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Final Report: Section 3. Public Outreach

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SECTION 3

PUBLIC OUTREACH

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Taunton River Watershed Study included a significant public education and outreach component to build a greater understanding about the project within the watershed and to solicit input. This component included presentations at 10 public meetings, an outdoor watershed awareness and education day, development and maintenance of a project website and coordination with Bridgewater State College student projects on stream flow and land use development issues.

The project was initiated with the establishment of a website at the following location: www.horsleywitten.com/tauntonwatershed. The website contains an overview of the project and provides information on upcoming events. It also provides an opportunity to make comments and suggestions.

A project kick-off meeting was held on June 13, 2007 at Bridgewater State College at which the project was introduced and comments were received. A public Watershed Day was held on September 15, 2007 featuring a presentation by State Senator Mark Pacheco. Field trips were conducted, despite inclement (rainy) weather.

During the month of November, four public meetings were held throughout the watershed to present preliminary findings and to identify and prioritize key watershed issues. The highest priority issues included:

- public education;
- training of local government officials;
- the amount of habitat, wetlands, and open space being protected;
- the extent of inappropriate development; and
- water quantity, flow and quality in the rivers, lakes and streams in the Taunton watershed.

In the spring of 2008 HW organized and ran a workshop to explore smart growth issues in the Town of Easton. Easton was selected as representative of the many issues facing communities in the watershed and had expressed interest in working with the project. A planning meeting was held with Easton town officials prior to the actual workshop at which the scope of the meeting was focused to low impact development (LID) and transfer of development rights (TDR). HW presented the preliminary results of the water balance work (described in Section 4 of this report) and provided introductions to the two selected smart growth techniques. Exercises were conducted by break out groups to explore the potential applications of these techniques, and additional time allocations are recommended for future workshops. However, insufficient time was provided for discussions and comments at the end of the meeting.

During the month of June, HW participated in three public meetings organized by the Upper Taunton Wastewater Project. The water budget model results were presented and discussed. A range of wastewater management alternatives were presented by the project contractor, CDM. The workshops included discussions as to how creative wastewater solutions could lead to “keeping water local” and in some instances may assist in restoring natural hydrologic conditions in those sub-watersheds identified as out of balance.

Overall, the public participation process was successful in explaining the project and obtaining input about priority issues. However, the attendance at the workshop was relatively low. Perhaps this reflects the public’s focus on other important issues such as the economy. We will seek to improve public participation in the future through the establishment of local stakeholder groups and other techniques.

2.0 PUBLIC MEETING AND EVENT SUMMARIES

Summaries of the public meetings and outreach events that took place as part of Phase I of the Taunton River Watershed Management Plan project are provided on the following pages. These include:

<u>Meeting/Event</u>	<u>Page</u>
Public Forum (June 13, 2007)	3-3
Taunton River Watershed Day (September 15, 2007)	3-6
Public Meetings (November, 2007)	3-7
Public Workshop in Easton (April 20, 2007)	3-10

Public Forum
June 13, 2007
Moakley Center, Bridgewater State College

Summary Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Attendees were asked to sign in and pick up a “Watershed Perceptions and Practices” survey for completion during the event. We had 28 members of the public attend the meeting, plus several Steering Committee members and several of the interns that will be supporting the project and their advisors. Representatives from the consultant team of Horsley Witten Group, Inc. (HW), Geosyntec and Weston & Sampson were also present. The public was represented by a combination of non-profit organizations, town staff in the water, sewer and other departments, representatives of local boards and commissions (Conservation, Health, Water Supply, Wastewater), residents and a local reporter. (Contacts have been added to the project master contact list, and surveys are being tallied for future reference. A copy of the survey is also being made available on the project website.)

Introduction:

The meeting was opened by Ed Minnock, Vice President for External Affairs, Bridgewater State College and primary contact for the Steering Committee. Mr. Minnock introduced the project, the consultant team led by Horsley Witten Group, Inc., and Scott Horsley.

Presentation:

Scott Horsley presented a slideshow that included an overview of the Steering Committee, the project scope of work, the draft outline for Phase II of the project, and a general overview of watershed statistics and concerns. Bob Hartzel, from Geosyntec, presented an overview of the previous EOEEA 5-year Action Plan, describing how that was different and will contribute to this study. Mr. Horsley then described the water budget methodology, including the use of a trial sub-watershed to test the methodology before applying it throughout the Taunton watershed. Potential watershed restoration and protection tools were introduced, such as LID, integrated water resource management techniques, smart growth and village style development, and trading of development rights. Ellie Baker of HW then reviewed some statistics of homeowner practices that can affect the watershed, and solicited feedback on a watershed perceptions and practices survey.

A copy of the presentation is available to download from our project website, under ‘Public Workshops’.

