

North Shore Water Resilience Task Force Meeting
Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School – Smith Hall
January 30, 2024
MEETING SUMMARY

Purpose:

- Hear about progress and remaining work on the contracts funded with Task Force earmarks
- Seek consensus on creating an annual report and website to share the work of the Task Force
- Hear from the Joint Narrative Subcommittee and seek consensus on their recommendation
- Set a path for the coming months

Attendees

State and Congressional Legislators and legislative aids/staff: Senator Bruce Tarr (Chair), Vicki Mori Daigle (Office of Senator Tarr), Katie Morfill (Office of US Senator Markey), Luis Garcia-Robles (Office of Sen. Crighton), Senator Joan Lovely, Sarah Cahill (Office of Sen. Lovely), Ian Hatfield (Office of Rep. Robertson), Kristin Kassner, Representative Sally Kerans, Hannah Levine (Office of Rep. Cruz), Michael Searles (Office of Rep. Walsh)

Task Force Members, Stakeholders, and Other Attendees: Rachael Belisle-Toler, Erin Bonney Casey, Sarah Bower, Anne Carroll, Wayne Castonguay, Chuck Dam, Chris Cole, Joseph Domelowicz, Jim Engel, Anne Gero, Vicki Halmen, Kevin Harutunian, Daniel Heiter, Curtis Johnson, John Keeley, David Lane, Jack Lawrence, Joe Lobao, Erik Mansfield, Nathan Mousseau, William Paulitz, Brad Perron, Ross Povenmire, Matthew Prince, Colleen Rizzi, Alan Taubert

Facilitators: Sara Cohen, Martin Pillsbury, Leah Robins

Welcome from Conveners

Senator Tarr welcomed everyone and commented on the important milestones represented by the Task Force's current meeting. He underscored the good faith that everyone on the subcommittees has brought to their efforts, dealing with lots of meaty issues, but also emphasized the importance of the full Task Force as the consensus-based body that makes the final decisions. He stressed the importance of the website, the annual report, and the joint narrative – the three items the Task Force members would be hearing about at the current meeting. He also mentioned that the wider public should be made more aware of the Task Force, including that its efforts have been deemed important enough for the state legislature to earmark \$400,000 toward them. In the coming weeks he expects to be proposing another press release focusing on the many recent milestones. Senator Lovely, Representative Kerans, and Representative Kassner all additionally thanked the group for their work and encouraged everyone to continue the forward progress.

Katie Morfill from Senator Markey's office shared that the federal earmark process will be coming up and invited those interested in pursuing funds for their communities or organizations in the coming year to contact her or Senator Markey's office.

Transition for Wayne Castonguay of the Ipswich River Watershed Association

Wayne shared that he is transitioning from IRWA to a position with the Department of Fish and Game but would be staying on the Task Force Earmark Subcommittee to help see through the three current studies, expected to be completed at the end of March. Erin Bonney Casey would be officially representing IRWA on the Task Force after the current meeting. He thanked everyone for all the progress and good will to date and stressed that the group was on the cusp of doing great things to address the problems that the watershed has been struggling with for decades.

At the end of the meeting, Senator Tarr recognized and thanked Wayne as a driving member of the Task Force from its inception and a critical factor in its progress to date. Sara Cohen also thanked Wayne on behalf of the facilitators for his hard work, commitment to the process, and modeling what it means to listen specifically to understand, which is a critical collaborative skill.

Earmark Study Update

All three of the following studies are on track to be complete by March 30th, and the Earmark Subcommittee continues to review and oversee the individual tasks.

- *Assessment of the Water Security and Resilience Needs and Opportunities in the Ipswich River Watershed* ("Earmark Project #1"). This study builds on the DEP Water Management Act grant project completed by Hamilton and IRWA that was presented to the Task Force last March. It will summarize the needs for improved water supply resilience among the communities relying on the Ipswich Watershed for supply, assess the feasibility of more water sharing among lower basin communities, and assess the feasibility of adding storage capacity with a new reservoir in Topsfield.
- *Modeling the Relative Impacts on River Flow of the Water Supply Alternatives Identified in an Assessment of the Water Security and Resilience Needs and Opportunities in the Ipswich River Watershed* ("Earmark Project #2"). This study will analyze the potential improvements to streamflow that could result from alternative water supply scenarios in the Ipswich River Watershed.
- *North Shore Water Infrastructure Status Report* ("Earmark Project #3"). This report will summarize the water supply infrastructure projects that are planned or under consideration by Task Force members and potential water supply partners with a focus on the timeline for these projects and critical decision-making junctures. Data will be gathered through direct communication with communities and water suppliers. The intention is to help the Task Force understand the regional implications of various individual infrastructure decisions.

