

Summary of Meeting 2
Citizens Advisory Committee
Greenwich Bay Special Area Management Plan
Wednesday, October 22, 2003 6:30-8:30 PM
Warwick Sewer Authority, Warwick, Rhode Island

The second meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Greenwich Bay SAMP received a strong turnout of community groups. The focus of this meeting was to review the findings of fact for the draft water quality chapter of the SAMP. The November 5 meeting will review policy recommendations for water quality.

TOPICS DISCUSSED

- There are currently 13 groups represented on the CAC. Other groups are encouraged to send a letter of membership to CRMC before the next meeting. Guidelines for the CAC were handed out for review.
- CAC members crafted a shared vision for the future of Greenwich Bay. The CAC also generated a list of limiting factors that must be explored in order to reach their vision for Greenwich Bay. The vision statement and limiting factors will be continually improved upon at each meeting. The CAC draft vision statement is as follows:

*Greenwich Bay is a healthy and safe place to fish, swim, clam, play, and boat.
The shellfish industry is healthy throughout the bay with no conditional closures.
Anadromous fish runs and native wildlife species are restored to functioning levels.
Greenwich Bay offers public access that is safe, convenient and maintained.*

Factors that the CAC sees as challenges to attaining this vision for Greenwich Bay are listed below. In the remaining CAC meetings, members will identify potential actions to address each of the limiting factors.

- Limited financial and material resources
- Lack of technology to detect/address non-point source pollution
- Stewardship for the Bay and its watershed
- Red tape slows down action – funding issues
- Intergovernmental coordination is challenging
- Human Nature – i.e. lack of sewer tie-ins
- Education – lack of information reaching the public
- Enforcement – resources, commitment, & coordination
- Pollution
- Over-development and continued population increases
- Beach and fishing closures
- Statutory limitations constricting agencies
- Collective change in behavior
- Matching the effort and funds to address major issues

Water Quality Presentation:

A summary of the Draft Water Quality Chapter was presented. Each chapter of the draft plan will have three sections: Findings of Fact; Goals, Policy and Regulations; and Recommended Actions. Findings of fact were discussed at this meeting. Policies and recommended actions will be the focus of the next meeting. The three main findings explored in the presentation were bacteria, nutrients, and other pollutants. Most of the discussion was focused on the bacteria data and findings.

Bacteria summary: Sources of bacteria contamination include failing septic systems, wildlife and pet waste, that enters the Bay via stormwater discharges. The result is reduced human use of the bay such as shellfish and beach closures. However, the ecology of the system is not impacted. The greatest sources of bacteria are within Greenwich Bay's watershed, not Narragansett Bay. In fact, the lowest bacteria counts are found at the entrance of Greenwich Bay and the highest counts are up in the small rivers and streams (tributaries) feeding Greenwich Bay.

CAC concerns: CAC members stressed the need for a concrete explanation about the sources of the bacteria. Members requested a bacteria-loading budget for Greenwich Bay, similar to the loading budget for nitrogen (that quantifies the major sources). RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM) stated there is no bacteria-loading budget at this time, but they do know which sites contribute the most bacteria. The chapter will be updated to include an estimate of bacteria sources.

Concerns were raised about the contribution of boat heads to the bacteria levels, since no quantitative study has been presented as of yet. It was also concluded that enforcement of boat discharge be improved since it is limited at this point. DEM explained that available data show that after a wet weather event, bacteria levels in the bay are at their

highest. Meaning, boats would have to discharge on the day of a wet weather event to contribute to significant increased bacteria levels. Increased bacteria levels after a wet weather event are largely due to stormwater runoff polluted by groundwater from septic systems, pet, and wildlife waste that enters Greenwich Bay through over 150 stormwater discharges. Data collected on run-off from streets at various sites reveals very high levels of bacteria (1000s parts/ML).

DEM has collected a significant amount of bacteria data to identify sources to the Bay in their efforts to develop a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) document. They have found that significant sources are found in tributaries and from the watershed. No DNA studies have been completed in Greenwich Bay to distinguish between bacteria sources. It was confirmed that neither East Greenwich nor Warwick's wastewater treatment facilities have combined sewer overflow (ruling out inputs from sewer overflows into the Bay during wet weather events). Thus, these facilities are not a source of significant bacteria.

