

St. Marys River Binational Public Advisory Council (BPAC) Meeting Minutes

Place: CC 202, Essar Convergence Centre, Algoma University
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

When: June 17, 2015
6:30 – 8:30 pm

1. Call to order/introductions

Members: Emily Martin, James Dukes, Mary Rossiter, Mike Ripley, Klaas Oswald, Kristina Denison, Chris Graham, Matt Konieczki, Jessica Wesolek, Don Marles, Crystal Bole, Ron Prickett, Brian Wesolek

Agency Reps: Corrina Barrett (Algoma U), Carrie Ginou (Algoma U), Mark Chambers (EC), Catherine Taddo (City), Meagan Sutherland (Algoma U)

Guests: Angela Darwin (EC), Peter Tonazzo (City), Tesha Zimmerman (Sault Tribe), Michelle Bruneau (MDCH)

Regrets: Paula Antunes, Megan Kelly, Ron Dorscht

2. Approval of Last Meetings Minutes

- May 7, 2015 - approved as presented

3. Business arising from previous minutes

- Received a response from AECOM/KPMG regarding the letter that BPAC sent in May. The project lead, Karen Wall, of the Port of Algoma Redevelopment Planning Study acknowledged the letter sent by the BPAC. The response letter briefly summarizes the project and states that they are still in the early stages of planning. Once the environmental requirements of the project have been determined by the regulatory agencies she would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss the project with the BPAC.
- Klaas had updates on previous business:
 - Update on the Pointe Louise Wetland Court Case – The transcripts have still not yet been typed and the law firm for the developer has asked for a continuation to present the notice of appeal in the courts. There is nothing that can be done until the transcripts are typed so it will probably be another month or two before anything starts to happen.
 - Update on Bill 66, The Great Lakes Protection Act, 2015 – Klaas has checked on the website and it looks as though all parties are in agreement that, in principle, it is a good Act. Bill 66 is slowly working its way through the committee stages and given that the current government has approximately 4 years left in their mandate there is plenty of time for Bill 66 to go from its second reading (debate stage) and through the third reading where it's passed by the legislature and, in other words, becomes law.

http://ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&Intranet=&BillID=3115

4. Presentations

- Peter Tonazzo (City of SSM Planner) presented on proposed Natural Heritage Policies within the City's new Draft Official Plan.
 - Copies of the Draft Official Plan were handed out to meeting attendees.
 - An overview of planning in general was given. Planning is a technical and political process. The goal is to achieve the greatest public good over the long term.
 - There is a planning hierarchy in Ontario. Everything that planners do has to be consistent with the 2014 Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) (available online).
 - The Official Plan (OP) is the development vision for the community. It breaks the community into relevant land uses. Review of the Draft OP has been ongoing for several years. The current OP was approved back in 1996 which is prior to updates to the previous PPS (2005) and the Natural Heritage Resource Manual, not to mention that important Acts such as the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act did not yet exist. Although the Planning Act and Provincial Policy requires the OP to undergo a "comprehensive review" every 5 years, it has been nearly 20 years since this has occurred resulting in an out dated OP. Updates must be made to ensure conformity with Amended legislation, plans, agreements and the PPS, and they must reflect changing community vision, development needs and trends.
 - Peter stresses that public input is critical for determining the communities' overall development goals and to ensure public support of policies to aid implementation. Although the Planning Act only requires 2 public meetings, the Planning Division is proposing a comprehensive outreach campaign based upon the current Draft OP. Informal discussions, such as this meeting with the BPAC, will be held with multiple stakeholders and the public throughout the Summer. In the fall they hope to release a new Draft OP that has updates based upon the comments and concerns heard throughout the summer.
 - The promotion of efficient development patterns (vision s.1.1) focuses growth to within the urban settlement area and especially the downtown, however, this also happens to be next to the St. Marys River.
 - In the Natural Heritage Policies there has been some positive changes to significant natural habitats, features and areas. Some examples include:
 - Fish habitat (s.3.2.1) – If you propose a planning application within 120m of the water you have to do an environmental impact study (improved from 50m).
 - Wetlands (s.3.2.2) – Coastal wetlands will now be treated the same as provincially significant wetlands.
 - BPAC comments that the revised PPS (2014) requires that municipalities have regard for international agreements (ex. GLWQA) which includes AOC and the RAP. This puts the onus on the BPAC to review the Draft OP in detail and provide comments and suggestions. The BPAC has a lot to gain in terms of the RAP through this process.
 - Peter points out that the current Draft OP has no policies that relate to the St. Marys River (at least none within the scope of the BPAC). Peter stresses that it is important to look at the document as a whole because there is a lot of emphasis on strengthening the downtown area. However, this can lead to problems as it is right beside the St. Marys River, which has always been viewed as a hard/manufactured shoreline by planners in the past.
 - Comments and suggestions from the BPAC should be presented in a formal letter. BPAC members need to review the Draft OP and reconvene to discuss how to move forward as a group.

- Angela Darwin with Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) presented on their study to address the Fish and Wildlife Habitat BUI in the SMR AOC. The multi-year effort consisted of assessing current conditions and evaluating the degree of impairment (if any) in coastal wetland water quality, and breeding marsh bird, amphibian, aquatic macroinvertebrate and submerged aquatic vegetation communities within the AOC, as well as non-AOC reference sites.
 - Surveys were conducted in a total of 6 AOC sites and 5 non-AOC sites to assess whether coastal wetland conditions within the St. Marys River AOC are comparable to those of suitable reference sites (outside of the AOC).
 - There was some interesting water quality results relating to turbidity measurements. Some relatively high readings for Lake George, Pumpkin Point, West Shore St. Joseph Island and Hay Bay Wetland. Angela pointed out that this was likely due to those areas being large open wetlands subject to wind and wave action.
 - Wetlands were assigned a water quality index ranging from excellent to highly degraded. Most wetlands received an index that was considered good to very good. However, others were considered moderately degraded to very degraded. This was attributed to the wetlands with high turbidity readings. It was pointed out that the use of such descriptor words could be deceiving since the high turbidity readings were likely a result of wave action.
 - Angela presented results based on an Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) for marsh birds and submerged aquatic vegetation. There was quite a bit of variation over the years, most likely due to changes in water level. They are currently unable to develop an IBI for macroinvertebrates and amphibians. Another year of surveys are needed to validate results.
 - So far, there is no clear picture as to whether there is a difference in community condition between AOC and non-AOC coastal wetlands. Next steps are to complete another year of surveys and validate IBIs where possible.

5. Office Reports

- Ontario RAP office received confirmation of EC funding in May (up to March 31, 2016).
- LSSU may no longer be able to host the BPAC website. Corrina is looking into an alternative server through AU or an independent (paid) company (such as GoDaddy). The deadline for this is the end of the month.
- Have hired an assistant field technician to help Carrie G. with water sampling this summer.
- Have had three excellent interviews with candidates for Corrina's replacement. Notified successful candidate today. Corrina will be finishing June 26th.
- RAP Office (Ontario) will be participating in the Hub Trail Festival on July 1st and the Sustain Algoma Expo on July 25th. The Hub Trail Festival involves setting up an information booth along the hub trail, ideally situated beside the St. Marys River. Participants will walk or bike the hub trail, stopping at each booth to get a passport stamped and talk with the participating organizations. The Sustain Algoma Expo is essentially the former Green Expo, however, a name change was required to try and attract more people. It will take place at the arena in Desbarats.
- SPAC update: The legislative meeting in Lansing went well. Updates on PAC support grants to be sent out.

6. Agency Updates

- Little Rapids Restoration Update:
 - Looking for an available BPAC member to attend a briefing session for Congressional Representative Dan Benischeck on Saturday June 27 or Friday July 3.
 - A request for bids has been sent out for construction of the bridge. Opening of bids will be at the end of June and an announcement of the chosen contractor will be on June 30.

- Environment Canada (EC):
 - EC will be collecting White suckers from the river for its fish tumour survey in July or August. This will be the second survey in the last 6 years. This survey is meant as a follow-up to the survey done in 2009 due to the high tumour rates that were initially observed.
 - Two sediment maps were passed out. Maps were created using 12 years of data collected on contaminated sediments. The maps show where sampling has taken place and the year samples were taken. These maps focus on the sediment chemistry, however, studies have also been done to look at the chemistry of surface and core sediments, benthic organisms, biomagnification and community abundance. Mark will email the maps to the BPAC.
 - Fisheries & Oceans Canada is currently conducting fieldwork to gather data for a second year on fish community health within the AOC.

7. Memberships

- For new members, applications must be received & prospective members present for confirmation – standard procedure.
- Emily Martin has switched to a new position at BMIC and Matt Konieczki was presented as a replacement. A letter written by Matt showcases his background and qualifications. Mike mentioned for Matt to be accepted as a BPAC member and Mary seconded. Matt was present for confirmation and there were no objections.

8. New Business

9. Public Comments

- None.

10. Next Meeting

- Next meeting will be in September, date TBD.