Water Resources Committee

September 8, 2016

Attendees: Tim Cook (chair), Al Werner, Mike Ross, Melissa Makepeace-O’Neil, Nancy McGarigal

1. Welcome to Melissa
   * This is the first meeting Melissa has attended. She is the new representative of the Select Board.
   * Everyone made introductions.
2. Review Minutes from Last Committee Meeting
   * A couple adjustments were made to the last meeting’s notes (July 7, 2016):
     + Add a logistics detail to #5 to include that all water samples need to be delivered to a laboratory within 24 hours of being collected.
     + Need to correct the spelling of Melissa’s name
     + Need to replace “Town Council”, with “Town Counsel”

* With above adjustments, the minutes were accepted.

1. Discuss Private Well - Water Quality Testing Proposal with Town Counsel
   * Town Counsel was not present, so this topic was postponed.
   * Al will follow-up with Becky Torres to see if the Town Counsel (Donna McNichol) is available to meet with us at our next committee meeting on October 12, 2016.
   * Attendees all agreed that facilitating getting residents drinking water tested was still a good idea to pursue, even if the data might not be available to us. We know some things about the natural chemistry of our area’s well water based on a Mt Holyoke study that Al led. That was based on evaluating outside spigot water and generalizing spatially where issues are.
   * Questions for Town Counsel include: whether the Town could help fund water testing and not receive data, or, if data is obtained from residents, do results have to be made public? Or, is there a liability if poor water quality is documented? Private rights, public disclosures, and liability are the primary concerns.
2. Member Updates and Follow-up from Last Meeting
   * Al expressed frustration with the USGS well monitor changing locks on the two town wells he is monitoring. Steve Mabee replaced combination locks with key locks and gave Al a set of keys. This is less convenient, as we will now have to coordinate sharing keys when different people check the wells.
   * Al will talk to USGS contact to see about a more convenient security system.
   * As a reminder, USGS is monitoring about 20 wells in the region, including the two in town, visiting them 1/month to get a sense of overall regional trends. Results are published.
   * We reviewed Action Items from the last meeting:
     + Item #1: Not done yet (Tim to provide links to govt websites re: water quality)
     + Item #2: Done (Tim to welcome Melissa to committee)
     + Item #3: Next Meeting (Al to ask Becky Torres to invited Town Counsel to next mtg)
     + Item #4: Skipped because Paul Lyons was not in attendance (webpage status)
     + Item #5: Done (Al to send his Town meeting ppt to committee members)
     + Item #6: Done (Al and Paul to put conductivity loggers back in Roaring Brook)
     + Item #7: Not done yet (Tim to contact water quality testing labs to check on costs; probably should wait until we talk with Town Counsel).

* Al provided background for Melissa on why we have conductivity meters out. We are looking at whether roadside salt is getting into the streams and potentially impacting the natural system. Preliminary analysis, based on the data, indicates that salt is getting into the stream, but it is at a very low level and very transient. It appears no major contamination is occurring.
* Lake Wyola did extensive monitoring of water quality this summer. (More places were sampled with great frequency than in past years). Tim plans to evaluate the data at his lab at Worcester State University to identify temporal variability and determine if more targeted testing is needed.
* Al provided a quick overview of the well monitoring program to Melissa. He showed a map of locations, and shared the 2015-2016 data from the Town Hall wells as an example. A quick review appears that the Town Hall deep well (300 ft) has fluctuated approximately 7 feet over the past 12 months, which is a similar fluctuation during the same time period in 2015. Thus, it appears that the bedrock aquifer in town is not showing anomalously low levels in response to the drought conditions. This is interesting given current drought conditions. The shallow well (12 ft deep), however, is dry though may recover quickly with a good rain.
* Al has a student interested in analyzing the data in more detail to look at seasonal patterns, precipitation patterns, or any other relationships. The plan is that she will also make the data more seamless and presentable to town residents.

1. New Business
   * Develop information to share with town residents about signals that a private water well may be drying up, and suggest conservation measures during this drought. Nancy to do internet search and prepare something. We should also include info on results of well monitoring. Suggestion was to ask Buzzy Booth (the town “well guy”) if he had information.
   * It was suggested we ask Walter Tibbets about whether there are any fire hydrant issues during this drought, just as an indication of overall drought concerns.
   * The committee needs to prepare a brief annual report for FY16. This is required for all standing committees. Tim will ask Paul if he can do it for this past year that he served as Acting Chair.
2. Next Meeting
   * Next meeting will be Wednesday, Oct 12. The plan is for all future meetings to be on the second Wednesdays of each month.
   * Potential topics:
     + Brainstorm on how we can make data collection and analysis more practical and efficient (e.g. Is there more we can do to convince USGS to adopt Shutesbury Town Hall well site as one of their weather stations?)
     + Need to discuss the committee’s focus for the future
     + Current preferred email addresses for everyone
     + Website topic (which was postponed from this meeting)
     + Check on action items from July meeting that were not completed.
     + If we pursue water quality testing, we might think about the school as a conduit for getting testing equipment distributed/dropped off/picked up. Other options?
3. Action Items from Meeting
   * Al to ask Becky Torres about getting Town Counsel to attend our Oct 12 meeting to discuss water quality testing.
   * Al to coordinate with student project on analyzing well monitoring data.
   * Al to talk to USGS about the locks on Town Hall wells and a better solution.
   * Nancy/Tim to develop information for town residents on signals for when a private well may be drying up. (Note: Information is drafted and has been shared with members. It was suggested we post a note on NextDoor Shutesbury directing residents to the committee website where the information will be posted. Need to coordinate with Paul who is working with WebMaster.)
   * Paul (?) to do FY16 report to town of committee accomplishments.