

Newtown Creek CAG Steering Committee Meeting

Friday, July 11, 2014

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Via conference call

Attendees

Christine Holowacz, GWAPP, NCMC

Deb Mesloh, Long Island City Partnership

Mike Schade, CAG Co-chair

Paul Pullo, Metro Terminals

Sean Dixon, Riverkeeper

Stephen Fabian, EWVIDCO

Walker Holmes, Skeo Solutions

Willis Elkins, Newtown Creek Alliance

Discussion Notes

1. Announcements

a. Mike Schade, Willis Elkins, Sarah Durand, Sean Dixon, Mitch Waxman, and Christine Holowacz plan to attend a boat tour on Friday at 5:00 PM; Newtown Creek Group will be giving a tour of the Creek on one of the boats they use for sampling. Steering committee members discussed the possibility of a blog post after the tour in order to share information learned during the tour with the full CAG. Attendees of the tour will decide if this would be useful after the tour takes place.

b. There will be a public water taxi tour of Newtown Creek on Saturday.

2. Overview/Follow up from May meeting with New York State Department of Health

a. New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) staff presented information about fish consumption advisory efforts on the Hudson River; the Hudson efforts were intended to show a successful model. Could any of these efforts be replicated for Newtown Creek when a fish advisory is developed? Mike Schade mentioned that the Newtown Hopes Project may be considering including fish consumption education.

b. Can CAG efforts help to speed up the progress of future health-related reports?

c. Briefings from state officials should stay on the CAG's to-do list.

d. Riverkeeper has tasked an intern with examining the law behind Public Health Assessments (PHAs) in order to answer the question raised by CAG members interested in knowing whether they can legally request more risk assessment to prevent exposure to chemicals in Newtown Creek.

e. Regarding fish advisory signage:

i. Could New York Aquarium be a potential source of funding for fish advisory signage?

ii. Are the signs worth the cost and the effort if they are not being observed?

iii. Can schools assist with outreach and education regarding fish advisories?

3. Discussion of future meeting topics

- a. Phase II sampling plan – more information about the details of the plan would be helpful.
 - b. Revisit Phase I data – some CAG members would like a more detailed explanation of the Phase I results, including how they relate to water quality.
 - c. Technical assistance opportunities – share with EPA what the CAG envisions its technical needs to be and ask EPA about the availability of technical assistance resources for these purposes.
 - d. Tide gates – invite the Mayor’s Office to present on the status of its tide gates work and climate resiliency efforts and plans. A meeting devoted to this topic could include both a briefing from city staff and a panel of experts to provide more information and comments.
 - e. Lessons learned from other CAGs (e.g., Passaic River, Gowanus Canal, etc.)
 - i. Superfund processes are long, particularly at complex sites like these river/canal sites. While the Superfund process is proceeding, community interest drives progress at the small projects, such as signage. Involvement waxes and wanes over a long process. We might lament that people are not heavily involved all the time, but this is part of the cycle. In order to ensure productivity in the long term, we need to keep the process and our activities honest and open so that the mechanisms are in place for people to get involved when something big comes up.
 - ii. Other Superfund sites in our region are further along. At Passaic River, there is a lot of focus on dealing with dredged material. At a recent gathering of regional CAGs in New Jersey, there was interest in more conversations among CAGs. We should take advantage of this interest.
 - iii. Gowanus has a more active community surrounding the site and has been successful at pressuring the City; this is something we can take note of. In the future, we might consider a meeting with Gowanus stakeholders about their lessons learned and the things they did to effectively push the City and EPA. Passaic River could also be included.
 - f. Proactive CAG planning – the CAG could devote a meeting in the fall to strategic planning, similar to the meeting held late last fall.
 - g. Comment about CAG meetings in general – We should consider in which areas we would benefit most from expert advice. Panel-type meetings with experts in the field, as proposed for the briefing from the Mayor’s Office about tide gates and resiliency, will help drive the conversation toward productivity.
4. Next steps and logistical notes
- a. Mike Schade and Willis Elkins (Paul Pullo and Christine Holowacz if possible) will speak to Wanda Ayala to explain the CAG’s request for a meeting in early September about Phase I results, Phase II plan, and technical assistance. Walker Holmes will reach out to Wanda Ayala to set this up.
 - b. Next meeting logistics
 - i. Borough: Brooklyn (last meeting was held in Queens).
 - ii. Location: Paul Pullo will look into availability of senior center on Dupont Street.
 - iii. Target date: first half of September on a Wednesday or Thursday.

- iv. Time: 6:30 – 8:30 PM.
- c. Sunnyside community center might be a possible location for the next full CAG meeting that takes place in Queens (after the September meeting).
- d. The next steering committee meeting will be an in-person meeting. Deb Mesloh offered LIC Partnership's office again as a location. This meeting will occur after the September CAG meeting.