

Minutes of Meeting
North Shore Council of Governments
10/30/2024 - 7:00 p.m.
West Monroe Fire Department
46 County Route 11, West Monroe, New York

Attending:

Central Square: Randy House, Mudd Murphy

Constantia: Richard (Rip) Colesante, Dan Poné, Frank Tomaino

West Monroe: Mike Hickey, Jesse Green, Dale Maher, Vern Sundet

NorCOG staff: Paul M. Baxter, Heidi Tompkins

Tug Hill Commission: Katie Malinowski, Matt Johnson, Jillian Lee

Other attendance:

Jim Peck, Chick Quattrini, Rod Campbell, Danielle and David Grenze, Dean Gass, Charles Gobb, John Metzger, Tom Moran, Ron Chapman, MJ Walker, Ais Matteson, J.J Maderul, Austin Wheelock, Casey Coughlin, Lance Makham, Greg Briggs, Lance Rudul, Doug Koch, Tracey Bowers, Bill Bucchue, Dutch Clark, Tim Buckingham, Tim Stahl, Sandy Bell, Brittany Jerred,

Meeting called to order at 7:02 p.m. and NorCOG board attendees were introduced.

NorCOG Business Items:

Financial: Budget Review: Paul reviewed and explained the draft budget. **Motion for Cell Phone and Internet Support:** A motion was made by Vern and seconded by Randy to allocate \$30 per month to the Circuit Rider for cell phone and internet costs.

- **Equipment Transfer:** Paul reminded the board that prior authorization existed for purchasing a laptop and cell phone for the Circuit Rider role. The responsibility for this equipment would now be transferred from Paul to Heidi.
- **Intermunicipal Agreement: IMA Renewal:** The current Intermunicipal Agreement will need renewal in 2025. Heidi will review the existing agreement and propose a new version by the end of the year. **Council Overview:** Paul provided an explanation of how the North Shore Council of Governments operates with support from the NYS Tug Hill Commission. **Representation Inquiry:** Richard inquired about representation from the Village of Cleveland. It was clarified that they were aware of the meeting date and time but were not in attendance.

Oswego County Rail Trail Update:

Tim Stahl introduced himself and spoke on **Trail Maintenance Update** A letter regarding concerns about trail conditions prompted discussions about improvements. County Highway Supervisor Shawn Walker and his team have been working on repairing sections of the trail.

- **2023 Maintenance Plan:** Goal: Repair the section from the county line to Route 49 before winter, weather permitting. Light maintenance, including mowing, has been completed across the entire trail.
- **Ongoing Challenges:** Maintenance is subject to staff availability and competing priorities across the county. Increased ATV traffic has accelerated wear and tear on the trail. No formal maintenance plan is currently in place, but efforts are made to address critical sections annually.
- **Infrastructure Investment Discussion- Potential Wastewater Trunk Line:** The county is exploring the feasibility of installing a wastewater trunk line along the recreational trail. Purpose: To connect strategic locations for improved infrastructure while minimizing disruption. Timeline: The project is in the early planning stages and may take 5-8 years to implement, but still unknown.
- **Funding Considerations:** Grants would potentially cover post-installation beautification and improvement of the trail. The county aims to involve local communities in planning to ensure efficient use of resources.
- **Trail Use and Restrictions - ATV Traffic Concerns:** Current regulations exist, but enforcement is challenging due to resource limitations. Discussions are ongoing to explore ways to accommodate mixed-use (pedestrian and ATV) safely. Suggestions include widening specific trail sections and creating a balanced plan for shared use.
- **Community Collaboration:** The county is open to conversations about potential town-level involvement in maintenance. Suggestions for reimbursement to towns for maintenance work will be further explored.
- **Additional Notes-** Supervisor Dale Mahar emphasized the need for collaborative discussions to prioritize trail improvements. Dave Turner, the county's Strategic Initiatives Director, joined remotely to provide an overview of the infrastructure plans and highlighted potential for enhanced wastewater treatment capabilities to benefit multiple towns. **Action Items:** The county to continue evaluating funding opportunities and partnerships for trail improvements. Further discussions to involve local stakeholders and communities in planning. Dave Turner to provide more detailed updates on the wastewater project and its potential impact on trail improvements.

OSHA Update:

- Katie Malinowski provided an update following the previous NorCOG meeting, which included significant concerns from volunteer fire department members regarding proposed OSHA changes to the Fire Brigade Standard. Concerns centered around the potential for the new regulations to negatively impact volunteer fire departments, with fears that members unable to meet the standards might have to resign from service.
- **Actions Taken:** A letter was drafted and submitted by various councils of governments, municipalities, and volunteer fire personnel to OSHA representatives, voicing concerns about the proposed standards and their impact on volunteer departments.

