**DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY**

**Attendance:** Vic Putman (Chair), Jackie Bowen, Bill Wellman, James Dawson, Laura Generous, Jane Gregware, Steve Kramer, Ricky Laurin, Tom Metz, Anna Reynolds, Mayor Rosenquest, Charlotte Staats, Ahren Von Schnell, Fred Woodward

**LCBP Staff:** Mae Kate Campbell, Katie Darr, Eric Howe, Erin Vennie-Vollrath

**Presenter:** David Miller

Meeting summary by Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

**1:00 – 1:15 pm**

1. **Welcome and Introductions** – Vic Putman
2. **Public Comments**

No public comments were made.

**1:15 – 2:15 pm**

1. **Clean Water Infrastructure Needs in Local Communities** – David Miller

David Miller, Clean Water Program Coordinator at the Adirondack Council, provided an overview of the Adirondack Council’s clean water infrastructure report from October 2020 and the new white paper on septic system pollution. He highlighted clean water infrastructure needs in the Adirondacks including the Lake Champlain watershed. The report ***Adirondack Clean Water 2020: Successes Made/Wastewater Treatment Needs Ahead*** can be found [here](https://www.adirondackcouncil.org/vs-uploads/pdf/1602613809_Adirondack_Park_Clean_Water_Report_2020.pdf). The white paper ***Protecting Adirondack Waters from Septic System Pollution*** can be found [here](https://www.adirondackcouncil.org/vs-uploads/pdf/1619805295_Septic_White_Paper_ADK_Council_Spring2021.pdf.pdf). A summary of David’s presentation is below.

**Clean Water Infrastructure:** Today’s snapshot of clean water infrastructure needs does not take into account tomorrow’s needs, this is an ongoing effort with a moving target. In response to growing infrastructure needs, the Governor and State Legislature have invested $3.5 billion in clean water infrastructure grant funds. Since the inception of New York State’s Clean Water Infrastructure Act in 2015, Adirondack communities have received over $58 million in grants for wastewater and drinking water facilities as well as other clean water programs. This includes grant funding from the Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC), NYSDEC Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP), Road Salt Storage program, and the NYSDEC assistance funds for engineering studies. For wastewater treatment/sewer system and engineering study grants, close to $39 million has been spent. Drinking water and road salt storage project grants total about $19 million. In total 72 projects over the past 5 years have resulted in $58 million in grant funding and $94 million in state revolving loan funds low-interest financing to cover the balance of the project costs. In Adirondack Park, $152 million has been invested in clean water and drinking water infrastructure improvement projects since 2015. This is an impressive start, but engineering studies show the large overall need that remains. EFC’s Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) grants, WQIP funding, and the Environmental Bond Act were postponed in 2020 due to COVID-19. WQIP applications for 2021 are open until July 30, 2021, more information available [here](https://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/4774.html). The Environmental Bond Act will go on the ballot in 2022.

The total cost estimate for clean water projects, with more studies still being completed, is over $117 million. These communities require expanded support so they can remain fiscally solvent and reach community clean water infrastructure needs. WIIA allows for EFC to provide grants of up to 60% of project costs with a $5 million cap, but EFC’s administrative rules set a cap of 25% of total project costs. The administrative cap has created an affordability gap for many communities in Adirondack Park due to their limited user base that is available to finance the remaining balance of project costs. A supplemental grant category is needed to move these projects forward and make them affordable. Most Adirondack communities fall within New York State’s hardship community category when applying for zero-interest loans from the EFC’s State Revolving Loan Funds. The Adirondack Common Ground Alliance has asked the State to establish a supplemental grant program for the needs of hardship communities requiring funding that exceeds the current 25% administrative cost share cap.

* Fred Woodward asked how a hardship community is defined. David clarified that it is a formula based on income levels and State Revolving Fund regulations. The communities in Adirondack Park don’t have the residential user base and income to repay the large loans required to carry out projects. It is difficult to assess hardship when there are multimillion-dollar homes on septic. There have been attempts to conduct income surveys for sewer districts but they have not been successful because there is a mistrust of giving away that personal information.

**Septic System Pollution:** The impacts of failing septic systems on Adirondack lakes, rivers, and streams are widespread. The conversion of summer homes to year-round homes and old septic systems are contributing to water quality including high E. coli levels, nitrogen and phosphorus loads, and Harmful Algal Blooms. The white paper examines the current status of septic in Adirondack Park and the resources and needs for property owners to make informed decisions. Septic systems are underground and are generally out of sight out of mind until there is a big problem. The key to any program is education, including why and how to monitor septic systems. Lake George has done extensive work to educate homeowners and develop programs including low-interest loans for homeowners and local ordinances. The role of local government is central to septic oversight. Queensbury and Bolton Landing have ordinances that require septic system inspection and upgrade during the sale of a property. However, even the Mayor of Queensbury has noted we have to look at septic repair and replacement beyond property transfer. The white paper provides recommendations for government officials about creating a septic system agenda for the future and it provides links and resources to homeowners.

Cohesive, collaborative efforts with other communities and funding support from state agencies are needed to help address septic system issues. Acid rain monitoring in the Adirondacks is a model, but it needs to be expanded to include phosphorus, nitrogen, e.coli, and other water quality issues in Adirondack Park. If we wait to find a HAB, we will be acting when the problem has already become a crisis. Ordinances calling for periodic inspections on septic systems are needed. Extension of sewer lines should be considered where appropriate. As of 2021, six Adirondack counties have been approved for the NYS Septic System Replacement Fund. Essex County was only allocated $170,000 this year, which is just 17 systems. There are many more systems that need to be updated. The Finger Lakes have extensive septic review and installation requirements to protect water quality. On Long Island, the DEC Nitrogen Removal Program approved a million dollars for homeowner grants, enabling over 1,000 septic system replacements. The funding is there but allocation needs to shift.

