

## York River Stewardship Committee

### Minutes for the January 28, 2025, Meeting

**Voting Members Present:** Karen Arsenault, Allan Cawrse, Joan LeBlanc (Chair), David Marshall, Mary Marshall, Susie Rice, Jim Smith

**Other Committee Members Present:** Philip Brekke (Alt), Beth Cromwell (Alt), Deane Rykerson (Alt), Paul Dest (Wells Reserve), Jim MacCartney (NPS), Hannah Volk (NPS), Jenn Hunter (Coordinator)

1. **Welcome and introductions:** Joan welcomed the group at 5:30. There were no guests.
2. **Review and approve minutes:** David Marshall proposed an edit stating that he had made an annual report presentation to the Eliot Selectboard in October. Mary made a motion to approve the minutes, as amended. All approved.
3. **Cooperative Agreement/federal funding (Joan and Paul):** Joan diverged from the regular agenda to comment on the unprecedented recent federal funding freeze which impacts our Cooperative Agreement. The Executive Committee had an emergency meeting on Zoom this morning. Wells Reserve's access to the federal payment system has been suspended due to the government putting a freeze on all government grants. She stated that, as it came as a complete surprise to everyone, at this point we can only assess the situation as it unfolds and determine how to move on. However, at this juncture, we will not be going ahead with sending out the RFP for the Watershed Grants Program and until further notice we will put other actions on pause.

Paul stated we are only one of the many thousands of organizations that have been affected by this suspension, which was an executive order from the Office of Management and Budget. The Reserve cannot access money owed to them. The Reserve has always honored their contract commitments, and will continue to do so, and this puts them in a difficult position. Our elected officials have been notified, and we can only wait and see what happens.

Joan commented that all we know is that agencies have been tasked with reporting to the White House by February 10<sup>th</sup> explaining their grants with the point being to realign funding with government priorities.

Much discussion ensued regarding monies owed for awarded grants that haven't been invoiced, Jenn's salary, and other expenses that have already been incurred but not reimbursed. Many questions but few answers.

4. **Treasurers Report:** Paul, on behalf of treasurer Sally Harold, reported that the Treasurer's report had been sent out with the committee's meeting materials, which shows our financial position as of December 31.
5. **York River Watershed Grants Program for 2025:** Jenn wanted to get all information approved for the proposed new grant program so that it will be ready to be issued as soon as it appropriate to move forward based on funding availability. There are some small adjustments to the program this year. We will only be allowing one proposal per entity and there is a shortened time frame for submission, roughly 9 weeks instead of 11. Once we issue the RFP, Jenn would like to organize the review team.

We will discuss at the next meeting, if issued. \$10K will be the maximum grant this year, same as last year.

Mary made a motion to approve the RFP as presented, seconded by Susie and all approved. Jenn will work with the Executive Committee to determine when it's appropriate to issue the RFP.

6. **Communications Products and Outreach Plans:** Jenn reported that the website is up and running, using WordPress as before. There is a new editing platform. Fluent organized a training for her, Emma and Hannah, for the website, CANVA and Mailchimp – an email platform. Hannah and Emma both have access which is a great help for Jenn. Hannah and Jenn set up YRSC on Facebook and Instagram earlier this month, and Hannah has been posting storylines and has developed a content calendar for holidays and initiatives to post. Hannah asked us to provide pictures to either her or Jenn: cool things happening on the river, related activities or events. Account names are: yorkrivermaine for Instagram; York River Stewardship Committee for Facebook. There are links at the bottom of our website.

Jenn asked for volunteers to help with outreach activities in the communities as we want to have a presence at events: Saturday, April 5th is the Seacoast Film Festival where we will have a table; and Jim's summer river cruises. Jim has worked out a number of available option dates starting in June. He suggested it would be good to invite members of town committees. Judy and Jim are working on a loose script of pertinent information so that everyone can participate if they are interested in accompanying him. So far Sally has invited the Kittery Conservation Commission. Anyone interested in inviting partner groups and committees should contact Jim and Jenn to coordinate.

## 7. Updates and discussion

**a. Cooperative Agreement:** already discussed at the beginning of the meeting.

**b. NPS and PWSR program:** Jim reported that the Park Service has a hiring freeze. They were hoping to replace people that were retiring but now cannot. They have been told to return to in-person work but they no longer have Boston office space, so there are many issues to be resolved.

**c. Executive Committee:** already discussed at the beginning of the meeting.

**d. River Access Ad Hoc Committee:** Mary reported on the River Access Committee's interview process for firms designing a new paddle craft dock. GEI was selected as the contractor. Decision was brought to the Selectboard on December 9<sup>th</sup>. By a 4-1 vote the committee was tasked to proceed with the contract. GEI is under contract, and there's a February 7, 2025, kickoff meeting at Grant House. Permitting is also part of GEI's work. Finalized construction drawings will go out to contractors for bid with currently proposed build date between 2026 and 2027. This part will be on the May 2026 ballot. Parking and usage have been discussed, as well as lighting and accessibility. Parking needs to accommodate trailers.

**e. Committee members:** Phil asked about "merch" like stickers or hats. Jenn stated that we haven't discussed this yet but "keep the ideas coming." There is a small outreach/communications budget for additional activities or products, now that the branding and set up is done.

Meeting adjourned at 7:02

Submitted by Karen Arsenault, Secretary

Approved: February 25, 2025