



WARNER RIVER LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

<https://www.wrlac.com/>

MINUTES

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

7:00 p.m.

Pillsbury Free Library, Warner, NH

2025 WRLAC Meetings	
Weds, January 29, 2025	Weds, July 23, 2025
Weds, March 26, 2025	Weds, September 24, 2025
Weds, May 28, 2025	Weds, November 19, 2025

Appointed WRLAC Representatives present in **bold** (term ends):

Mickey Benson, Warner (02-24-2028)

Marlene Freyler, Bradford (08-16-2027)

Rebecca Herman, Bradford (09-25-2026)

Bob MacGowan, Webster (04-19-2027)

Dan Morrissey, Hopkinton (2028)

Laura Russell, Warner (02-24-2028)

Peter Savickas, Sutton (08-19-2025)

Associate Member / Trout Unlimited Rep: Greg Swick

Invited Guest: Ben Nugent, NH F&G

Members of the Public: Tim Blagden, Barbara Marty, Mark Rosenthal

The meeting was convened at 7:05.

New Business

1. Ben Nugent, NH Fish & Game – [Warner River Watershed Project Update](#)

Ben provided background information about NH Fish & Game's relationship with Trout Unlimited and WRLAC. Since 2012, F&G's Warner River Watershed Conservation Project, which has included support from Trout Unlimited and other volunteers, has collected a large amount of data about the streams in the Warner River watershed, including information about the presence of brook trout, stream crossing assessments, and flood vulnerability. At this point, there are volunteers at the town level, particularly in Warner and Bradford, who Ben feels have the capability to continue the watershed monitoring at a basic level. Ben asked if the data could be posted on WRLAC's website. This would include a link to Fish & Game's ArcGIS maps; the maps have several overlays and are interactive. Ben is hoping to develop an aquatic restoration "story map" for the Warner River watershed. (See some general information and a link about the [NH Aquatic Restoration Mapper](#).) In addition, Ben felt that he could also build in data from the VRAP (Volunteer River Assessment Program). Ben also mentioned that the Merrimack River Watershed Council will be sponsoring tree planting at Ballard Brook on Saturday, April 26. Up to nine volunteers will be needed for that. In addition, he thought that the data that volunteers have been collecting on paper could be entered into an app that he could build. Ben has just submitted three grants to FEMA to create culvert designs for culverts in Bradford; hopefully, the designs would then turn into an implementation project. He is hoping to have the WRLAC provide a letter of support for that project.

2. [January 29 minutes](#) were approved unanimously.

3. VRAP sampling data update

Rebecca has received 2024 VRAP water sampling data from DES. The data is taken from several tributaries in the Warner River watershed as well as from the Warner River itself. In looking at the data for turbidity, the levels appeared high at some locations, although not necessarily high for the state, but high for that particular area. The pH values seem to have fluctuated over the years, and perhaps pH data is something to keep our eye on over the next couple of years. Rebecca has asked an ecologist who lives in Bradford and is on the Bradford Conservation Commission, Rhett, to do some mapping to see what the trouble areas are, if any. Rebecca shared a map that she had made that shows the [locations of the water sampling](#). Hopefully, Rhett's mapping would be provide more information. It might help us understand what results are showing natural occurrences and what is not. Rebecca hopes to connect with Ben and Rhett to see if they can combine their data in one place. Dan wondered if the WRLAC could engage a student to organize the data. Tim suggested that [Matt Baronas](#) from the Central NH Regional Planning Commission might be a resource for creating GIS story maps for the data. Dan noted that the advantage of a story map is that it can include different kinds of data, like soil types or land use, that can be overlaid to help interpret the VRAP data. For the VRAP testing, the team visits 14 locations once a month during May-Oct to just gather water quality data, such as dissolved oxygen, pH, conductance, and temperature.. ([See 2023's data](#).) The state sponsors the work; there are teams for every river all over the state. There's a lot of data, but there has not been extensive interpretation of the data by the state, and there's less manpower than ever at this point. Dan said that maybe there's some way that the WRLAC can help with the data

interpretation or get something started. Rebecca would like to see what Ben and Rhett come up with. Dan mentioned that the flow data from the [USGS gage in Davisville](#) could be posted along with the VRAP data to determine high/low water flows.