Nitrogen summary: In saltwater, nitrogen is the nutrient that controls the amount of algae (phytoplankton). Elevated levels of nitrogen increase plant/algae growth to cause "blooms". Under certain environmental conditions (weak tides, low winds, hot temperatures and poor flushing/water circulation), the death of these algae blooms may lead to severe reductions of dissolved oxygen in the water. This hypoxic or anoxic (no oxygen) condition kills marine animals. The largest sources of nitrogen in Greenwich Bay are atmospheric deposition, sewage (from septic systems and wastewater treatment facilities) and Narragansett Bay. Both failing and functioning septic systems release nitrogen into the groundwater. Boats illegally discharging sewage are not a large source of nitrogen.

CAC concerns: CAC members asked why lawns were not included as a major source of nitrogen. It was explained that available data shows nitrogen input from lawns as being very small. However, available data on lawns will be incorporated into the graph and water quality chapter to show their level of contribution.

Members expressed the need for a study comparing sources of pollutants and their proximity to rivers and/or the Bay. Protective barriers were mentioned as a potential mechanism for reducing nitrogen levels from land. This concern will be addressed in the Habitat Chapter dealing with buffer zones.

Discussion continued about vegetative buffers used to decrease nitrogen input from atmospheric deposition. Buffers along streams and tributaries can catch inputs. Members offered suggestions on how to reduce excess nitrogen, such as using buffer technologies and planting oysters, which may help to remove nitrogen from the environment.

CAC members concerns:

- CAC members need strong data to bring back to their groups. If CAC members are not convinced, how will the public be convinced?
- The term "stakeholder" is very important. Everyone in the story needs to be involved and needs to see themselves as part of the problem and the solution.
- Community members experience frustration when they hear about extensive government analysis only to be told THEY are the problem. Community members want to know what has changed? Is it population, boats, weather..?
- CAC members would like continued discussions and more information for the Water Quality chapter (bacteria).
- The public education strategy needs to ensure all areas of the watershed receive enough attention, such as Baker's creek and inland watershed areas to the west.

Next Steps

- CAC members will review the CAC guidelines, which highlight the purpose of the CAC & how it will function.
- CAC members will review the draft Water Quality Chapter and the summary document with their constituents. Feedback will be requested at the next meeting.
- Railroad and Airport representatives will be asked to provide input to the Technical Committee.
- CRMC will request URI experts to present data on absorption rates of chemicals by lawns.
- CRMC and CAC members will continue to contact additional community groups to become members of the CAC.
- CRMC will post documents and public education materials on the CAC website (see footer for the link).
- CRMC will contact CAC members to develop communication strategies for their organizations.

Next Meeting

The CAC will meet next on November 5 from 6:30 – 8:30pm at the Warwick Sewer Authority. The focus of the discussion will be on policy recommendations for the water quality chapter and developing a public education strategy.

Attendees***CAC MEMBERS***

Jerry A. Meyer, E.G. Chamber of Commerce
Rich Langseth, Indian Point
Carol Fritz, Cedar Tree Point Assoc.
Bill Bergan, RI Shellfish Assoc.
Leo Martin, Warwick Marina Alliance
Steve Insana, Buckeye Brook Coalition
Catherine Murphy, Defenders of GB
Jack Early, Defenders of GB
Karen Way, Buttonwood Beach Garden Club

Individual Citizens

Andi Biagi, Oakland Beach Association
C. Theetge, Oakland Beach Association
John Williams, Warwick Cove Marina
Connie Bryan, Buttonwoods Bay Comm.
Elaine Todd Trench
Don Pryor
Tom Javote

Leah Robinson
Sharyn Iannuccilli, Town of EG
Elizabeth Herron, URI Watershed Watch

Management Staff & Technical Committee

Chris Turner, DEM
Heidi Travers, DEM
David Burnett, DOH
Dennis Vinhateiro, Warwick Sewer Authority
John DeLuca – City of Warwick public works
Michael Tikoian, CRMC Chair
Grover Fugate, CRMC Ex. Director
Virginia Lee, URI Coastal Resources Center
Glenn Ricci, URI Coastal Resources Center
Michael Campana, URI Coastal Resources Center
Lora Harris, URI-GSO Graduate Student
Kristina Perrelli, URI Student
Charlie Festa, URI Student