- **OSHA's Response:** On September 17, OSHA released a statement addressing the concerns raised about the Emergency Response Rulemaking and the Fire Brigade Standard: OSHA acknowledged the feedback and expressed a commitment to minimizing negative impacts on volunteer fire departments. The agency indicated the possibility of excluding volunteer emergency response organizations entirely from the new standards if supported by the record of comments received.
- **Key Statement from OSHA:** "OSHA is committed to taking steps in any final standard consistent with the rulemaking record to assess and minimize detrimental effects on volunteer fire departments. This may include excluding voluntary emergency response organizations entirely based on these feasibility concerns."
- **Community Impact:** While volunteer fire departments remain committed to maintaining safety and operational standards, there is relief in knowing OSHA is considering exemptions based on feasibility and cost concerns for volunteer organizations.

Route 49 Closure Update:

Heidi reported an update from NYS DOT Region 3. Inspection of temporary bridge should be completed 11/12, with the road reopened shortly thereafter.

Route 49 Traffic Study status:

Katie reported that the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council's Route 49 traffic analysis is getting underway, with local representatives secured – Randy from Central Square and Vern from West Monroe. More to come on this at next meeting.

Tug Hill Commission Updates:

- **THC Local Government Conference:** LGC will be held on 3/31 & 4/1 next year at Turning Stone.
- **Circuit Rider Transition:** Katie reported that 11/7/2024 will be the official start date for Heidi. Paul will still be a full-time employee through the first few months of 2025. Heidi asked for all correspondence moving forward to include both Heidi and Paul to make sure all requests are taken care of.
- **Planning:** Matt Johnson reported that Constantia is at its halfway point for their zoning law. Planning staff will be increasing soon with a new hire. Matt mentioned being able to do ZBA and planning board training if wanted.
- **Micron Update:** Groundbreaking is now scheduled to be in later 2025. Draft environmental impact statement should be available end of 2024.

Economic Development- Oswego County:

Austin Wheelock reported an overview of the **Oswego County Industrial Development Agency (IDA)**, in partnership with the **Oswego County Legislature**, has initiated a **Housing Market Assessment and Development Strategy**. This study aims to evaluate the current housing stock in Oswego County and explore opportunities for development across various housing types, including new single-family homes, multifamily market-rate housing, and affordable housing options.

- **Consultant Selection:** The **MRB Group** was selected as the lead consultant for the study, with their previous experience with the **North Shore Economic Resiliency Study** a factor in the decision. Their familiarity with the region provides a strong foundation for this new housing study.
- **Regional Focus:** Instead of conducting a one-size-fits-all study, the county is broken down into distinct regions to address local needs.
 - **North Shore Area:** Tailored strategies that reflect the shared characteristics of these communities.
 - **City of Oswego and Fulton:** Urban-focused housing strategies.
 - **Northern Oswego County:** Rural-specific recommendations.
 - **South Town Communities:** Addressing housing needs in communities near the Micron development in northern Onondaga County.
- **Community Engagement:** To ensure the strategy is comprehensive and informed by local expertise, focus groups have been established, including local elected officials, real estate professionals, home builders, housing developers, and organizations such as land banks. These groups will provide valuable insights into housing needs, barriers, and opportunities within the county.
- **Timeline and Next Steps- Next Steering Committee Meeting:** Early December 2024.
Completion of Study: Late February or early March 2025.
- **Strategic Site Marketing Materials:** Development of promotional materials following the study's completion (about 1-2 months after). A presentation summarizing the study's findings will be scheduled for **spring 2025**.
- **Significance of the Study:** The study is critical for addressing a pressing housing gap in the region. The **Syracuse and Central New York** area has recently been identified as the second hottest housing market in the U.S., with significant cost increases over the last few years. This highlights the imbalance between housing supply and demand, making it essential to plan for the right type of housing to accommodate current and future residents. The project is a collaborative effort by the **IDA** and the **County Legislature**, both recognizing the need for increased housing options to support the workforce required for business growth. Providing the appropriate housing is key to meeting workforce needs and sustaining economic development.

Oneida Lake 9E Study Update:

Katie reported that the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board continues to work on the Oneida Lake 9E Watershed Plan, with computer modeling currently being done. The modeling looks at different scenarios that were developed by the advisory committee earlier this year, including potential temperature and precipitation increases, potential increased levels of phosphorus which could

come from additional septic systems, etc.p to hold a public meeting on the results of the modeling in the spring of 2025.

NYS DEC Wetlands Regulation Presentation:

Krista Spohr: Fresh Water Wetlands Outreach Coordinator presented a presentation via Zoom (recording will be provided with meeting minutes)

Introduction:

- **Overview:** The meeting focused on the significant changes to freshwater wetland regulations, particularly regarding the statutory amendments in Part 664. These changes will impact mapping, classification, and permitting processes.
- **Objective:** Discuss the upcoming release of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) by the end of December and review the direction and implementation of the regulatory changes.

