

Place: Exeter Historical Society

Date: February 24, 2015

Notes Taken by: R. Walsh/W. Jordan/R.
Huber/ P. Walker

Project #: 52151.04

Re: Great Dam Removal
Section 106 Consultation
Public Informational Meeting

ATTENDEES: See attached sheet for a partial list of attendees.

VHB staff Peter J. Walker and Rita Walsh, the Town's consultants for the dam removal, presented a brief overview of the project and the Section 106 Consultation process. Key items included:

- Project Background: The dam was first identified as not meeting state dam safety standards in 2000. Several previous engineering studies had been completed over the years to examine what to do about the dam. In October 2013, VHB issued a report on behalf of the town that summarized many options. In March 2014, the town voted to allocate the money for dam removal via Warrant Article 8.
- Section 106, which requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of their projects (which they fund, license, approve, or permit) on historic properties. Section 106 is part of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Army Corps of Engineers is the lead federal agency because they have to issue a permit for the dam removal under the Clean Water Act. (NOAA had served as the lead federal agency during a previous phase of the project.)
- Several reports and inventory forms had been prepared to help identify and assess impacts to historic properties, including a Project Area Form, Individual Inventory form for the dam, Phase 1A archaeological survey and Phase IB archaeological survey. The historic inventories had been provided to the project consulting parties and are also available on the website. (Because archaeological reports are considered confidential, only a summary of the Phase IA and IB reports were available.)
- The Section 106 process is ongoing and is expected to continue through approximately June 2015. Although the overall project schedule is very ambitious, the Town currently plans to begin removal of the dam in September 2015.

Bill Jordan, head of the Great Dam Remembrance Committee, introduced the committee members, whose charge is to receive and suggest possible measures to mitigate the loss of the dam. Mr. Jordan invited people to attend their March 24, 2015 meeting to discuss ways to memorialize the dam. The meeting will start at 6:30 PM and would be held at the Exeter Historical Society. The Committee is seeking public input on how to memorialize the Great Dam after it is removed. In the meantime, comments and suggestions can be sent by email to: exeterdam106@gmail.com.

Please see the attached slide presentation, which is also posted on the Town's website.

Following the presentation, the meeting was opened to comments from the public and officials in attendance:

- Nadine Peterson of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (the state historic preservation office involved in the Section 106 review process) commented that the purpose of Section 106 is to avoid, minimize and/or mitigate the adverse effects of the dam's removal. She said that minimizing the dam removal, by trying to keep physical components of it in place as a reminder of its existence, should be explored.
- Bill Campbell, Exeter resident, noted that the rocky bed of the Exeter River was likely modified from its original condition when the dams were built. Mr. Campbell asked if there was any interest in restoring that so that the river could flow the way it did originally. Pete Walker explained that the project would not just remove the dam; engineers are working on a design to restore the river bed to a more natural condition and so that it will provide good habitat and so that upstream fish passage would be restored.
- Jonathan Ring, Park Street, of Exeter noted that he was surprised that the dam only dated to 1914 and asked about earlier dams on the river. Barbara Rimkunas, Curator of the Exeter Historical Society, responded that a dam had been in this location since the 1640s and that in the past there were actually dams further downstream at the String Bridge. Pete Walker also noted that the Individual Inventory Form for the dam and the Project Area Form are both posted on the Town's website, and they provide more history about the dam.
- Mr. Ring also asked if the Remembrance Committee had investigated how other dams were memorialized so that we are not reinventing the wheel. Bill Jordan noted that VHB provided some examples, including archival photography and walking tour brochures, and that they are aware of other memorialization measures. Nadine Peterson of NHDHR also noted that the adverse effect is not only to the dam, but to the entire historic district that surrounds it, so the mitigation measures should also consider a wider geographic area. She listed walking tour brochures, oral histories, or traveling exhibits. She stressed, however, that the mitigation measures should be suggested by Exeter's residents and that creative means to mitigate are encouraged.
- Frank Ferraro, Exeter resident, noted that overgrown vegetation near the library prevents people from seeing the river, and asked if anything was being done to minimize visual obstruction of the river. He also noted that any measures be designed with the understanding that certain places along the river will be obscured by vegetation. Pete Walker said that the vegetation near the library will not be directly affected by the project and also noted that the NHDES Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act does not allow removal of existing shoreline vegetation. Generally speaking, a vegetated buffer is an important part of the river's ecology.
- Dave Keddell, Project Manager with the US Army Corps of Engineers, said that, in previous dam removals he has worked on, that interpretive signage and photographs, including aerial views, have been the most common mitigation measures.
- Peter Olney, owner of 11 Water Street, which is a vacant lot bordering the river and dam, suggested that keeping real artifacts, and not just photographs of them, would be a better way to memorialize the dam. He noted that the history of dams at this location was fascinating.

