

Town of Mansfield
Conservation Commission
Special Meeting of 27 November 2012
Conference B, Beck Municipal Building
MINUTES

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 4:05p by Chair Quentin Kessel. *Members present:* Robert Dahn, Neil Facchinetti, Quentin Kessel, Scott Lehmann, John Silander. *Members absent:* Aline Booth (Alt.), Joan Buck (Alt.), Drzewiecki. {Frank Trainor has resigned.} *Others present:* Pat Suprenant.

2. This special meeting was called to consider the draft **Water Supply Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE)**, released on 06 November. The comment period ends on 21 December, two days after the Commission's regular monthly meeting. However, Town Manager Matt Hart has requested comments from relevant Town commissions and committees by 04 December, so that "one consolidated set of comments" can be submitted by the Town. To help focus discussion, Kessel distributed a draft of points he proposed that the Commission make in its comments.

Of the water-supply options studied, the EIE judges three to be capable of supplying the amount of water UConn and the Town maintain is needed to meet demand through 2060: (1) Connecticut Water Company (CWC, from Shenipsit Reservoir and wells) (2) Willimantic Water Works (WWW, from Willimantic Reservoir), and (3) Metropolitan District Commission (MDC, from Barkhamsted and Nepaug Reservoirs).

(a) There was general agreement with Kessel's proposed ranking of these alternatives from best to worst in terms of conservation as WWW, CDC, MDC. Obtaining water from within Mansfield would permit firmer control over collateral development, whereas importing it from distant basins would expose other towns through which the water mains run to development pressure. Ms. Suprenant suggested citing Growth Management Principle 4 in the draft State Plan of Conservation and Development, which (among other things) prefers local water sources in rural areas and cautions against introducing public water at a scale that encourages development. {See draft CPCD, p.18, "Rely ..."} Silander noted that inter-basin water transfers can have significant ecological consequences; conservation planning, often done on a watershed-scale, is difficult if large amounts of water can be moved from one watershed to another. While the WWW option does involve moving water from the Fenton watershed to the Willimantic watershed, these watersheds are contiguous in the Thames River basin; a good portion of the withdrawn water would be returned (as treated wastewater via the Willimantic River) to the basin a short distance below the Willimantic Reservoir.

The EIE mentions (e.g., ES-8, under "Cumulative Impacts") that water quality tends to deteriorate as it spends more time in transit. This is another consideration favoring a nearby source (WWW) over more distant ones (CWC, MDC).

(b) The Commission agreed that it was worth pointing out that the EIE sometimes seems to treat the alternatives unevenly, noting potential costs or problems for the WWW option without noting corresponding issues with the CWC and MDC options. For example, most of the bulleted "Cumulative Impacts" (ES-8&9, 12-11) seem greater for the CWC and MDC options, yet the following paragraph singles out the WWW option.

The need for a diversion permit is noted in the “Assessment of Feasibility” section for the WWW option, but not in the corresponding section for the MDC option. Kessel also wondered why a water storage tank near Four Corners would be needed under the WWW option, when no such need is noted for the CWC and MDC options.

(c) Kessel reported that Jason Coite had suggested at the Four Corners Sewer & Water Committee meeting on 15 November that a connection to WWW, CWC, or MDC might permit UConn to shut down pumping operations in the Fenton and Willimantic Rivers well-fields entirely. This possibility is not mentioned in the EIE, but the Commission agreed that it would be appropriate to discuss it as a potential environmental impact of the project. While ceasing withdrawals from the existing wellfields would have a positive impact on instream flows, there could be negative consequences as well. If these wellfields were abandoned, the Town would lose a back-up source of water (notwithstanding that “supply redundancy” is mentioned at ES-12 as a benefit of the project). Abandoning wellfields could also increase development pressures in the watersheds that protect them, as some existing restrictions would no longer apply. Ms. Suprenant observed that a bill permitting sale of watershed lands where wells are abandoned had passed the General Assembly last year.

(d) Lehmann noted that the EIE’s assessment of alternatives is driven by water demand projections by UConn and the Town, projections not evaluated in this study. He observed that if the PDD with 15% MOS figure for “Committed Water Supply Demand” in Table ES-3 were calculated in the same manner as the other values in this column, it would be 425,500 gpd instead of 730,000 gpd. More generally, the basis for the projections is not clear. Nor is it clear whether any consideration has been given to managing demand (by demand pricing, building codes requiring water conservation, etc.) rather than simply supplying whatever amount of water is demanded.

3. The meeting was **adjourned** 5:25p, with the understanding that Kessel would revise his draft comment to reflect the discussion summarized in 2(a)-(c) and that Lehmann would contribute to it a brief comment on point 2(d).

Scott Lehmann, Secretary, 28 November 2012; approved 19 December 2012.