



Management Committee Meeting Minutes

March 16, 2022 (DRAFT)

Hudson River Foundation – Remote Meeting

Participants

Management Committee: Pinar Balci (NYCDEP), Rick Balla (EPA), Lisa Baron (USACE), Tracy Brown (Riverkeeper), Elizabeth Butler (EPA), Hugh Carola (Hackensack Riverkeeper, PAWG), Meredith Comi (NY/NJ Baykeeper, CAC), Lisa Congiu (NJDEP, WQWG), Chris Daggett (HRF), Jason Fagel (NYSDEC), Allison Fitzgerald (NJCU, CAC), Ann Fraioli (BOP, NY-Educator), Margaret Flanagan (PAWG), Lingard Knutson (EPA), Marit Larson (NYC Parks, RWG), Tom Laustsen (PVSC/NJHDG), Kate Lawrence-Shetty (PANYNJ), Jessie Murray (NOAA), Rob Pirani (HEP), Evelyn Powers (IEC), Patti Rafferty (NPS), Cathryn Schaffer (NJDEP), Clay Sherman (NJDEP), Shino Tanikawa (NYCSWD, WQWG-CAC), Judith Weis (Rutgers, STAC), Peter Wepler (USACE), and Cathy Yuhás (Hudson County Schools, NJ-Educator)

HRF/HEP Office Staff and Guests: Vince Bacalan (EPA), Elizabeth Balladares, Rosana Da Silva, Sara Harrison, Jon Kramer, Isabelle Lavarone (?), Melissa Sinisgalli (PVSC), Isabelle Stinnette, Bryce Wisemiller (USACE)

Minutes

1. Welcome and agenda review

Rob Pirani welcomed the committee and reviewed the agenda.

2. Review and approval of December 2021 Meeting Minutes

Rob Pirani reviewed the December minutes.

Action: December 2021 minutes were approved, motioned by Rick Balla and seconded by Patti Rafferty.

3. Update on USACE Harbor and Tributaries Study

The USACE is restarting the Harbor and Tributaries Study (HATS), which is assessing alternatives for addressing coastal flooding across the region that was initiated back in 2016. Bryce Wisemiller shared federal funding was resumed in October 2021. USACE is shooting to release the report and have public meetings late summer, early fall. The plan that will be selected will likely be layered – educational, shared responsibilities between states and land owners, and proceed with the low hanging fruit projects. After Hurricane Ida, USACE received \$6.7M of DRSAA funds to fully fund HATS. Bryce provided a recap of the different alternatives: Alternative 1 is the future without project implementation where USACE is looking at future conditions within the study area if nothing is done and aid to identify where there are coastal vulnerabilities. Alternative 2 is the largest alternative in

terms of scale, costs and construction timeline. The alternative 2 includes a storm surge gate from Sandy Hook to Breezy Point and then another at Throgs Neck. Alternative 3A steps further back with gates at the mouth of the Arthur Kill, Verrazano Narrows, and Throgs Neck. Alternative 3B looks at gates at the Arthur Kill and the Kill van Kull, and has a Jamaica Bay feature from the Narrows all the way back to Rockaway Peninsula. Alternative 4 includes the Jamaica Bay features and places a gate on the Hackensack River. Alternative 5 is only shoreline-based measures, most notably in Jersey City, East Harlem, and parts of Manhattan Island. Alternative 6 is a nonstructural plan, but given the type of housing and structures in the study area, this would cause complications to develop a nonstructural plan although USACE will advance natural and nature-based features throughout each alternative, particularly in Jamaica Bay. Bryce shared a graph on sea level change projections and a graph to show how Alternative 3A, 3B, and 4 are faring. For environmental considerations, there are a number of factors to review including the use of the ecological model that has been developed to help inform on the various projects and the construction duration. According to the timeline, USACE anticipates a chief's report will be prepared by June 2024.

Judy Weis relayed her concern that the abutments and other fixed infrastructure of the tide would change the hydrology of these tidal areas, even when gates are open. She asked if there is any way to construct gates without placing fixed structures in the water? Bryce noted that the towers in the suggested design would be placed in the water and this is a valid concern. Based on initial conceptual designs, the USACE are looking at the impact through the ecological model. Alternative 2 has the greatest effect, but they are trying to come up with quantification to make an informed decision. Peter Wepler indicated they are seeking to minimize the changes to the estuary. Rob Pirani asked, assuming USACE moves forward with an alternative that focused on smaller barriers, if the USACE be engaging in public meetings in those project areas or more general meetings across the study area? Bryce indicated that USACE wants to have meetings throughout the study area as well as in the impacted areas. Congress is supportive of public engagement and the USACE is looking to engage the public throughout this process. Lingard Knutson inquired about the energy source for the gates and whether the USACE has thought about if something like Hurricane Sandy cuts power to the region? Bryce indicated the gates are electrical, but would be designed with a second alternative source to be able to open/close the gate. The Stamford Hurricane Barrier can be viewed [here](#) which also has a sophisticated system to provide energy to the gate.