Regulatory Changes Overview

- **Key Points:**
 - a. By December, SOPs will be released outlining how regulatory changes will be implemented.
 - b. Focus is on mapping and classification of wetlands to meet statutory goals.
 - c. Key regulatory updates include changes to Part 664 (mapping and classification), permitting processes, and jurisdictional determinations.

Statutory Changes and Key Areas

- **Mapping and Classification:** Wetland mapping will move from being regulatory to informational, reducing confusion and inefficiencies. Changes include decreasing the acreage threshold for wetland regulation from 12.4 acres (until 2027) to 7.4 acres in 2028. Wetlands of unusual importance will be defined under new criteria, including significant ecological, hydrological, and conservation features.
- **Wetland Classification:** Wetlands will be classified from 1 to 4 based on their ecological value and functions, ranging from the most restrictive (Class 1) to the least restrictive (Class 4). New criteria for wetland importance will be introduced, with specific focus on vernal pools and habitat for endangered species.

Challenges with Existing Mapping

- **Current Issues:** Existing wetland maps have been outdated and inaccurate, missing significant wetland areas. Challenges in permitting and project development due to inaccuracies and jurisdictional questions. It was noted that significant resources were previously spent on mapping amendments, with an estimated cost of \$7 million for statewide updates.

Proposed Changes to Wetland Regulations

- **New Maps:** Maps will no longer be regulatory; they will provide informational support. Modelled wetland data from Cornell Institute for Resource Information Sciences will be used to generate new maps. Wetlands previously mapped will be updated and available online by December through DEC Info Locator and Environmental Resource Map.
- **Acreage Threshold:** The threshold for wetland regulation remains at 12.4 acres until 2027, and will drop to 7.4 acres in 2028.
- **Wetlands of Unusual Importance:** Criteria for unusual wetlands include rare plant species, vernal pools, habitat for endangered species, and wetlands in urban or flood-prone areas. Currently, 13 wetlands across the state are designated as of "unusual local importance."

Feedback and Public Comment

- **Public Comment Period:**
 - Two rounds of public comment have been conducted to gather feedback on the proposed changes. Concerns included vernal pool regulation, jurisdictional determinations, and the impact on projects in the development pipeline.
- **Feedback Outcomes:**
 - Adjustments made to vernal pool regulations, such as listing known productive pools and allowing for voluntary reporting of new pools by landowners.
 - The adjacent area for vernal pools has been extended from 100 feet to 800 feet based on scientific research indicating the need for larger buffers for amphibian populations.
- **Jurisdictional Determinations (JD):**
 - The JD process will be streamlined, with a focus on remote determinations. A web-based form will be available for JD requests.
 - The department will be required to respond within 90 days. If no response is provided within 10 business days after a certified notice, jurisdiction will be waived for five years.

Timeline and Next Steps

- **Regulation Adoption:**
 - Draft regulations are set to be adopted in early December.
 - Informational wetland maps will be posted online in December, along with SOPs.
- **Implementation:**
 - Statutory amendments will take effect on January 1, 2025.
 - Outreach and communication efforts will continue to ensure stakeholders are informed of the changes.
- The team will prepare for the release of the SOPs and informational maps by the end of December.
- Final regulatory changes will take effect in January 2025, marking a significant shift in the way wetlands are mapped, classified, and regulated in New York State.

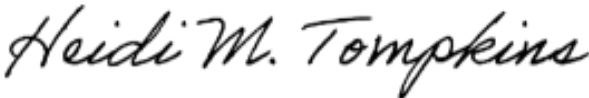
Q&A

Krista gave time for questions and can be listened to from the provided Zoom recording. Several local officials, county staff and landowners had questions and concerns about the following:

- Q: What amount of acreage will be regulated? A: everyone will need to get a jurisdictional determination what classification of wetland is on the property. Unless it is under 12.4 acres and does not have any of the 11 criteria of wetland
- Q: What will happen to the multiple development projects that are already awarded or under construction. Is there a new set of maps available for review? A: NYS DEC does not have the maps back yet from Cornell, a conversation will need to be had with the DEC regional manager.
- Q: 1.2 million acres are currently regulated and DEC is projecting an additional million acres. If and when this happens, does the state have any plans to reimburse local municipalities for loss of usable acreage? A: There are conservation easements. There is not anything yet, but it is in the comments and being considered.
- Q: So DEC is not just regulating buildings, they are regulating the yard space as well? A: Yes, exactly. If it is close to a wetland and its in the adjacent area.
- Q: How will DEC handle the additional workload and enforce these new regulations? A: If we can not handle we will have proof, and petition to get more help.
- Q: Why is the Vernal pool regulation voluntary? A: It is part of a balance.
- Q: Does Oneida Lake fit the description of a Wetland? A: Yes, DEC would need to do a General Permit. This would ease the burden of the regulations on the people who have lakefront property. Activates will need permits – dredging, filling, building.

Adjournment 9:07pm

Heidi Tompkins



Municipal Management Consultant
North Shore Council of Governments