4. The "Comet Project" — Report on a conceptual consultation to Warner Planning Board from [CATCH Neighborhood Housing](#) for [Warner property 35-4-3](#), owned by Comet LLC.
 - a. Some related documents
 - i. [2020_05_06 Application & Site Plan](#)
 - ii. [2020_09_04 WRLAC comments to Warner Planning Board](#)
 - iii. [2022_08_22 WRLAC comments to Warner Planning Board](#)
 - b. Pete provided a review of the previous affordable housing project in the same location. There are three sublots: 4-1, 4-2 (current Dunkin), and 4-3. The first proposal in 2020-2022 was for a Dunkin Donuts on Lot 4-2 (completed) and a 24-unit apartment building on Lot 4-3 (not completed due to the state's concern about access over and through wetlands). During 2020-2022, the WRLAC worked exclusively on the middle parcel, now Dunkin. When 4-2 was approved for Dunkin, Lot 4-1 (which could be for restaurant, offices, etc) was also approved, but no construction has happened as of yet. The state was very concerned about the access to these sites from Rte 103 because of their proximity to the roundabout. In 2022, the problem for Comet for the 24-unit project was the access road that goes through the wetland that parallels Rte 103. In Pete's mind, if any type of housing unit goes into Lot 4-3, it's important to remember that Lot 4-1 was already approved, so it's possible that that site could be developed, too. It would seem that Warner's PB and ZBA would need to take this into account. Pete then shared some selected examples of the communications regarding the fluidity and need for quick responses for this project: May 28, 2020, the [WRLAC sends a letter of concern](#) to the Warner PB. September [July?] 30, 2020, [Ares engineering, hired by the town, files a plan to assist the Warner PB](#). The [WRLAC responds to the Alteration of Terrain](#) app to the state on 8-31. September 14, 2020, [NH DES responds to Comet](#) regarding AoT and requesting further information. That letter states "All WRLAC concerns must be responded to by a deadline of 1/21/2021, or the application will be denied." There were approximately 20 conditions in our comments. [Comet responded on 2/10/21](#). Pete passed around the [original site plan for the Dunkin project](#) [See p. 6, 7, 14.] Pete noted that during this process we had concerns about stormwater runoff, stormwater containment, and turtle survival. Regarding snow removal, the developers for the Dunkin project said that they would plow first, then salt, and the WRLAC felt that plan wouldn't work for a drive through. A stormwater pollution plan was developed. Ultimately, the project was approved, but some felt the WRLAC capitulated with Comet. Our response was "We gave them a list of 20 things; they did the best they could to answer these 20 concerns and they answered to the satisfaction of the state. Who are we to say you can't build this; it's your land. We want to keep the river safe, do what we can." Lot 4-1 was approved; Pete's not sure how long the approval window lasts. In 2022, 24 units for "workers' housing" were proposed — 3 stories, 8 units on each floor; 54 parking spaces.

In July, Gov Sununu had offered COVID money in the form of \$3m stipends for people who could get shovel-ready projects in the ground by Sept 1. The applicants requested ZBA to grant special exception for the project. The ZBA approved it. Then, the application went to the Planning Board. The PB and Comet started discussing whether the project would work with only 12 units, not 24. WRLAC submitted a letter on [May 26, 2022 to Warner PB](#) voicing its concerns. The PB continued to discuss the Town's definition of "workforce housing," and posted their updated position on [workforce housing](#), on Aug 31, 2022. The project died at that point. Dan noted that the current definition for workforce housing requires that 100% of the units be designated workforce housing. Rents are income-based. There will be one parking spot for each unit [check this – or was it 1.5 spaces?], which was a sticking point for the Planning Board at the conceptual presentation to the PB on March 3, 2025. Dan noted that the Warner PB will have to approve the number of parking spaces with a variance. Pete also noted that, according to the Warner PB's definition, the housing must be "perpetually available" as workforce housing, so no apartments can later become rented at market rate. Pete sees similar issues with this proposal as with the Dunkin project: more impermeable surface, a stormwater runoff pond that may pose a threat to turtles. In 2020-2022, the state did back up the committee. Possible future questions that this committee may want to see addressed for this new project would be the impact of the project on water quality and availability when the town is facing the need for an upgraded sewer system. Proximity to/encroachment on the wetlands may also be a question for this committee. Dan noted that the next step in the application process is a Warner ZBA meeting to address CATCH's requests for a variance and a special exception on April 9. Pete noted that if the ZBA and WPB approve the the project, then this committee will need to get updated site plans and review the permits for this committee's comments. Laura noted that in the conceptual meeting the applicants used the current flood maps, rather than the proposed new maps.

