 in our account. We'll just try and collect for the next fiscal year.

Chairman Gesullo reported that he went to the Shelton Board of A&T and then it was sent on to the Board of Aldermen and I believe it was voted on and passed. I happened to be at a meeting on Tuesday in Milford where this item came up on their agenda. They asked if there was a representative from the HREC and so I sat down and told them what we are trying to do. They thanked us for the good work and it is still has to be voted on. Vice-Chairman Romick said she sent a letter and the item will be voted at the May 8 meeting. Chairman Gesullo stated that once the items are approved we have to write a letter to them to get the money. Vice-Chairman Romick commented that she was told she would not

need to write the letter because we did file an official annual report, which they were very satisfied with, the account was still in good standing in Shelton that it would automatically go through again. I asked for \$1000.

Commissioner Marcucio asked if a letter could be sent to the Mayor's office for Derby. Commissioners Blake and Urban asked for the same. Commissioner Urban stated that he met with the Mayor 6 times requesting the money.

Chairman Gesullo said that he would talk to Commissioner Rock to see what will come from Stratford.

Chairman Gesullo said he would write a letter requesting the \$1000 contribution for each town and each Commissioner would hand deliver it to their respective Mayor/First Selectman.

5. DONATION FOR THE MAY 2 RIVER CLEAN UP

The river cleanup is scheduled for Saturday May 2 in Shelton, Stratford and Milford.

Chairman Gesullo reported that Scott Corner had t-shirts made for the event and the Housatonic River Estuary Commission is listed as one of the sponsors. He asked us to sponsor the food for the 3 locations. The cost would be about \$300. Mr. Corner has a friend that owns a Subway in Stratford and he would get back to us with the cost. We need to get a motion to approve the expense.

Commissioner Marcucio MOVED to support the river cleanup with a donation of up to \$300. The money would be used to purchase food for the volunteers at the Shelton, Stratford and Milford locations. SECONDED by Commissioner Urban. A voice vote was taken; all were in favor, MOTION PASSED.

Vice-Chairman Romick commented that details of the event is at

www.cleansound.org

The Shelton site is at the Sunnyside boat ramp, Milford boat ramp and Stratford's is at Knapp's Landing.

After the last year's cleanup I received photos of the numbers of plastic water bottles. The number was phenomenal. I wrote a letter and sent the pictures to a local representative to add to the effort to pass the new bottle bill expansion.

Commissioner Urban commented that the first bottle bill took 10 years for it to pass.

Vice-Chairman Romick asked the Commissioners that will be volunteering to take pictures so they can be sent on to the legislature to reinforce why this bottle bill needs to go through.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FUTURE OF THIS COMMISSION

Chairman Gesullo said he wanted to discuss this agenda item and find out how each of you feel about it. At times I vacillate on this Commission; at times I think this is a waste of time and there are times I don't think it's a waste of time; and there are times I think it is what ever we make of it. That is probably the bottom

line, whatever you make of it. As long as we remain committed to it, it will function. A good example of that is the frustration you have with your own town's leadership in some cases, by not coming forward with the money. So far we have been able to get by. The other thing is, when I see the work of some of these other associations and they are so pinpointed on what they are focused on, that is fine. I look at our charter we have kind of a grandiose mission. Now that I look back at it I think I'd like to re-write it. I think the reason we are here is simply as a watchdog. It's ok to be more but do we have the resources and the energy to do that? I don't have the answer for that. I'd like to hear your opinions – do you feel this Commission is a value? We're not that old, so there are a lot of growing pains here. Do we just keep going and see what progress we can make going forward?