Discussion/Question and Answer:

The last hour of the meeting entailed discussion and questions from the attendees about the project and the major issues in the watershed. Below is a summary of the comments that were voiced:

- Commercial-Industrial properties in our trial sub-watershed, Coweaset Brook, are located in both Brockton and Easton and discharge to the Brockton treatment plant. Industrial discharges from Brockton require pretreatment while those from Easton do not require the same pretreatment.
- Comment that local changes (zoning, ordinances/bylaws, regulation, and enforcement) can begin now, and do not need to wait until this study is completed.
- Question was raised about whether building inspections enforce or can enforce stormwater management on sites.
- Easton DPW discussed the benefits and successes in Easton from public education/ watershed education. He noted that the Wastewater Department has \$20,000 in its annual budget to fund household hazardous waste.
- Concerns were voiced about the water quality to the Salisbury Plain River from the Brockton wastewater treatment plant.
- A large wetlands replication project being considered for Burrige Pond was mentioned.
- A suggestion was made for a survey to be given to local town boards in the watershed to gather information about needs, problems and areas to highlight for Phase II of the project.
- It was noted that there appear to be missing groundwater discharge permits in the data from MassGIS.
- It was stated that there are problems in Taunton with untreated wastewater discharges to the river during large storm events due to overflows. Many sump pumps are hooked directly to the system (stormwater or wastewater?) and contribute to overflows. These overflows create fines for the city to DEP, and this person questioned whether that money was used by the state to help solve the problem. A large study on sump pump locations was done in Brockton to begin to address this problem.
- A question was asked about whether the project would include any watershed education outreach to young school children. Kevin Curry commented that Bridgewater State College was working on that down the road.
- Wetland restoration to address historic wetland loss was requested to be included in the recommendations from the project. Another noted that wetland loss seems to be an even growing problem, despite regulations.

- It was noted that the local elderly services agencies were urging elderly residents to throw away all old medicines by flushing them down the toilet, and commented that we contact them with alternative approaches for water quality purposes.
- Several people commented that local enforcement of wetland regulations and other local building regulations was inadequate and needs improvement.
- A concern was raised regarding aerial mosquito spraying, a large concern in southeastern MA, and asked how that should be addressed. Is it a water quality and habitat concern, and can it be done differently with less impact? Similarly, is cranberry bog aerial spraying a concern and will it be addressed?
- A suggestion was made that we compare and contrast our pilot watershed, Coweaset Brook, with the Salisbury/Matfield Rivers sub-watershed due to differences in the amount of protected area and the existence of an Enterprise Zone for Commercial development in one watershed.
- A question was asked about the recently released DEP RFP for a wastewater study in the northern Taunton communities, and questioned whether that study should wait to start until after this study is completed.
- A Bridgewater State College professor noted that BSC has an Institute of Regional Development that is adept at carrying out surveys. He suggested that they may help in gathering watershed survey information, such as the survey distributed at the meeting.

Taunton River Watershed Day September 15, 2007

Taunton River Watershed Day was held at Watson Pond State Park in Taunton on September 15, 2007. We had a great group of people in attendance, and we managed to fit in some great informational walking tours and a nice barbecue lunch before the wind and rain took over. Three tours were offered:

- Local development and stormwater management tour, led by Rich Claytor, PE, Principal at HW;
- Hydrology and water quality tour, including a stint on the water in some rented kayaks, led by Neal Price, Senior Hydrogeologist at HW; and
- Wetland and shoreline ecology tour, led by Alison Bowden, Freshwater Programs Director for The Nature Conservancy Massachusetts Chapter.

MassAudubon's Sarah Slack, Director of the Oak Knoll Sanctuary in Attleboro, offered a hands-on investigations table for children. They sampled water from the pond's edge and investigated the plants and critters that they found. A table-top watershed model was also a big hit.

Senator Pacheco (D – First Plymouth and Bristol Districts) gave lunch time remarks in support of the watershed study, and we offered a free barbecue lunch, using donations from local vendors.

Many thanks to:

The MA Department of Conservation and Recreation
The Nature Conservancy
The Taunton River Watershed Campaign
The Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Atlantic Pest Control: Project PEST
Joe Noberini - Noberweenies
Canoe Passages
Hannaford's of Taunton
Trader Joe's
Waste Management
The Taunton River Watershed Study Steering Committee

Public Meetings November 2007

Four public meetings were held in November to engage the public and discuss watershed issues that the residents, businesses and municipalities think are most pressing in the Taunton watershed. Attendance at these meetings by the general public (i.e., non-Steering Committee or Project staff) ranged from six to thirteen people, with a total of 36 people participating in the meetings. We engaged a sub-consultant (with funds donated by Horsley Witten Group) to assist in promoting these meetings by making personal invitations to town offices and community groups, and making brief presentations at local Selectmen's and other municipal board and commission meetings. We also issued two press releases and received front page coverage in the Brockton Enterprise (11/9/07) (text attached).

Meetings were held on:

- November 5 (Bridgewater State College);
- November 8 (Southeastern Regional High School, S. Easton); and
- November 13 (two meetings, Bristol County Agricultural High School, Dighton).

The November 5 and November 13 afternoon meetings were recorded by local cable access shows, and copies will be distributed to other cable stations in the watershed.