- c. Report on CATCH Housing's conceptual presentation (See [Warner Planning Board Minutes 03/03/2025](#) for notes on the applicant's presentation.) CATCH would like a variance for a setback from the road and special exception to change the area's designation from commercial to residential. [Sec. note: At its April 9 meeting, the ZBA tabled the CATCH Housing application to pursue further review of the project's "regional impacts."] Pete noted that our comments will go to the PB and to the state. The state reviews our letter and will act as they see fit. We did influence the Dunkin project. Barb Marty noted that this committee should go to the ZBA and voice our concerns. Pete respectfully disagreed, based on his experience, saying go to the PB. Dan clarified that the current applicants will be appearing before the ZBA to request a special exception to go from commercial zoning to residential. They want a variance to change to set back from the road from the required 40 feet to 20 feet.

5. Permit reviews

- a. Dan noted that this committee will be reviewing permits for the CATCH project, but also for other projects, including the instream flow study and its proposed management plan based on the study (which will involve dams, Warner's wastewater treatment plant, the various conservation commissions). The draft will be sent to the various lakes with dams; there's only one out so far, which is Todd Lake. Once the plan is completed, there will be an information meeting (public hearing). Then DES will respond to comments from the hearing. Another project involving permits in the river corridor will be for the Concord Lake Sunapee Rail Trail project.
 - b. Dan noted that Chris SpannWeitz has decided not to renew his appointment to the WRLAC. Dan thanked him (in absentia) for his contributions to the WRLAC and the permit subcommittee. Dan expressed a need for at least one additional permit review subcommittee member. Mickey graciously agreed to join the subcommittee. Dan noted that the subcommittee will be sure to seek input from the rest of this committee when possible, but sometimes the turnaround time for comments is very short, making it impossible to convene members within the timeframe given. Dan also noted that other committee members are welcome to get involved to the extent that they wish. Discussion moved to whether it would be a good idea to seek out the expertise of former WRLAC chair, Ken Milender. It was decided that Pete would sound out Ken to see if he would be willing to be an outside advisor for technical advice for complex projects. The committee voted unanimously to have Pete contact Ken.
 - c. Review of Article II Section B of WRLAC [bylaws](#) on WRLAC's role in permit reviews – Laura and Pete noted that with these complex projects coming up that it might be a good idea for committee members to review our committee's role as an advisory group in the bylaws: [Article II Section B of WRLAC bylaws](#).
6. Need for additional representatives on the WRLAC – Dan encouraged committee members to continue working on bringing more members to this committee.
7. If time, begin review of the Warner River Corridor Management Plan – Laura suggested that over the coming year or so, each committee member would lead a review of one of the seven sections of the action plan with an eye to determining whether that section of the plan is completed, needs revision, or is no longer relevant. She will contact committee members about which section they would like to lead a review of. She will lead the review of the first section.

Continuing Business

1. Instream Flow project & Warner River Management Plan update – The management plan will involve operation of the four dams and the Water District.
2. Encore solar array project update – The application for an alteration of terrain permit has been granted.
3. Need for assignment of specific tasks for committee members – Dan noted that various committee members are providing reports on various programs, such as VRAP. We also have a

permitting subcommittee. Dan noted that it would be a good idea to have someone to spearhead the review of the Warner River Corridor Management Plan. Laura has offered to take the lead on this. She will contact each committee member to indicate which section of the plan they'd like to lead the review for. We have plenty of time to do this. This is somewhat of a living document that is meant to be updated. We would send revisions to DES.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, May 28, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Russell
WRLAC Secretary