* Ricky Laurin noted that the mobile home park in Kings Bay was dumping straight into the lake, it takes much longer to clean up than it does to pollute. He asked if other private enterprises on lakes and rivers are being considered in this. David agreed that any older, centralized septic system on a lake or river needs to be monitored, maintained, and replaced. Depending on the location there may be an opportunity to upgrade the centralized station and hook it into the sewer system.
* Vic Putman asked about the state priority waterbodies list. The State Septic System Replacement Fund targets septic systems near priority waterbodies. The Boquet used to test below the hospital but never got an adverse water quality test, did testing need to be expanded? David noted that about a year and a half ago, they did some testing on the Boquet and found a high rate of E. coli, however, without DNA testing they could not affirmatively say whether it was from people or geese.
* Ricky asked if it would be useful to do sewer system outreach with people moving up from the city and may not know how sewer and septic systems work, how they should be used, monitored, and maintained. David agreed and noted that is why the first part of the white paper is focused on model education programs. Queensbury has done 101 inspections (for a fee) and found that 80% of septic systems had to have some type of repair with 50-60% requiring total replacement. This is a small sample size but gives an indication of the problem parkwide. Local governments need to conduct educational programs for new and existing residents. Lake associations play a key role in education and outreach. This is an all-hands-on-deck problem that will take years to address.

**2:15 – 2:45 pm**

1. **Discussion of NYCAC Priorities for the Lake Champlain Basin Program**

In preparation for the LCBP June Summit, this discussion featured a recap of the pre-summit round table meetings. Vic Putman, Jackie Bowen, and Walt Lender participated in the roundtable discussions to seed the conversation for the June Summit meeting. The goal of the June 2nd Summit is to formulate themes and priorities for the FY2022 budget and management themes for the LCBP. Following the summit, a survey will be distributed to committee members to ensure members who could not attend can reflect and offer insight on priority themes.

Jackie shared that climate change and environmental justice were big discussion points across both days. Vic noted that we discussed some of these issues at the last CAC meeting, including increased support for agricultural pesticide and herbicide monitoring. David’s white paper supports infrastructure needs to help protect water quality.

David suggested septic education and outreach. Vic clarified there are existing programs that address septic systems and conservation districts often lead the charge. Tom noted that more reinforcement of this couldn’t hurt. If the information is out there, it is important to understand how to better reach the audiences that current educational efforts are not getting through to.

If you cannot attend the June 2nd Summit but have priority themes and focus areas for the LCBP FY2022 budget you would like to be considered, please send them to Katie (kdarr@lcbp.org).

**2:45 – 3:15 pm**

1. **NYCAC Discussion *“Where Do We Go from Here?”* –** Vic Putman, Katie Darr, and Erin Vennie-Vollrath

**Membership:** Membership applications are due on June 30th, 2021. Both prospective and existing NYCAC members need to submit applications for NYSDEC appointment. Please review the bylaws, draft member manual, and application guidelines before applying. The primary differences between members and non-members are voting ability and attendance expectations. Members can vote, serve on sub-committees, serve as chair or vice-chair, and are asked to attend at least 75% of the meetings. Non-member meeting attendees are always welcome to attend meetings, ask questions, and voice concerns.

Ricky asked if we will be offsetting appointments. Eric suggested appointing an official slate of members and then randomly assigning them 1-3 year appointments. David added that the Long Island Sound Study CAC does not have terms for members, they continue to serve as long as they attend meetings.

**Future meetings:** Tom suggested an update on Miner’s run-off study. Vic noted in the past the NYCAC has done a site visit. Given the expanded body of members and participants, it would be a good topic to re-visit. Jane seconded this idea.

Katie will begin the planning process for a joint CAC meeting in the fall.

Jackie Bowen asked if the goal moving forward is to continue having presentations or if the NYCAC will work more actively to move issues forward as a committee. Eric noted that from the Lake Champlain Basin Program perspective, the group is heading in the right direction to advise the Steering Committee. There could be stronger engagement with officials in the New York State government. The NYCAC could organize a legislative day where members visit Albany to discuss issues with elected representatives. Tom noted that they have done days of action in Albany in the past to educate elected officials. Ricky agreed that the NYCAC needs a stronger presence in Albany and occasionally DC to show them this is an important area. Vic shared that the CAC has no budget and everyone is strictly a volunteer. It might be different if there was some funding to do education and outreach, PSAs, questionnaires, or field visits.

Jackie suggested future areas for engagement and next steps the CAC should take as an agenda item. Katie reminded the group that as the CAC Coordinator, she is here to help the NYCAC achieve its functions and goals. She will look into opportunities for engagement over the summer and always welcomes ideas.

David shared that the Long Island Sound Study CAC writes annual letters to the management conference on priorities of the CAC and annual letters to Congress on funding levels and suggestions to increase funding in identified priority areas. He suggested coordinated, joint letters with Vermont.

The NYCAC plans to meet next in September unless something pressing comes up. At the end of August, we will solicit suggestions for meeting topics and discussions.