- Don Clement, Exeter resident, said that, building on what Mr. Olney said, that the remembrance need not be limited to the most recent dam, but could include all the interesting events that took place 300 years before the present dam was built.
- Edna Feighner, of the NHDHR, said that the evolution of the Great Dam should be considered and the mitigation should be as creative as possible. She recommended against copying what other places have done. She named some communities that have all had their own unique and creative kind of mitigation, which depended on how important the dam was in that community and how it affected its development.
- Jonathan Ring, Park Street, suggested that the penstock be retained, which was seconded by Pam Gjettum, Exeter resident, who said it was a great feature. Pete Walker attempted to clarify some of the terminology: the penstock is a buried 400-foot tunnel that runs from the dam, under the library, to the Exeter Manufacturing Co. The part that is above ground is known as the headworks and abutment. The penstock itself would not be removed, but the plans currently call for the complete removal of the abutment and headworks. Peter noted that, based on the comments received at the meeting, VHB would look at whether leaving some or all of the headworks in place would be feasible. He noted that the abutment directly affects the hydraulics of the river, so leaving it in place could have a tradeoff with regard to flood mitigation.
- Bill Campbell, Exeter resident, asked if the area where Founders Park is located was filled. The area is all filled, although several people noted that the area had been lined with houses historically.
- Lionel Ingram, Exeter resident and head of the Exeter River Study Committee, noted that the chosen mitigation measures would have to go before the town if there's a need for more money to fund these efforts. So we'll have to convince the town that any commemoration plan is a good idea. Pete Walker stated that there is some funding already built in to the project budget for mitigation but that some of the suggested ideas would exceed that planned budget, some possibly dramatically.
- Pete Richardson, Exeter resident, said it would be nice to have a walkway connection from String Bridge to Founders Park so you could walk all around downtown Exeter, with the river as its focus and centerpiece. He noted that the river is the reason the town was founded and where it was founded. He also noted that the Exeter Manufacturing Co., the owners and builders of the dam, ran the town until 1900 and that should also be recognized.
- Arthur Bellaigeron, Exeter resident, noted that a lot of clearing of vegetation, including large trees, would need to happen for a riverwalk.
- Frank Ferrero, Exeter resident said that with the river much reduced, one way to accomplish the connection between String Bridge and Great Bridge is to have a stairway going down from String Bridge down the east side of the river, and a stairway by the Great Bridge so that people can get down by the river to view it and possibly fish.
- Dick Huber, Exeter resident, expressed support for the walkway and that the walkway might involve a boardwalk much like the boardwalk Exeter has along the Squamscott River.
- Bill Campbell, Exeter resident, noted that the Town will have to renovate the String Bridge soon, so perhaps the stairway and walkway idea should be considered there.

- Jonathan Ring, Exeter resident, also supported the idea of the walkway and noted that the trees should not be kept.
- Pete Olney asked how important it would be to open the river channel as wide as possible; is it really necessary to remove the headworks? Pete Walker responded that he would discuss the issues with the project engineers and with the Town to see if retaining some or all of the headworks could be accommodated.

The meeting concluded with a reminder that the Great Dam Remembrance Committee would meet on March 24 at 6:30 PM at the Historical Society to further discuss mitigation. Bill Jordan will chair that meeting.