Vice-Chairman Romick commented that she recently got on to the Long Island Sound Assembly, which is a Commission of all the coastal towns with representatives appointed by the respective Mayors/First Selectmen, Governor appointees and the actual Mayor/First Selectman of the towns are members. They have monthly meetings and there is a speaker at each meeting that will talk about some topic of interest and importance. The group can then follow-up with. Every year they write a booklet that goes to the legislature. This is where I see us being more productive in a way. They listen to the groups, they listen to the people out in the field doing the work on specific topics on Long Island Sound, and what those groups feel needs to be done. A lot of it is funding – you can't do anything without money. They put it in to this report; all the topics, all of the needs, what they feel is most important. This Commission is like ours – a state statute mandated commission. They get \$50K a year from the state to run this commission and they have a paid director (Sue McNamara). Her job is to organize the meetings, do the outreach, and to take the thoughts and feelings of the Commission to the legislature, to go to the hearings and testify why things need to get done, why there needs to be funding for particular projects. They are looked upon with respect due to the type of people on this Commission. I am very happy to be a part of this Commission.

Ms. Romick continued to explain the types of speakers and the role of the Commissioners. She also mentioned that Commissioner Rock is also a member of this Commission.

Vice-Chairman Romick commented that she feels this Commission (HREC) has a lot of potential.

Commissioner Marcucio said he does not agree. If an issue comes up in town it is going to come before the Wetlands Commission, then on to engineering. If there is a project on the waterfront we have no engineers to check the measured drawings. We have no attorneys to help us legislate things through. I don't see where we are going to make the impact. When I go to the Wetlands meetings and I try to tell them what is going on down at the island where they are doing the brownfield cleanup and try to get information. I think they don't respect what we try to do.

I made a commitment to be on this Commission. If something comes up that we can get involved with is ok. As of now, we really haven't.

Chairman Gesullo commented that we really don't have any resources. Commissioner Marcucio said we do have a little money and should have more after July. It's not fair that not all of the towns are contributing money to support us. If they can't give \$1000 to this Commission then they don't care.

Commissioner Blake commented that there are 3 things, specifically, that I have been thinking about that we could do and I would like to do. First, we are the one assembly that brings the towns together. As Phil said, it's a difficult job because we don't get a lot of respect, and we have zero authority. But, without a doubt, our charter is to be the watchdog of the river. I think at every entrance point as well as other areas along the river we should have signs on posts that say something like Housatonic River Estuary Commission – a phone number to call in and a website they can log onto. The second thing would be to get a website up and going. Then people could send in notifications of "abuses" to the river. It could be anonymous. Then we would be able to follow-up on them, whether we actually go out in person or send someone from the respective town out there. The third thing is to go out and take samples of the water and soil samples and have them tested. These are 3 things we can do that would have some results. The Commissioners agreed that the website is a great idea. They spent some time discussing the details of starting up a website as well as the idea of a sign giving the public contact information.

They discussed the fact that they have no authority to "stop" abuses but would have the resources available to contact the appropriate authority.

They all discussed the need for all of the towns to contribute money to this Commission.

Vice-Chairman Romick discussed a grant that is available until September that the Commission may wish to consider.

Commissioner Urban commented that he believes there needs to be communication between towns. There is disrespect within the town regarding the wetlands regulations. After spending over 30 years on various Commissions I had thought that if a few Commissions would do a good job to show a way people would benefit that things would change. I am sorry to say that over the 3 decades they have not changed. Unfortunately people have not learned that a big price is paid when you don't follow the regulations put in place, especially in towns that are so small that the parcels left for development have severe issues. My overview of this Commission is that we are talking to each other. I don't know of another mechanism for towns for representatives to get together. The Council of Governments used to be that type of mechanism but that has dwindled down pretty much to the CEO's of the towns. It puts more of an importance to this type of group. Mr. Urban discussed some concerns of other agencies.

Commissioner Urban stated that he feels this Commission is of importance and he is frustrated and ashamed that the Mayor who spoke to me said he would support this has not. In short, I don't think we can meet a huge goal that we put together in the mission statement, but the fact that we can call each other is really important.

Chairman Gesullo shared a couple of stories relating to his discussion with the Mayor of Shelton regarding his decision to stay on this Commission or not, and

his meeting with the Board of Aldermen in Milford and the necessity of this Commission.

Chairman Gesullo talked about the importance of setting up a website as a method of outreach to the community plus providing links to other organizations. The Commissioners again talked about how to get the website setup. Vice-Chairman Romick mentioned that she would ask the Mayor if the town web master might be available.

