

Steering Committee Meeting
Thursday, October 19, 2017
10:00am

Present: Deb McCormick
Steve Lynch
Mike Didio
Jim Sierzenga
Ken Post
Kathleen Cuddy
Megan Bell
Aileen McNabb-Coleman
Leslie Baxter

The meeting began at 10:05am

The group reviewed the meeting minutes from the previous steering committee meeting on August 24, 2017, the Agricultural representative's stakeholder group meeting on September 21, 2017 and the Lake Owner/Advocate stakeholder group meeting on October 6, 2017. The group agreed that the steering committee meeting minutes and the Agricultural representative's stakeholder group meeting minutes were appropriate as written and could be added to the project website. However, the group would like Steve Lynch, who attended the Lake Owner/Advocate stakeholder group meeting to expand those meeting minutes and share them with the group for final approval before putting them on the project website.

The group asked how the Lake Owner/Advocate group meeting went. Steve shared that it went well, a lot of good discussion surrounding the process for updating the rules and regulations. Also a lot of discussion surrounded what other areas in the State are doing to solve the problem, as well as various causes of the problem. Steve mentioned that economic impact was also a topic of discussion at this meeting. (I.e. economic impacts to the community as whole, not just the agricultural community) Steve shared that if the states adopts the revisions they have to abide by the process set forth by SEQR which would include and economic analysis study.

The group discussed what members of the public who attended the meeting viewed as the cause of the issues within the Lake. Steve mentioned Dr. Boyer, scientist with NYS, who studies harmful algal blooms and the various causes.

Steve shared some discussion he had been having with his staff regarding the direction of the project and the idea that some of the focus should be on educating the community about the rules and their existence and the inspection and violation process. A member of the Lake Advocate/Owner stakeholder group asked at the meeting when someone buys a house on the lake if they receive a copy of the watershed rules and regulations. Currently, they do not believe they do, but that would be a great way to get information and education out to the public.

Kathleen circulated a draft document for the group to review that was a “cleaned-up” version of the public comments, stakeholder discussion and expert feedback to use as a starting point for moving forward in revising the rules and regulations.

The group discussed the process moving forward and what the end goal of the process should be. Discussion focused on who would carry out the actual writing of the revisions. The group discussed whether it should be a single expert or scientist or a team of various staff from different areas of expertise within the community.

The group also discussed whether we needed to start from scratch in the process or do we clarify and strengthen the existing rules with small edits/amendments and focus on having a stronger inspection program with better resources and on educating the public. The process of completely amending it through the State DOH and State Department of Ag and Markets can be a very long and drawn out process. The opposite path would be to look at the existing rules and regulations and drafting an interpretation of the how they should be implemented and have that interpretation be accepted by the Town of Owasco, The City of Auburn and Cayuga County and focus on giving more resources to the inspection program, giving the inspection program the ability to properly enforce what is currently in existence. There is currently not enough manpower both at the Soil and Water Conservation District or the Watershed Inspection Program to appropriately enforce the Watershed rules and regulations and any other sets of regulations that may be in place.

The group asked Jim and Ken if they knew approximately how many farms there are in the Watershed that are not CAFO’s. They thought approximately 300.

The group discussed how they would like to move forward in regards to the Watershed Inspection Program and not only enforcement of the current rules and regulations, but also education of the public to their existence and their purpose. Similar to zoning ordinances, often the process starts with the authority to have the ordinances, then definitions of the ordinances and who has the authority to enforce the ordinances before finally moving into the actual ordinances. The group thought that providing some clarification might give the Watershed Inspectors more credible authority. Many rules and regulations often have guidance documents that accompany them that offer clarification

Kathleen asked if the group should look at the process in two steps: 1. In the short-term clarifying the existing regulations with definitions and an accompanying document and 2. In the long-term add necessary revisions and go through the amendment process with the State. The group discussed the current Watershed Inspection Program and how amending and/or clarifying the current rules and regulations could strengthen the program and offer assistance in educating the public in regards to the Watershed Rules and Regulations as well enforcing what is currently in place. The program currently has 2 full-time Watershed Inspectors that cover the entire Watershed.

The group discussed Skaneateles’ Watershed Rules and Regulations and shared that a lot of it is individualized on a more farm by farm basis (as each landscape is different) through the utilization of a Whole Farm plan. In the Owasco Watershed there are several farms that are not large enough or do not have animals so therefore they are not regulated by CAFOs and also

choose not to participate in any government reimbursement programs, therefore other than the rules and regulations there are no regulations that they must follow.

Kathleen mentioned that discussion at another meeting had focused on the 9E plan and whether the group would be wise to wait until that is released in 2019 to move anything further with the Watershed Rules and Regulations Update project. The group felt that was too long of a time to wait and that the public wants and deserves to have something accomplished regarding this project prior to that.

There are a lot of people connected to the implementation of the Rules and Regulations and the group would like to invite some of those members to attend the next steering committee meeting. The additional members would include staff from soil and water, environmental health, planning office, the watershed inspectors, and the Finger Lakes HUB. The group discussed the goal of the next meeting and wanted to include that goal as part of the meeting invitation.

The meeting will try to be scheduled for either November 13th or November 14th in the afternoon.

Leslie shared that Dr. Greg Boyer is speaking at the CCC Auditorium on November 6th at 7:30pm. He is planning a 45 minute lecture and then a 30 minute period for questions and answers.

Meeting adjourned at 11:20am.