

Summary of Meeting 4
Citizens Advisory Committee
Greenwich Bay Special Area Management Plan
Wednesday, November 19, 2003 6:30-8:30 PM
Communications Meeting
Warwick Sewer Authority, RI

At the fourth meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Greenwich Bay SAMP, guest speakers discussed the sewer tie in policies, nitrogen loading from lawns and the value of vegetative buffers. The members also discussed how they would communicate with the public.

Committee Matters

The schedule for reviewing chapters has been changed. The Dec. 3 meeting will review the Cultural Assets and Public Access chapter and the Dec. 17 meeting will review the Habitat chapter. Please see the CAC website (http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/G_Bay/Management/samp/index.html) for the full schedule.

Sewer Tie-in Policy by CRMC

Greg Baribault of CRMC discussed the recent changes to the application/permitting process for sewer tie-ins in Warwick. A new program has been developed to make the tie-in process convenient, simple and cost-effective. The new program has been very successful, has received some press, and has been well received by the public. CRMC can issue a permit on the spot with an application and an application fee (\$20). Applicants and contractors can fill out an application at the Warwick Sewer Authority. CRMC visits the Sewer Authority regularly to review applications and issue permits. CRMC also goes out with inspectors regularly to ensure standards are being met. Biggest concern of CRMC right now in respect to sewer tie-ins is people want to remove underground structures for future development and expansion plans. CRMC deals strictly with sewer tie-ins, while DEM has jurisdiction over new sewer main lines. When a tie-in is authorized, it is required that the septic system is thoroughly pumped and filled with clean fill. It is important to realize that tie-in does not equal no nitrogen, since it can take about six months to a year for a difference to be recognized.

Communications Strategy for the CAC

A major role for CAC members is to communicate the problems with the bay, potential solutions and the role of the SAMP to integrate the issues at a watershed level. The members were introduced to some general rules for communicating clearly and effectively to the public, such as having three to five major points that are clear and concise to answer "So What?" (about the problem and the solutions). Also the overall message needs to be larger than local issues, though local issues will not be ignored in the actual plan. The CAC has immense credibility in the eyes of the public and the CAC needs to use their influence to educate the public and the town governments.

The CAC members agreed to establish a communications subcommittee to focus on crafting a clear message and communicating with the media. The CAC communication strategy will change as the process evolves. Right now, the message might be to highlight the multiple problems for the bay and what government is doing now to address them in a coordinated manner (SAMP). Later, the message will be what are some new policies and regulations to achieve the CAC's vision for the bay. One objective of the subcommittee is to provide the CAC with guidance about what is expected from them on the communications front, including a framework of what/how to talk to audiences and the media. The subcommittee will report back to the CAC at each meeting.

Nitrogen Loading from Lawns and benefits of vegetative buffers

Art Gold from the URI Cooperative Extension Program spoke to the CAC about research on lawns absorbing nitrogen and the role of vegetative buffers for reducing stormwater runoff. Research on lawns

in RI have found that they are great at storing nitrogen (30-65 years) and building organic matter. The major issue with lawns is excessive fertilizing and watering since they cause nitrogen to enter the groundwater rather than remaining in the roots of the lawn. Also buffers around landscapes help contain spilled fertilizer, since any fertilizer landing on hard surfaces will enter the bay rapidly. Water moves an inch to a foot per day in the ground and an inch per second on hard surfaces like pavement. CRMC deals with retention ponds, which can help with the denitrification process. DEM oversees infiltration that is basically a hole in the ground, which does not allow the ecosystem to undergo microbial actions that remove nitrogen. Land use design is important for controlling nitrogen to the bay. Sewers may allow development in areas that act as sponges for nitrogen right now. When a watershed gets highly developed, sponge areas are lost, resulting in increased runoff of nitrogen and other contaminants to rivers, coves and the bay. Publications on lawns that were handed out at the meeting are available.

CAC Recommendations/Comments

- Assess airplanes as source of chemical or other contaminants.
- Concern about non-gravity sewers during power-outages, installation of Y valves in order to activate pump system. CRMC to look into this matter.
- What are the benefits of individual septic systems for multi-unit subdivisions vs. combined sewers into a treatment plant? CRMC will investigate this issue.
- Bring CRMC Policy & Planning Committee to CAC meetings instead of holding separate meetings and prolonging the approval process.
- When communicating goals, use simple comparisons such as nitrogen in x bags of fertilizer.
- CAC could potentially evolve into a watershed council for Greenwich Bay using a coalition model for organizing existing groups.
- Members expressed concern about lack of monitoring of developers who are using the planning boards to pass plans to fill wetlands through zoning boards. CRMC should attend town planning and zoning meetings now to get technical info to the local process since decisions are being made during this SAMP planning process.
- Recommend that CRMC jurisdiction for permit review be extended from 200' to entire watershed as part of SAMP regulations.
- Recommend protecting “unbuildable” lots once sewers go in, especially in priority areas.
- Would like to see a water budget (which will be part of Water Quality chapter).
- Determine if any beaches in GB qualify for CBRA (Coastal Barrier Resources Act) protection, then set aside as protected areas.
- Lawn Care best management practices (BMP's) – training of lawn care companies and public about spillage prevention, application of fertilizer after certain date and over-watering of lawns.
- Atrazine BMP's – toxic for shellfish, 24D transforms rapidly, should prohibit use within town right of ways, powerline, railroad and airport properties.
- RI HEALTH, starting this summer, will use a different indicator of human bacteria sources. This may be beneficial in determining animal vs. human sources of bacteria in the bay.

Action Items

- 1) CAC members should review the Cultural Chapter draft before the meeting. A new draft will be posted online on December 2nd. However, older versions can give a good introduction.
- 2) The CAC website will be updated to simplify finding information.
- 3) CAC Communications Subcommittee will meet before the next CAC meeting and report back.
- 4) Guest speakers will be invited to present to the CAC on topics of historic preservation, and shellfishing rules.

Next Meeting

The CAC will meet next on December 3 from 6:30 – 8:30pm at the Warwick Sewer Authority. The focus of the discussion will be on reviewing the Cultural Assets and Public Access chapter.

Attendees

CAC Members

Jerry A. Meyer, E.G. Chamber of Commerce
Rich Langseth, Buttonwoods Bay Committee
Carol Fritz, Cedar Tree Point Assoc.
Bill Bergan, RI Shellfish Assoc.
Catherine Murphy, Defenders of GB
Jack Early, Defenders of GB
Karen Way, Buttonwood Beach Garden Club
Leah Robinson, Buttonwoods Bay Comm.
Stephen Medeiros, RI Saltwater Anglers Assoc.
Jim White, RI Saltwater Anglers Assoc.
Walt Galloway, Buttonwoods Beach Assoc.
Chris Ruhling, RIMTA
Steve Insana, Buckeye Brook Coalition
John Williams, Warwick Cove Marina

Individual Citizens

John Dickerson, Apponaug Harbor Marina
Lincoln Ross, Cedar Tree Point Assoc.
Michelle Komar, Buckeye Brook Coalition
Art Gold, URI Cooperative Extension
Linda Green, URI Cooperative Extension

Management Staff & Technical Committee

Michael Tikoian, CRMC Chair
Grover Fugate, CRMC Ex. Director
Greg Baribault, CRMC
Virginia Lee, URI Coastal Resources Center
Glenn Ricci, URI Coastal Resources Center
Michael Campana, URI CRC
Kristina Perrelli, URI Student

