

Rideau Lakes Watershed Plan – Public Advisory Committee Meeting One
Monday Nov. 14, 2005, 1:30
Rideau Canal Office Boardroom, Smiths Falls

Minutes

Present: Lynn Preston, RVCA
Kerry McGonegal, Parks Canada, Rideau Canal
Doug Moore, Rideau Ferry
Maggie Leach, Bass Lake
Peter Au, Rideau Roundtable
Norman Peterson, Upper Rideau Lake
Nick Stow, Gartner Lee Ltd.
Ted Joynt, Smiths Falls
Sarah Cooke, Smiths Falls
Sheanna Tinlin, RVCA

1. Welcome and Introductions

Lynn welcomed all to the first meeting of the Public Advisory Committee of the Rideau Lakes Watershed Plan. Everyone introduced him or herself and gave a brief account on why they were there. Interests of the group included increasing tourism in the area, raising awareness levels of people on lakes, increasing stewardship opportunities in and around the Rideau River/Lakes, increasing economic and social development, creating/enhancing ecological linkages on a large scale and source water protection.

Lynn explained the purpose of the meeting was to get closure on the Terms of Reference and the draft Vision statement (previously circulated) and discuss the role of the PAC.

2. Role of the Public Advisory Committee (PAC)

Lynn presented her thoughts on the role of the PAC (see attached) and a breakdown of the number and content of PAC meetings. She explained the role of the PAC will be to provide input into the plan throughout its stages, develop partnerships within the community and help deliver the message of plan development and its findings back to the watershed community. The PAC will also be expected to assist with developing the formats for any public meetings.

Maggie asked if there was an opportunity to have a representative from the PAC sit on the TAC and vice versa for the sake of continuity and better communication. Lynn explained that there was no plan to do this but would not oppose it if there were interested candidates.

Norman questioned how and what stakeholder groups were invited to the committee and to the watershed planning process. Lynn stated that we did have a list of interest groups to whom invitations were sent. They and the general public were invited to the public

meetings. The only two interest groups targeted to attend separate meetings were the lake associations and the local businesses.

Nick suggested that we ensure that effort is made to outreach to the municipalities regarding this plan since the indication was given at the first Technical Advisory Committee meeting that they had little time to input into it during the process.

The discussion then turned to expectations of the members regarding their role on the committee. Doug suggested that regular updates of the progress of the plan are needed to share with the public and use of the media is likely the best and easiest way to do this. It was decided that a press release be issued after each meeting to report on the committee's efforts.

Norman mentioned the upcoming Rideau Canal 175 anniversary and UNESCO Heritage Site nomination for the Rideau both coming up in 2007. He suggested the official release of the watershed plan could occur during this time highlighting the Rideau lakes and its issues.

Nick stated that there is confusing regarding who does what within the government structure associated with watershed management. He suggested a table of who does what be made part of the watershed plan. Lynn said such a list has recently been put into another watershed plan and that she will send a copy with the minutes.

Peter suggested that the PAC target politicians and get them involved. It was also suggested that members of the public exercise the democratic process given to them and bring their issues to the politicians regarding watershed management.

Doug suggested the PAC be made as transparent as possible. The PAC members could be used to relay concerns from people in their area into the watershed planning process. It was decided that the names and contact information of the PAC members be made public and that they be used as contacts for the process. It was also suggested that a number of web pages be used to relay information on the watershed plan.

Doug suggested that the business community likely does not realize the implications of the watershed plan and the impact it may have on them. It was suggested that an effective communication strategy be used to include them. Peter suggested using business reports and magazines as points of communication and putting the findings of the watershed plan in economic terms.

Committee members discussed the importance of keeping the watershed plan alive and real, reaching out and communicating often. It was suggested that it be related to within a larger context as well, i.e. as part of the UNESCO World Heritage site, as part of the Algonquin to Adirondacks ecological linkage, etc.

3. Terms of Reference

Lynn explained the role of the Terms of Reference (ToR) was to lay out how the watershed plan will be undertaken, what it will include, who will be the players and the process schedule. It was suggested that an additional goal be added stating that the recommendations of the plan be implemented. The following issues were suggested for inclusion: Lake Carrying Capacity, Climate Change, Preserving “rural” character of the area, consistency of planning documents throughout the watershed, Communication among and between all stakeholders (government and non) including getting increased involvement from local politicians and the implementation, monitoring and use of the adaptive management strategy of the plan.

Lynn cautioned the group about expectations of the watershed plan. The level of recommendations found within the plan will be a function of availability of information on the watershed itself. Since it has been surmised that information and data on the watershed is limited, we can only expect a more general level of recommendations as opposed to specific recommendations to address specific issues on which we have limited information. She cautioned that the recommendations are more likely to include creating or maintaining opportunities for partnerships, coordinated studies, education and outreach.

Discussion from the committee suggested that the lines of communication should be open at all times dealing with watershed issues. People should know who to report issues or occurrences to when they see them. It is also important to show to people when and how an issue is dealt with. Peter suggested that seeing something done about an issue empowers others to be better stewards. Norm suggested that the plan explore avenues people have to undertake the recommendations of the plan.

4. Vision Statement

Minor changes were suggested to the vision statement. The following is suggested by the PAC, changes in bold:

*All residents, visitors and **other stakeholders** are knowledgeable environmental stewards committed to working together to ensure this unique watershed is diverse, healthy, **safe** and clean, where the thriving local economy exists in harmony with the thriving ecosystem for future generations.*

5. Rideau Lakes Watershed Plan process/schedule

The attached schedule is the intended one. Lynn explained that watershed plans have historically taken and been allowed more time to be completed. The RVCA would like this one completed within 2006. As a result, little time can be spent partner building and communicating. Efforts will be spent on keeping the process on time and reaching the milestones. It was suggested that efforts be made to get information out to the public, especially as it pertains to the present state of health of the watershed. Norm felt a lesson on what a watershed is would be beneficial as the concept is not well understood. As well reasons why people should care about watershed health, why we study it, what people do to influence its health, how it affects personal health should be promoted.

6. How the PAC will operate and where

It was generally agreed to have “live” meetings as opposed to electronic discussions as much as possible as people get more out of them and they stimulate better discussion. It was suggested that teleconferencing be used if necessary. Web pages can and should be used to update on the progress of the plan. It was suggested that Smiths Falls is central to most and therefore the best location. Days were preferred over nights for meetings.

7. Press Release

This item was added to the agenda as a result of discussion and will be included on all agendas. The topic of content for the first press release was discussed. While it would be preferred if the press releases could be motivational and inspire people to become involved in the watershed planning process and the environmental cause, time and talent limitations dictate that the press releases will stick to progress on the watershed plan, reporting on the discussion of the current milestone and ways people can get more information. For the first press release it was decided that it include the role of the PAC, whom the members are, what was decided re: Terms of Reference and vision and what the next steps are. It was also decided that the contact information for each member be included so that the public may go to them for more information, input and motivation. It was suggested that we take as much advantage as possible of the local media, including newspapers and radio and provide stories whenever possible. Lynn will draft the press release and pass it by committee members prior to release.

8. Next meeting/milestones

Lynn suggested the next meeting of the PAC would not occur until the new year. A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting will be held on Tuesday Nov. 29 at 10:00 at the Foley Mountain Conservation Area. The purpose of this meeting will be to report on the revisions to the Terms of Reference and Vision statements and to discuss the draft Goals and Objectives. The next PAC meeting will discuss the draft Goals and Objectives. The TAC meeting is open to any member of the PAC who would like to attend.

Merry Christmas