Action: A Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement to be completed this summer followed by public meetings on the draft report.

4. Proposed BIL and HEP FY 2023 Workplans

Rob Pirani presented on draft workplans for the \$909,800 that HEP will receive under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) as well as the anticipated \$750,000 in base funding for HEP in FY 23. Rob thanked Vince Bacalan, Lingard Knutson, and the EPA team on aiding HEP to prepare for the funding while we wait for the official guidance. HEP staff have been meeting with partners and work groups to discuss project ideas/feedback with the anticipation of sharing a final workplan to the Policy Committee this June. Rob provided an overview of the 9 projects being considered for BIL funding from green infrastructure, climate resiliency and climate-ready culverts, habitat restoration, urban shoreline monitoring, pilot projects in Jamaica Bay to understand sea level rise restoration, public

access, capacity building and engagement through small grant RfPs, and supporting concept plans for shoreline remediation along the Passaic. Overall, the proposed projects are distributed almost evenly by the two states, target 8 of 10 waterbody regions, all advance infrastructure, 7 of the 9 will address climate change, and 72% are within EJ/underserved communities (though this is without considering the projects that would be supported through the small grant RfPs). Rick Balla thanked Rob for the overall review and process. Rick noted the SRFs in NY and NJ are also being significantly funded and Congress has made eligible CCMPs and NPS management programs through the SRFs.

Meredith Comi shared that during the CAC meeting yesterday, advocating for capacity building and small grant funding for project implementation is important. How we look at those small grants will be critical for some of those organizations to move forward. Rob added a sweet spot would be to support both the state/municipal planning initiatives as well as supporting those organizations in advancing local issues and projects. Judy Weis asked if HEP could estimate whether these proposed projects would result in measurable improvements to estuarine health? Rob indicated that is the goal, but recognizing that HEP resources are not sufficient for most capital projects, our intent is that HEP can help create the planning studies and/or monitoring that would lead to the implementation of projects by others.

Rob Pirani shared the FY 23 workplan. Appropriations Bill was just past a week ago and HEP is anticipating \$750,000 for HEP and EPA has also asked for support for the UWFP Ambassador positions which may change our final FY 23 budget. As BIL funding would be dedicated to projects, the staff time paid for under the FY 23 workplan will be tied to BIL Year One projects. Two \$10,000 projects are proposed to support outreach and shoreline cleanups in connection with a NOAA grant received by Hoboken and Riverkeeper to remove ADVs and another to continue a second year of our support community stewardship for eel monitoring. HEP proposes to provide a small honorarium to partner organizations to encourage engagement on HEP's management committee and noted that to begin this effort HEP will likely need to maintain this funding. Meredith Comi and Allison Fitzgerald added they were glad to hear that this is being considered. Tom Laustsen agreed. Meredith added this would help to get more NJ groups to the table. Rick Balla added that the FY 23 looks good and EPA will be looking to see if there are other opportunities for the region, but that the \$750,000 final budget per NEP has passed.

Action: Comments are due no later than March 31st to Rob Pirani on the proposed BIL workplan and the FY 23 workplan.

5. STAC and Management Committee Role and Membership

Rob Pirani thanked Judy Weis for prompting this conversation regarding the Science and Technical Advisory Committee. With Judy's help, HEP has reviewed other STACs across NEPs function and how HEP has engaged the STAC. Rob proposed strengthening the role of the STAC in helping create the CCMP, specifically the Environmental Monitoring Plan, State of the Estuary and ensuring good science and best practices are used and embedded in the Action Agenda. In addition, the STAC would play a role in quality management and connecting/engaging research in the region. HEP proposes to bring STAC members once per year to help HEP staff in the preparation and implementation of the CCMP. Allison Fitzgerald shared support in the propose STAC charge and key milestones. Rob introduced Jon Kramer as a nominee to co-chair the STAC and the 2022 meeting will include a discussion on how the

STAC will meet this charge. Judy Weis thanked Jeff Levinton for moving her to engage this conversation to advance the STAC forward. Jon Kramer thanked the Management Committee for his nomination.

At the last couple of Policy Committee meetings, there have been requests to have the Policy Committee meet more frequently. Rob proposed a revised meeting schedule where the Spring meeting would focus on the Annual Work Plan and Budget, add a new Summer meeting for field visits to promote or recognize partnerships advancing AA priorities, continue to participate in the HEP annual conference in the Fall, and a new winter meeting which could be a joint meeting with the Management Committee to have an annual review of HEP accomplishments. A poll was launched and 74% of the committee answer they would like hybrid management committee meetings this year. When asked about interest of additional HEP leadership in-person networking event in 2022, 58% answered yes, they would attend in-person. Shino Tanikawa suggested make two meetings fully virtual (perhaps Spring and Winter) and two in-person meetings (one in NY and one in NJ) with a virtual option. Meredith Comi liked that idea. Judy Weis indicated that the summer season is a time where many are on vacation and may not be great for in-person. Chris Daggett indicated that a joint Management and Policy Committee would be valuable to encourage discussion and that would be best to do that in person.