At each meeting, HW presented a Powerpoint presentation, which you can download from the project website (www.horsleywitten.com/tauntonwatershed) and clicking on the Public Meetings tab. We also provided several handouts to guide the discussion, which are also available for download on the website. Participants were asked to join in small group discussions to identify the most important issues facing the watershed, ranging from wastewater to low flow issues in the Taunton River tributaries to education of the municipal boards and staff. The full list of issues identified by the groups in the four meetings is attached, along with the ranking that resulted from an individual voting process. The issues that rose to the top in these discussions were:

- The level of public education and training for municipal boards, commission and commissions;
- The level of general public education and outreach on environmental issues;
- The amount of habitat, wetlands, and open space being protected;
- The extent of inappropriate development; and
- Water quantity, flow and quality in the rivers, lakes and streams in the Taunton watershed.

The need for education of both the general public and municipal officials on these issues was the overwhelming priority concern at these meetings. Even if this was not identified by a discussion group as the top priority, it came up in discussions as a problem area, and a potential solution for other priority concerns.

Once the full list of issues was identified, attendees discussed potential solutions to address those issues. Solutions included:

Education:

- Mandatory training for local officials
- Outreach efforts using PSAs on radio and town websites
- Use a positive message
- Use good science as a basis for education and awareness
- Reach kids in high school and younger: science fairs, scouting troops
- Organize an umbrella educational organization, similar to DEP Wetlands Circuit Rider program, to reach all communities
- Get people out to experience the river, solicit corporate sponsors and adopt a wetland program

Extent of Inappropriate Development and Habitat Protection:

- Improve local regulations
- Improve local enforcement
- Improve education and training for officials

Water quality and flow in rivers, streams and lakes:

- Improve aquifer recharge using LID and Smart Growth techniques
- LID retrofits
- Find illicit connections in the stormwater system
- Limit “effective imperviousness” into the NPDES Phase II permits
- Improve Water Management Act permitting process
- Provide education and outreach about outdoor water use

We would like to thank everyone who participated in these meetings, and provided valuable insight and feedback for our study as we move forward. We will cover these key topics in more detail in our April 2008 public workshops (exact times and locations to be determined).

Looking ahead to the spring workshops, we propose that we coordinate these with other, on-going projects, specifically the Upper Taunton Wastewater Study and the MBTA Expansion project. We would focus on wastewater and smart growth issues respectively. We believe that this would ensure better attendance and participation and would serve to provide interaction and coordination with these two other important studies.

**Taunton River Watershed Study - November Public Meetings
Dot Voting Results**

RANK	ISSUE	NUMBER OF VOTES					Total
		Nov 5	Nov 8	Nov 13 afternoon	Nov 13 evening		
1	The amount of public education (training) for municipal staff, boards, commissions	7	4	3	2	16	
2	The amount of public education and outreach about environmental issues	2	6	4	1	13	
3	The amount of habitat, wetlands and open space being protected	5	1	3	3	12	
4	The extent of inappropriate development	3	3	1	3	10	
5	Quantity of flow and availability of critical habitat in rivers, stream and lakes	9				9	
6	The quality of water in the rivers, streams and lakes	3	1	1	3	8	
7	The problems with local permitting, compliance and enforcement	3		3	1	7	
8	The quality of my drinking water		3	1	2	6	
9	The way stormwater is being managed			3	2	5	
10	The way wastewater is being managed	2		1		3	
11	The available quantity of my drinking water			1	1	2	
12	The effectiveness of my local bylaws/ordinances	1				1	
12	The cost of infrastructure repairs and maintenance	1				1	
12	Science should drive priorities	1				1	
12	Ecological health/biodiversity should be maintained/restored	1				1	
12	Laws	1				1	
12	Public water supply withdrawal impacts on rivers			1		1	
12	Dams and obstructions			1		1	
12	Contamination hot spots			1		1	
13	Desalination impacts on rivers					0	
13	Aquifer recharge					0	

Easton Workshop
April 30, 2008

The meeting was coordinated with NRT of Easton, Town of Easton, Canoe River Aquifer Advisory Committee, Brockton Conservation, and TRWA.

There were 34 attendees, including:

- General public
- Boards/commissioners/selectmen
- Environmental groups
- Engineering firms
- Representatives of the Upper Taunton Wastewater Study

During the meeting, HW presented an overview of the study, the water budget tool and preliminary results, and the preliminary buffer and conservation land analysis. Then we presented three Smart Growth tools: LID, Traditional Village Districts, and Transfer of Development Rights. Attendees then split into three groups to do smart growth exercises. Everyone seemed to really understand the LID concept and were already familiar with the topic. The traditional village district concept was complex and people voiced concern about density, growth and wastewater needs. While people were very interested in the concept of transfer of development rights, this tool was very complex and was probably the least understood and embraced of the tools presented. There were questions about how the property rights banking works and concern about the fact that conservation was not guaranteed in the sending areas because owners are not required to use the overlay district.

Feedback received since the meeting:

- Excited about tying this in with Upper Taunton Wastewater Study, in terms of identifying potential wastewater locations;
- Thank you from RI Audubon, who was pleased with our work here and in RI;
- Call from Sharon resident thanking us for materials since he could not attend.

A follow up press release is under development. An HW Press Release and Easton press release prior to the meeting generated interest in a follow up to the meeting.