

Mystic River Watershed Initiative Steering Committee Purpose and Structure

Revised June 14, 2017

A. Introduction

The Mystic River Watershed Initiative (MRWI) works to improve water quality and public access to open spaces in the Mystic River watershed. The initiative, begun in 2009, is led by a coalition of representatives from government agencies, municipalities, non-profit organizations, community groups, and others who care about the Mystic River watershed. The MRWI Steering Committee meets regularly to discuss key issues and priority actions related to this initiative.

B. The Purpose of the Steering Committee

Steering committee meetings and efforts are designed to:

1. *Draw attention to the Mystic River watershed*, helping forge a shared identity among those working there, raise awareness of local challenges, and focus attention across groups on this particular watershed.
2. *Foster information exchange*, providing information about what is happening related to water quality and open space in the Mystic. It provides people with a place to jointly learn about upcoming or current Mystic-related projects, initiatives, scientific work, and policy direction.
3. *Build networks and relationships*, serving as a gathering place for stakeholders to meet and get to know those from other projects, initiatives, organizations, municipalities, and agencies who might have shared interests. This cultivates mutual respect and camaraderie to help build trust and thereby advance productive activities.
4. *Promote idea generation*, fostering opportunities for collaborative spin-offs such as partnering on grant applications and leveraging technical expertise on projects.
5. *Foster coordinated and collaborative action through subcommittees and member organizations*, providing for diverse feedback and even joint staffing to advance relevant ideas and initiatives. This includes coordination among and across key agencies at federal, state, and local levels.

Examples of Steering Committee action may include: creating an action plan with cross-agency priorities; reporting on progress in the Mystic River watershed; organizing periodic events such as the Mystic River Science Forum and Canoemobile; conducting environmental education and outreach; identifying potential funding sources for key projects; and sharing grant opportunities.

C. Steering Committee Participation and Roles

All are welcome to attend and participate in the Steering Committee. Steering Committee meetings are designed for individuals and organizations that come from or work on open space and water quality issues in the Mystic River watershed.

Steering Committee participants attend meetings when agenda topics are relevant and compelling. There is no formal membership or required level of attendance. Those who want the Initiative's full benefits are encouraged to attend regularly, but all are invited to come whenever they are interested and to participate actively in discussions. It is expected that most participants will come from organizations and/or constituencies in the watershed with diverse perspectives such as government agencies, non-profits, and community residents. The engagement of stakeholders from across the watershed, including both urban and suburban populations as well as voices from both the upper and lower parts of the watershed. Interested parties should let the Coordinating Team know if they'd like to be added to or removed from the Initiative's email list.

The Coordinating Team plans Steering Committee meetings and oversees project-related work that occurs between meetings. This group makes occasional process decisions as needed on behalf of the Initiative, but it will not provide consensus advice to EPA. Its primary task is to identify relevant and timely Steering Committee agenda topics that will engage participants. Coordinating Team members seek to design meeting agendas that enable sharing of useful information and provide time for discussion. They will also track the work of subcommittees and support subcommittee efforts as needed. Anyone who is committed to the Initiative, does work related to water quality and/or open space in the Mystic River watershed, and participates in good faith with others, may join the Coordinating Team.

Co-chairs facilitate Steering Committee meetings and the overall process. There are two co-chair positions, one from a government agency and one from a community group or non-profit. Both co-chairs must represent a group that has a watershed-wide focus. Co-chairs will be selected by consensus by the Steering Committee every two years.

EPA will provide the Initiative with support, including scheduling meetings; coordinating meeting logistics; planning the meetings; providing a note-taker and written meeting summaries; supporting between-meeting activities (e.g. subcommittee meetings); and helping the Initiative link to and draw in other federal agencies at the right time through the Mystic Watershed Urban Waters Federal Partnership.

D. Decision Making

This coalition is designed to be welcoming and inclusive. Since participation varies from meeting to meeting, participants do not make decisions for collective action beyond affirming subcommittee tasks and giving input to the Coordinating Team. Participants at any Steering Committee meeting may indicate support for forming or dissolving subcommittees and the overall charge of the subcommittees.

In the infrequent event that a formal decision must be made, the Coordinating Team will seek input and discussion from participants at a Steering Committee and then make a decision. For the Coordinating Team to reach agreement, both co-chairs must be in agreement plus a majority of other Coordinating Team members present in the conversation.

E. Steering Committee Meeting Planning and Management

Frequency, Duration and Location - Steering Committee meetings are held approximately quarterly. We strive to limit the meetings to two hours, but their duration depends on the meeting content. Meeting agendas and frequency are determined by the co-chairs with input from the Coordinating Team. Meetings are held in various locations, primarily in municipalities in the Mystic River watershed.

Meeting Notice – Meeting dates are usually determined well in advance of meetings, and meeting agendas are distributed via email at least one week in advance to people subscribed to the Steering Committee email list, which is managed by one of the co-chairs. Meeting materials and announcements will also be posted online on the Initiative website.

Planning Calls - The Coordinating Team generally meets via phone or in person at least once between each meeting to plan the upcoming meeting agenda.

Facilitation - Meetings are facilitated by one or both of the co-chairs, who keep discussions and presenters on track.

Meeting Guidelines – Meeting participants are expected to participate in good faith, and to think creatively and constructively about the challenges facing the watershed and opportunities that would benefit the watershed. They are expected to speak respectfully to one another, give everyone a chance to speak, and to stay on track with the agenda.

Initiative Website, Meeting Materials and Summaries – The Initiative has a website currently maintained by EPA where meeting summaries, presentations, handouts, and other items of interest are posted. This website is open and available to the general public. Summaries of each meeting include themes from presentations and discussions, a list of participants, and any next steps identified during the meeting. Summaries will be shared in draft form with presenters for any corrections before wider circulation and posting.

Staffing and Financial Support – Participation in this Initiative is voluntary and/or funded by individual participating organizations or entities. As noted in Section B, EPA has historically provided staff and contractual resources to help plan and organize meetings, produce meeting summaries, and generally keep the Initiative moving forward.

F. Subcommittees

The Steering Committee may both form and disband subcommittees. Subcommittees are one of the primary forums by which this initiative makes progress. If possible, Subcommittee membership should include a subcommittee chair that participates regularly in Steering Committee activities. Each subcommittee should have a clear purpose and objectives, and should report regularly to the Steering Committee. Existing and previous subcommittees have focused on topics such as water quality, open space, and relevant issues facing watershed residents, municipalities and the private sector/businesses. Active subcommittees are expected to meet at least twice a year, possibly after general Steering Committee meetings, to check in on their charge, timeline, priorities and progress.

G. Limitations

This document expresses the good-faith intentions of the participants, is not intended to be legally binding, does not create any contractual or funding obligations, and is not enforceable.

The participants understand that EPA's participation in this initiative is subject to the availability of appropriated funds, its budget priorities, and its legal authority under sections 104(a) and (b) of the Clean Water Act. Nothing in this document, in and of itself, obligates EPA or any other party to expend appropriations or to enter into any contract, assistance agreement, interagency agreement, or other financial obligation. Each participant agrees not to submit a claim for compensation for services rendered to EPA in connection with any activities carried out in furtherance of this initiative.

The participants may make factual statements to the public that describe its cooperation with EPA. However, EPA cannot endorse the purchase or sale of a participant's products or services. The participants agree not to make statements to the public in news releases, product brochures, on web sites or in any media that imply EPA endorsement of a participant's products or services.