After hearing all the Commissioners thoughts about the Commission it was decided that they would move forward and see where it takes us. We do agree that the website is priority #1. If any of the Commissioners has someone who can get the site going to contact the Chairman.

Commissioner Blake MOVED to approve spending up to \$250/year to establish and maintain a website for the Commission. SECONDED by Commissioner Marcucio. All were in favor, MOTION PASSED.

Tape 1, Side B

7. Discussion of replacement for Commissioner-at-large

Chairman Gesullo stated that as much as we would like to keep Jeff Snyder as the at-large member, due to the fact that he moved to Rhode Island, we should find a replacement. He said that if anyone has someone you think you want to put in here or would be a good addition; I'd like to hear about it. I have someone in mind and I want to share with you. His name is Bill Roland and he lives in Derby. He is retired from the military. He is a permanent part-time employee with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Bill is currently President of Corporation 71, Stratford, which is a corporation of a flotilla (Coast Guard Auxiliary Unit). When he is not active with FEMA, he volunteers with the USCG Auxiliary, and has been an active member since 2001. He is currently the Division Vice-Commander. He patrols the Housatonic River and provides support assistance to recreational safe boating public. His training with the USCG Auxiliary includes marine safety, environmental protection, public outreach programs like Sea Partners, he is currently a certified coxswain, an instructor, a vessel examiner, qualifications examiner, an ICS instructor for the Coast Guard, and on the auxiliary called AUXOP (which means you have mastered every component of operations).

Chairman Gesullo said he picked Bill because of his love for water, especially for the river, and he knows it like the back of his hand.

The Commissioners seemed to be in agreement with meeting Mr. Roland and have him come to the next meeting. Chairman Gesullo gave each Commissioner a copy of his resume.

Chairman Gesullo said he would write a letter to Jeff Snyder thanking him for what he has done for the Commission and if he would like to stay to have him as an advisor of some capacity.

Vice-Chairman Romick mentioned that if any of the Commissioners thinks they may have problems with making the meetings they can have an alternate, such as what Stratford does by have Scott Corner fill in for Bill Rock.

8. Discussion on HREC meeting dates going forward

Chairman Gesullo said there is a need to change the meeting day of the week to be able to accommodate Commissioner Rock. The Commissioners discussed this and agreed to the 4th Tuesday of every other month.

The future dates are as follows:

June 23, August 25, October 27, December 22.

The clerk will notify each town.

9. Commissioners remarks and/or outreach efforts

Vice-Chairman Romick provided newspaper articles relating to the towns. She mentioned that Stratford is putting in a new commercial dock; Caswell Cove in Milford is going to become a small park and have fishing access. Commissioner Blake and Vice-Chairman Romick discussed future dredging efforts in Milford.

Vice-Chairman Romick also had a Long Island Sound update newsletter and DEP newsletter.

She updated the Commissioners on the area near Baldwin Station where the trees were cut down. The remediation plans still have not been submitted to Mary Rose Palumbo (Inland Wetlands officer). She isn't really forcing them. Should we send a letter? The Commissioners discussed this issue and agreed that Vice-Chairman Romick should send a letter to Inland Wetlands, the Mayor and Baldwin Station association stating that we are aware that more trees were taken than were approved and we are looking after the river and have concerns about erosion and excess sedimentation running into the river. In the interest of the river we would like for them to take steps to remediate the situation and alleviate any runoff. Commissioner Urban suggested she also copy the Saltwater Conservation, Southwest region. She will send her draft to the Commissioners for review before sending it on.

Vice-Chairman Romick gave Commissioner Urban a hard copy of the DEP report about the CT DOT doing work in Ansonia. He said he was at the hearing which is concerning the new walkway. He discussed the details about them wanting to connect it to Derby.

10. New Business

None

11. Old Business

None

12. Next HREC meeting location

It was determined that it would be in Shelton, June 23 at 7:00 P.M.

13. Adjournment

Commissioner Blake MOVED to adjourn. SECONDED by Vice-Chairman Romick. All were in favor, MEETING ADJOURNED at 8:28 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Marianne Chaya
Clerk, HREC