For the third study, it was emphasized that Dewberry sent out survey questions to all communities in the watershed and has had, so far, a low response rate. ***Senator Tarr urged all communities who have not yet responded to the survey to do so as soon as possible to enable this study to be completed.***

Annual Report

The facilitation team introduced a draft annual report to orient the wider public and interested stakeholders in the background of the Task Force and the accomplishments over the past year. The report includes an overview of the Task Force, brief descriptions of each meeting of the full Task Force during 2023, descriptions of the three designated subcommittees, an overview of the current studies

underway with Earmark funds, a brief description of the anticipated work in the year to come, and the full charter as an addendum.

Edits/additions suggested and accepted by consensus at the meeting included:

- Adding a list of active members and current convenors for the given year (which may be different than the original/founding convenors as shown in the charter).
- Highlight clearly the amount of funding and sources of funds the Task Force has received.

The Task Force gave full consensus support for the annual report, with the suggested revisions, to be shared publicly.

Task Force Website

The facilitation team has worked with the Communications Team at the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to put together a website to be a landing spot for final approved public-facing information about the Task Force, including: the Task Force charter, meeting summaries, final approved studies, press releases, etc. The website would live on MAPC's domain but would be a product of the Task Force and could be linked to by Task Force members and stakeholders. It was suggested and agreed to that a link for members to preview the site will be sent around for comment before it goes live, and the site could evolve over time.

The Task Force gave full consensus support for the website to be shared in preview form with members and then go live.

Joint Narrative

The facilitation team provided an overview of the Joint Narrative Subcommittee process. The subcommittee was authorized by the full Task Force in August 2023 to help describe the challenges the Task Force is trying to address, the types of solutions to these challenges that they are pursuing, and any additional context that is important to understand about the Task Force. For internal purposes, the Joint Narrative can help as a foundation of common understanding for decision-making, as it describes the facts that people agree about. For external purposes, it helps members communicate about the Task Force to their outside stakeholders in a way that honors all members of the Task Force.

The subcommittee consisted of three voting Task Force members (Joe Domelowicz of Hamilton, Dave Lane of Danvers and the Danvers/Middleton Water Supply system; and Erin Bonney Casey of IRWA); two regional stakeholders (Sarah Bower of Mass Rivers Alliance and Jen Pederson of Mass Water Works Association); state Representative Kristin Kassner; and technical advisor (Viki Zoltay, hydrologist at DCR). They met 11 times over 4 months to arrive at the current proposed narrative.

Erin Bonney Casey, Dave Lane, and Joe Domelowicz spoke on behalf of the subcommittee and made the following points:

- The product was collaborative and represents common ground. No single subcommittee member's version of their own narrative would read the same as the joint version, but the narrative, as written, represents the best version of what everyone could agree on.
- The narrative builds on elements that all agreed were factually and demonstratively true. This required reviewing and grappling with the nuance of a large body of scientific literature.
- The process resulted in a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, the very diverse perspectives and concerns among the subcommittee members. There was a lot of learning, and the diversity was the subcommittee's strength!
- The narrative is meant to work as a whole piece and be presented in its entirety rather than have statements pulled from it and used out of context to advance one perspective above the others; the narrative as a whole piece reflects the full complexity of the region's water resources issues. There is both the long-form narrative and the "elevator pitch," both of which are complete on their own, and the latter can serve when there is the need to be brief.
- The narrative should be useful as a foundation to go back to when the Task Force is wrestling with controversy and decision-making in the future. It will also help explain the work of the Task Force to the outside world.

The Task Force gave full consensus support to the Joint Narrative, as proposed.

Press Release

Senator Tarr elaborated on his plan for the next press release, which will be the second one after the signing of the charter. With the adoption of the narrative, the website and annual report, the studies nearing completion, and the new year, it is good timing for another moment in the press. He plans to develop and circulate a draft for full approval by the Task Force in the coming few weeks.

Conservation and Demand Management Subcommittee

This subcommittee was created last August, with the intention to explore how conservation and demand management should fit into the larger set of regional solutions. The plan had been to begin the work of this group in October, but the focus on the joint narrative lasted through the calendar year, taking up substantial attention and time on the part of the facilitation team and members that were appointed to both subcommittees. Now that the narrative is complete, the Conservation and Demand Management Subcommittee will officially launch. Members include: Rachael Belisle-Toler (Town of Ipswich), Sharon Clement (Danvers), Chuck Dam (Manchester by the Sea), Erin Bonney Casey (IRWA), Anne Carroll (DCR Office of Water Resources), and Duane LeVangie (MassDEP Water Management Act Program).

Erin Bonney Casey had pointed out to the facilitators that the group could benefit from having a representative from a community that had been less successful meeting their water conservation goals to offer perspective on some of the key barriers.

No one was identified at the meeting to help round out the subcommittee in this way, but the facilitators welcomed follow-up suggestions by email.

Next Steps

- ➔ Senator Tarr's office or the facilitation team will circulate the annual report with the changes approved at this meeting and a link to preview the Task Force website for final comments before it goes live.
- ➔ Senator Tarr will develop and circulate a draft press release for review and approval by the Task Force.
- ➔ The Earmark Subcommittee will continue to provide oversight to the two contractors completing the three studies underway, with expected completion of all three by March 31.