Rob Pirani shared that Brett Branco's term as the NY co-chair has come to an end per the Water Quality Work Group's bylaws. The Work Group has nominated Shino Tanikawa to assume the role as the NY co-chair for a two-year term. Shino has been with HEP for many years, perhaps since the inspection, and the work group will benefit from Shino's leadership.

Action: Jon Kramer's nomination as co-chair of the STAC was motioned by Judy Weis and seconded by Rick Balla and approved by all. Shino Tanikawa's nomination as the NY-co-chair for the Water Quality work group was motioned by Rick Balla and seconded by Jason Fagel and approved by all.

6. Launch 2025 Environmental Monitoring Plan

Rosana Da Silva outlined the process for updating our [environmental monitoring plan](#) and estuary indicators. A number of indicators were adopted from 2018 that preceded the last CCMP from 1996. This update is an opportunity to review the indicator list and determine whether or not these indicators are still critical to answering estuarine health and that monitoring programs are collecting data on the indicator. Each indicator is organized across HEP's five goals and an additional list of suggested indicators are proposed for feedback. Ann Fraioli suggested under community engagement, HEP should consider tracking some EJ indicators. Shino Tanikawa supported this suggested. Rosana thanked Ann and encouraged the committee to think about EJ indicators as well as climate-related indicators will be an important focus for this update. Rosana reiterated that the first meeting the STAC will come together will be around the indicators being proposed for the 2025 update.

Action: Committee members are encouraged to provide comments on the shared word document to Rosana (rosana@hudsonriver.org) by March 31st.

7. Updates from Work Groups and Committee Chairs

- Public Access Work Group: Rob Pirani shared the work group focused on the Hackensack Greenway led by Hudson County and building off from the [paddling guide](#). Pratt shared an online tool to create access points for paddling through swimming points. A new swimming subcommittee has been formed to build on +Pool efforts and others to enhance access to swimming and swim safety for all.
- Restoration Work Group: Lisa Baron shared the team finalized the update to the [Restoration Activity Map](#) and recognized the work group's efforts. The group also began to create a focus priority list by all of the agencies so that when funding becomes available, they have some consensus to move priorities forward.
- Water Quality Work Group: Lisa Congiu discussed the work group's efforts in identifying and advancing BIL project ideas. In addition, through our efforts in developing a [shared waters communication strategy](#), we are moving forward with our next phase to interview key individuals. We ask the Management Committee to notify the chairs and Rosana whether there are key individuals that should be interviewed that could help shape the shared waters communications.
- Harbor Educators Work Group: Rosana Da Silva shared the work group will be meeting next week and providing opportunities for peer-to-peer feedback on place-based activities and lessons. The last meeting, the group focused on collective impact and potential indicators to consider.
- Citizen Advisory Committee: Allison Fitzgerald shared the CAC met yesterday, but are focusing on new priorities this year such as habitat, climate resiliency, and engaging new community groups (especially in New Jersey). Yesterday's meeting focused on urban forests and groundwater recharge/flooding which naturally flowed into equity and environmental justice conversations. Meredith Comi shared the CAC is supportive of small grants through the BIL funding that will be made available by HEP.
- Urban Waters Federal Partnerships: Liz Balladares updated that efforts are being made to plan a series of events in celebration of the 10-year anniversary of the partnership on March 30th. We are exploring how BIL funding could help collaboration and coordination in the Passaic.

8. Partner Updates

- Rob Pirani updated that the NY-NJ Watershed Protection Act has been steadily advancing in Congress with thanks to NY/NJ Baykeeper, Riverkeeper and Scenic Hudson. Congresswoman Malliotakis (Staten Island) has signed on as a co-sponsor and are hopeful that the language would be added to WRDA 2022. If successful, this bill would provide \$50M a year in grants through NFWF for estuary enhancement activities.
- Rob Pirani shared the bill the President signed includes \$1.2M to launch the planning for the four initial HRE sites. Lisa Baron added that the USACE will be advancing pre-construction and design of the four projects – Stony Creek Marsh Island, Flushing Creek with NYCDEP, Bronx Zoo and Dam and Stone Mill Dam fish passage with NYC Parks, and Naval Station Earle Oysters with NJDEP and NY/NJ Baykeeper. In addition, Spring Creek South Multi-Purpose Feasibility Study also was funded \$1.2M in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, as well as funded \$500,000 in the President's budget which fully funds the project.