

York River Stewardship Committee
Minutes for the April 22, 2025 Meeting

Voting Members Present: Karen Arsenault, Sally Harold, Karl Honkonen, Joan LeBlanc (Chair), David Marshall, Mary Marshall, Susie Rice, Judy Spiller

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

Guests: Tin Smith, Great Works Regional Land Trust

1. Welcome and introductions: Joan welcomed the group at 5:30 with a round of introductions for guest speaker Tin Smith, GWRLT.

2. Guest Presentation: Tin Smith, board member from Great Works Regional Land Trust, talked about the Kashmer Farm conservation easement in Eliot, for which our committee awarded \$20,000 to help with transaction and closing costs for this project that's been in the works for 8 years. The easement was on 126 acres of farmland and forestland, with 6260' on the York River and another 1800' on a tidal tributary.

Before convening the rest of the meeting, the committee offered its sincere thanks to Hannah Volk, NPS fellow, who has worked with the committee for two years, as her fellowship is concluding. Many expressed their gratitude for her assistance.

3. Review and approve minutes: Sally made a motion to approve the February minutes seconded by Susie. All approved.

4. Federal Budget/National PWSR Program Update: Paul Dest remarked that there was a tremendous amount of uncertainty and chaos at the moment and the budget process is caught up in it. In past years we would have known by now what would happen with the budget by now but that probably won't happen for another month. Everything is ready to go for our agreement amendment, but the usual July 1 start date could be delayed until August or September. Our Congressional delegation continues to be supportive of our programs and will need to be into the future. Jim MacCartney was asked if the funds would be retroactive to July 1 if decision isn't in. He said everything was in place from the Park Service, but he didn't know the answer to that question.

5. Treasurer's Report for FY25 Q3 funds & Proposed budget allocation for FFY25: Sally presented the Q3 report which goes to the end of March. There are some balances available going forward which include \$18,000 for watershed grants. The budget for next year is \$150,000, which was sent by email. Judy made a motion to accept the proposed budget for next year as presented, seconded by Joan. All approved. This will be the budget, assuming we are level funded for FFY25 funding.

6. Watershed Grants Program: \$42,000 was distributed to last year's program, which included 5 projects. Four to be completed by June 30. Save Kittery Waters has a 6 month extension to December 31.

- Parks & Rec kayak tours: lots of partnership opportunities, Sally & Paul will be on upcoming tours and will talk about river ecology. Included in our newsletter. Will get final report.

- York Conservation Commission pesticides brochure: complete, included funding credit and used logo. Online version on our website, included in our newsletter. CC wants to do a smaller follow-up mailing focused on fertilizers.
- River Ad Hoc Committee: Mary and Beth participating and keeping our committee updated. Town hired a firm and expanded the project and extended timeline to include permitting. Work we fund will be completed by June 30.
- York Land Trust: McIntire Highlands expansion project closed. Helped with transaction costs for parcels donated by the town, but without funds. Will get final report soon.
- CreekSmart – Save Kittery Waters: funded Town of Kittery to hire coordinator for Save Kittery Waters. Developed newsletter, speaker series, and other outreach, have come to Outreach Committee meetings. Coordinating on YardScaping and will have our materials at events that we don't attend.

Jenn reported that we have received 7 applications for the second round of funding in 2025. The total request was \$50,400. The Review Team is currently reviewing the applications and will meet next Friday to discuss the projects and get ready to present them to the full committee, with recommendations. There are \$18,000 in funds left over from last year's budget, to be added to FFY25 funds for the grants program. We may convene a special meeting on May 6 to make award decisions, if there is any positive progress with FFY25 funding.

7. Outreach Activities

- Newsletter update. Jenn asked that members forward it to people on boards and committees in each of our towns that may be interested, with info to sign up. She also mentioned she always needs photos and welcomes ideas for the "Wild and Scenic" section that she will keep in for the time being.
- Event likely to be organized in early August for past and new grantees from Watershed Grants Program, similar to last year. More of a networking and partnership building event than a media event.
- Boat trips on hold until we determine how Jim wants to proceed. Anyone working on a boat tour should not schedule anything before July and let invitees it may be on hold indefinitely.
- Seacoast Environmental Film Festival was our first tabling event. Climate Action Fair: still in need of additional volunteers. June 28 South Berwick Strawberry Festival: Karl and Phil will participate.

8. Other updates

- **River Access Ad Hoc Committee**: Mary & Beth indicated three options were presented by the consultants on April 8. Next meeting May 13th at 6:30. By August there should be preliminary designs.
- Karl mentioned the upcoming Wild and Scenic Film Festival hosted by Southeast NH Land Trust on April 25.
- Next YRSC meeting will feature a Coastal Resilience session

9. Public comments: none

10. Adjourned at 7:05.

Approved: