Ashburnham MVP Municipal Meeting Kickoff
December 14, 2023

Attendees: Brittany Woodhouse, Catherine Laramie, Rosemarie Eldrid Meissner, Brian Doheny, Randy Williams, Anna Wilkins, Ralph Baker, Chris Picone, Sara Singh, Paulina Torres, Will Collier.

NBS Discussion:

Randy shares that stormwater runoff from heavy rains are a priority concern in Ashburnham. Specifically that many culverts cannot handle the additional water flow. He asks the MVP team how a Nature-Based Solution may be integrated to help this issue.

Chris agrees, adding that Southern Ashburnham (aka "South Ash") faces the largest impacts from this issue.

- Streets have been closed off previously due to flooding. Murray Rd. presented as an example.
- The town's most vulnerable population resides in S.Pleasant St in the South Ash area, which is the lowest point in town. The Whitman River, a tributary of the North Nashua River runs through South Ash. There are some rain gardens there.
- NBS alone cannot solve the extensive flooding problem.

Anna shares that many lake-side homes that were previously only resided in temporarily during summer as camps have been transitioning into year-round homes.

- Stormwater runoff from these homes is going straight into water bodies, as stormwater connection was never engineered in the area.
- Additionally, road runoff is also making its way to the lakes, Anna suggests that it would be beneficial to assess where road runoff in the area is leading.

Ralph mentions a prior historical tour of South Ashburnham that he took, sharing about the history of the many factories that used to be in the area. This could help explain why and how water flow runs in the area.

Attendees agree that these issues are complicated in their severity and size, and are a top priority for Ashburnham. Discussion ensues on other observations within the town to consider.

Anna and Ralph suggest that Ashburnham could provide interconnected adaptations within this overall Watershed-scale project. Mentioning that the town has headwaters that could help with issues downstream in Fitchburg.

Brian mentions that dams in Ashburnham should be assessed as they would affect downstream flooding if they were to fail.

- Rosemary adds that many of those dams are non-jurisdictional, and under uncertain conditions. Some coming from prior factories and mills, an estimate of approximately 28 dams.
- Phillips Brook is mentioned as a tributary of importance as it has several of these dams.

- Chris adds that beaver dams are additional issues of significance on Holt Rd, Bush Hill Rd, Rindge State Rd, and Sherbert Rd. These dams contribute to erosion damage within the surrounding neighborhoods. Beaver deceivers have been put in place along Rt. 101, that have not been well maintained. An additional deceiver was placed around Bush Hill Rd this past fall by Gary and Lorraine that seems to be working well.
- Randy pointed out that there is a lot of shallow ledge in Ashburnham, and in such places water doesn't filter in well, it just runs off.

Chris suggests an additional NBS site idea: A previous swimming hole closed down in the 1980s includes a dam that has since been breached.

- In this area an additional dam was put in place that is also breached but still holds water back. Phillips Brook flows into the dam and out.
- Opening it up to allow more water flow could add resiliency. This idea is more of a 'low hanging fruit' in comparison to some others. Still worthy of mentioning and recording for this project.

Project planning suggestions:

Anna suggests looking through the prior MVP Planning document for the town from 2021 as much work has already been compiled by Ashburnham in that effort, which would be beneficial to this project.

Rosemarie asks for clarification on the project's deliverables, and how to best set up an implementation plan for NBS in the future.

- Sara clarifies that this project is a planning phase project, this grant would not cover any implementation but the goal is to provide each town/city with beneficial materials to help carry out future grant applications towards implementation of NBS.
- During this project, the plan would entail a list of NBS and specific sites for each town, as well as work towards defining the feasibility of implementation in some sites.

Anna suggests looking into TNC resiliency maps for the town of Ashburnham, as they would be helpful for future planning and implementation.

- Sara agrees to find maps and share with attendees.
- Chris and Anna discuss the benefits and limitations of these maps, stating that they are more beneficial on a larger scale and could have limitations on a smaller town-wide scale.
- Sara suggests MAPC green infrastructure siting tool as an additional resource. While it is limited to the Boston and Metro-west area, plans to update the tool with our 5 focus municipalities are of interest. This tool plots information on a parcel by parcel basis.
- Sara will circulate a set of resources, incl. links.

Will adds that during this project, the plan would help rank NBS and sites to give a 'buffet' of future actions to take in each municipality.

Rosemarie suggests the format and details of the Rapid Recovery Plan reports would be a beneficial way to view this project's information. This would be a great addition to future grant applications.

Community Outreach and Vulnerabilities:

Sara asks attendees what they have noticed about public involvement, outreach, and vulnerabilities in town.

Brian opens the discussion stating that in previous outreach efforts, public comments were dominated by national level climate change concerns such as those of electricity grid concerns. At the time, the concerns in Texas were dominating news sources, bringing many of these concerns to Ashburnham's meetings.

Brian adds that dam communications are difficult in town, reaching folks when a dam breaks is critical and not an easy task.

Anna shares that the public in town share their concerns openly, however many may not attend a town meeting to discuss such concerns.

- Anna suggests to focus on S. Ashburnham issues, these concerns would greatly gather interest to the public for engagement. 'Water in S. Ash, what are we gonna do?'
- Perhaps a meeting held in S. Ashburnham, such as at the Bresnahan Center, with a site walk element would be beneficial.
- Public is nervous about dam removal conversations.

Rosemarie shares that dam removal education could be beneficial. She also shares observations of real estate trends within floodplain areas.

- At various Lake properties and other areas, people are starting to sell their homes.

Anna suggests reaching out to Lake associations and communities. Surveys would be beneficial in cases where meetings aren't accessible.

Will mentions the project's limitations in the case of community engagement. The project entails 1-in person meeting in each community, there are limitations to how wide of an audience can be reached.

- We must include different engagement pieces and strategies aside from meetings to get information from as many groups as possible.

Will asks attendees what the case is for natural swimming areas in town.

Chris details that there is no public access to water bodies in town. A small area exists at one lake with little access (2 car parking limit).

- This point would gather interest for community meetings.
- Chris adds that while Ashburnham does not experience heat island effect issues like other municipalities may be facing, that swimming access is still important to the area.

Rosemarie and Brian suggest that dam conversations would gather interest from the public as well.

- Town of Ashburnham owns many dams, causing management issue concerns from the public.

- Poor planning in the history of Ashburnham's water treatment plant and pump station continues to cause issues and high water and sewer costs for the entire community.
- Rosemarie points out that setting up expectations early in community engagement is crucial. Many of the heavy issues discussed during this meeting will not be solved by this project, thus explaining the limitations of the project upfront is necessary.

Brian suggests that a vulnerable population in town are those who get flooded out during extreme weather events. Roads are a big deal here. Mentioning 'islands' of neighborhoods that became closed off from the rest of town in previous flooding events.

Rosemarie shares Cushing St strong water flow during this summer's rain events, large water flows through the street carrying dangerous amounts of sediment.

- It would be beneficial to think about the instances of other places in town where this might happen.
- Brian adds detail of road shoulders with 2-4" trap rock being scoured out during flood events on Russell Hill Rd. during September's storm.

Sara asks attendees the current standing of parks and playgrounds in town.

Rosemarie shares that at Winchester Park and River St Park there are implementation plans being made for resilience updates.

- Winchester Park plans included permeable pavement placement, wildlife habitats, and wetland restoration
- River St. Park plans included invasive species management.
- Implementation plans for these parks are already in place, however lack funding to start labor.

Chris adds that Sweeney Playground in S. Ashburnham could benefit from updates.

- It is just downstream of the Whitney Pond Dam, which is slated to be removed under a DER program that the NRWA (Jessica et al.) is involved with.
- Tree plantings for shade
- Fence is failing and needs updates
- Runoff issues from truck cleaning at Roy Bros., which has impaired the water quality of the Whitman R.
- Chris adds that the Whitman River adjacent to the park lacks many invertebrate species, speaking to the water quality. He also suggests that the park would be beneficial for educational purposes such as river macroinvertebrate program. However currently it would require walking to other locations downstream from the park.

MVP COMMUNITY MEETING #1
Ashburnham Town Hall - January 31, 2024

Attendees

Randy Williams, Rosemarie Meissner, Brian Cunningham, Cathy Cunningham, Bill Johnson, Clare Deucher, Cecilia Snow, Rebecca Merrell, Gary Howland, Patty Johnson, Thomas Ryll, Sophia Dehof, Courtney Neforas, Anna Wilkins, Carolyn Sellars, Fred Sellars, Walt Meissner, Brian Doheny, Sarah Culgin, Britany Woodhouse, Adrienne Lennon, Hillary King, Tom Groves, Ralph Baker

Ashburnham Focus Group 1

Parcels near water that the Town / ConCom / AgCom could acquire:

Center Street Parcel on Whitman River (Whitney Pond Dam)

Czajkowski Living Trust property (Center St)

Russell Hill Forest (Brown Brook)

Fitchburg Water Supply land

Murray Road

South Pleasant (prone to flooding)

Protection of **Factory Village's** surrounding pond

Meetinghouse Hill

Beaver deceivers needed!

Ashburnham Focus Group 2

Sweeney Playground on stream - oil property & industrial abutters

Route 101 - 4 dams, the 3 lowest ones have already breached. The top one is privately held & is being repaired. Would be very impactful.

Complete Neighborhoods Partnership Grant with MRPC for all towns along Northern Tier Railroad

Lower Naukeag, Paige Ave - stormwater from former camp residences

Old Ashby Road - 2 failed culverts by the 101 Rindge Turnpike

Murray Road, South Ashburnham => floodplain, multifamily housing, residents are low income

Downtown, Puffer Street - floodplain, workforce housing, DPW

<u>Ashburnham Focus Group 3</u>

Whitney Pond dam removal

DPW properties that should be restored: **pool area, Murray Road, baseball fields, Lake Watatic**

Williams Road pump station - flooding into waters

Winnekeag Lake Dam (private) **& Factory Village Dam** (state $ to remove this privately owned & abandoned dam)

Spurriers Lot - impermeable pavement (4-6 acres), privately owned

Lake Watatic - Broadhurst Point: very small, 4 parking spots, already public but inaccessible. Managed by Ashburnham Conservation Trust

Russel Hill - an opportunity to connect resilient areas to vulnerable areas

The Town Dump that's near the wetlands

MVP COMMUNITY MEETING #2: ZOOM
February 13, 2024

#1 DPW Fields: Scheduled for redevelopment, hoping to move the DPW in next several years, declare it as surplus property and redevelop it. Brownfield studies have been done. Flooding on Puffer Street, from Phillips Brook, but it doesn't reach the DPW. The Riverfront Area extends onto DPW but not substantially. Naturally occurring arsenic in soil, petroleum in top few inches of soil. Was a railroad station at one point.

#2 Baseball Fields: Ballfields are in the floodplain. Sewer pump station is just below the #2 ballfields, in the floodplain – it's a problem. Sewer pump station is a big deal, but the ballfields are not.

#3 Phillips Brook area near River Street Park: Old town swimming pool, abandoned due to beaver activity upstream. The idea is to try to do something with the parcel in a parklike manner. Viewsheds into Phillips Brook, nature trails on town property. Most of the property is in the Riverfront Area, existing wetlands. NRWA went to this property & removed invasive plants. Former pool area was completely overtaken by invasives. Multiple dams on Phillips Brook. Habitat restoration design by Conway School. Open Space & Rec Committee & community keen on doing something on this property. Very visible from Main Street, will catch people's eye, educational opportunity, town owned.

#4 Winchester Park Memorial Drive: Conway School of Landscape Design – Focused on adding trees, urban forestry grant for 5 tree installation. Preparing for a pollinator garden. Permeable trail system. A lot is happening there already.

#5 J.R. Briggs Elementary School: Perimeter around the school. South of school – braided stream, wetlands. Vernal pool on the site. Also wetland north of entrance road. Not a high priority site. Some rain gardens are already on site.

#6 Pump Station: One of the highest priorities for the town because of flooding. Trucks have to pump the area. Overflow problems that go into the Whitman River. Doesn't show as being in floodplain, so is it the pump station itself has an issue. Groundwater under the tank rises. I&I problem. Randy, DPW superintendent would know better. Need to relocate the pump station. Look at the new FEMA map that came out a couple of weeks ago. A FEMA map shows it in the floodplain.

#7 Whitney Pond Dam: In process of trying to take this dam down. Continuously applying for grants. Just submitted an application for dredging. A lot of restoration is going on. A lot is already in motion for this one. Permitting seems to be taking forever. Randy DPW would know more, he's coordinating it. Still haven't filed NOI with Con Com. The longer the permits drag out, the less aligned with the grants. Permitting has to be reevaluated, and then get it done. Why is it taking so long? Town gov't needs to move forward. Rosemarie: Have applied for grants but have failed to get them.

#8 Sweeney Park: Playground that borders the Whitman River. In really rough shape, no trees, barely any grass, a lot of pavement, fence (recently fixed) along the river. Highly used. Could be a great educational opportunity. Sits next to oil company. Probably in Zone AE in the floodplain (see FEMA data). A while ago some trees got planted by NRWA but all got pulled out. Con Com worked with Al Futterman to get approval to plant trees without DPW permission, so DPW moved them because of potential for DPW to have to maintain them. Basketball court is cracking, drainage

problems. It's in the floodplain. Not sure of the quality of the paved path. It's in an industrial zone. On the other side of the river on South Pleasant Street, have continuous water main breaks & flooding. Con Com had to constantly issue enforcement orders to the oil company b/c they would wash their trucks right next to the brook, cut channel to brook to facilitate drainage. Porous pavement basketball courts can be done.

#9 Murray Road: Horrible drainage – 7 lots ANR lots on road = disaster, also solar array farm is a disaster. Solar farm blew out and flooded Murry Road, and continues to be a problem. West area is a lumber yard, they removed a lot of trees, so runoff is a big issue. Con Com & DEP CERO have coordinated on enforcement actions. Have contacted EPA – no permit for NPDES. Being taken care of in other ways, Con Com is doing all that can be done. Country style drainage along Murray Road doesn't work once the housing, etc. have been added.

#10 Dam on Ashby Road: Privately held dam, owners are fixing it, not a priority. But drainage from this area impacts downstream roads. However, if that dam goes, then there goes the whole downtown.

Downstream of the dam - A lot of non-jurisdictional Phillips Brook dams that have been breached along the way along Ashby Road & Water Street. There was a lot of beaver activity, but not a lot now.

#11 Dump/Transfer Station: The back of the property isn't used at all. Waste Management trucks everything out except for brush which gets burned. May soon close. May regionalize, may have people send trash to Winchendon. Did renew contract with Waste Management for one more year.

#12 Bluefield Brook: Tuckerman Road (west of Bush Hill Road) houses were built, foundations were in the water. Flood zone. Need more info on this one.

#13 Page Ave: Concern from Con Com, needs stormwater management at the right of way to the beach. Near Page beach. Con Com approved improvements for the right-of-way to the beach (from Page Ave). Tried doing things to slow the water down. Issue likely was raised again. It's an easy thing to resolve. Worth looking at it on the site walk. Private roads, private property. The neighborhood association is likely to be open to doing something even though it is on private property.

#14 High St/Cushing St: Also came up as Meeting House Hill. Abandoned dam that has been breached, it seeps from base, very little water held behind it. Fieldstone & sheer concrete walls, old town reservoir, breached during the 1938 hurricane. Sends a lot of water down. Tributary to Phillips Brook. Heavy rains send rock, soil, sand, & oil down Cushing Street & High Street down to Main Street….Main street gets covered, which happened 3 - 4 times last year. Gets into brand new detention ponds, filled one in one summer. Had to dig sand out by hand. Open culvert on High St jettisons it out into the wetland behind her house, a lot of force**. Issue is drainage on Cushing and High Street.** Town has a collapsed culvert that they put structure into…

#15 South Branch of Souhegan River where it crosses Old Ashby Road just south of Billy Ward Pond: Flooding. Between Marble and Billy Ward Ponds on Ashby Road. Culvert may be in danger of collapse. Con Com got a letter from the property owner saying the culvert caused problems and created wetlands, but old maps show it as wetlands. It has always been wetlands. If a culvert has

a structural integrity issue, then that should be attended to. Important area for ecological connections. Blanding's Turtle habitat in this area. Randy DPW would know history/info.

#16 Czajkowski Trust Property adjacent to Whitney Pond:

#17 Factory Village Pond: private dam, private property, but if dam goes, it's a big mess. Easy to park next to it. He wanted to sell it to the town. House newly purchased.

#18 Jewell Hill Habitat Connections: Preserved by Trustees of Reservations other adjacent preserved lands. Can we introduce a wildlife corridor? Proposed connection to mid-state trail.

Somewhere else in town:
Two failed culverts at north end. Route 101 dams.

Dr. Chris Picone's follow-up email:

1. "River Parks" as a means to cool off, since we have no public access to a swimming area (besides tiny Broadhurst Pt., way out on the N side of town.). River Parks include the Bresnahan Town Park, which NRWA has already started helping to clear of invasive plants. It was a swimming area until 1980's when the dam was breached due to high E coli counts. Another river park is the river behind the Sweeney Playground. It would require a cleanup, and removing the fencing that separates the playground from the river. But that would provide multiple ecological and social benefits on South Ash, the closest we have to an EJ community.

2. Briggs Elementary School has a drainage swale around the large field along Williams Rd. It is now mowed, but would be a low-hanging fruit to add vegetation, and maybe shade trees?.

3. We talked about running the town sewer up to a few densely populated lake areas, in an effort to reduce nutrient input into the lakes. It is probably not $$ practical, but could be listed as part of our brainstorming.

4. At the Bresnahan Park is a breached dam that used to create a swimming hole. That river is flowing nicely. But just upstream, on the same town-owned parcel, is an old mill pond/dam that does no good. The water is shallow and skanky, low in oxygen (I measured it for Martha 10 years ago). It would be easy to breach that dam too, just like the one below.

This may be crazy, but I was thinking we improve climate preparedness by leaving the concrete sides of these two dams. That way water flows like a restored river most days, but in the event of a severe storm, the dams can still hold back some water. "Slow the flow" to Phillips Brook.

Either way, breaking a hole in that upper, small dam would be easy and very helpful on this site. Hopefully folks can take a look on the site visit.