

**Peconic Estuary Partnership
Management Committee (MC) Meeting**

**April 17, 2024
10am – 12:30pm**

LOCATION:

NEW Town of Riverhead Town Hall
[4 W 2nd St, Riverhead, NY 11901](#)
[Google maps link](#)

Briefing Materials Package:
Link to Briefing Materials Folder
Zoom Recording YouTube Link
April 17, 2024, MC Minutes
FY24 Suffolk County Workplan & Budget
FY24 Stony Brook University Workplan & Budget

Agenda:

10:00 Welcome & Management Committee Roll Call *see the attendance record at end of minutes.
– Sue Van Patten, Management Committee Chair

10:05 Review and approval of Management Committee meeting minutes from January 31,2024

ACTION: Management Committee vote to recommend approval of January 31, 2024, minutes.
Vote held: *All in favor, no members abstained, none opposed- Motion Approved*

10:08 Formal addition of the Shinnecock Indian Nation as a voting member of the Management Committee

Shavonne Smith was previously designated to be a representative by Shinnecock Indian Nation leadership. Discussion was had about moving this motion forward without Shavonne Smith present. The Committee hesitated to move this forward without her presence as they wished to t give her the opportunity to speak directly to the committee upon acceptance. It was determined that 1) This expansion of the Management Committee is written into the updated CCMP; 2) Shinnecock Indian Nation has engaged and wishes to be a voting member of the PEP Management Committee 2) upon that acceptance, the nation nominated a designated representative: Shavonne Smith. With these points, the committee decided to move forward in passing this motion with no objections while inviting the designated representative Shavonne to speak to the Management Committee

10:11 ACTION: The Management Committee votes to recommend the addition of the Shinnecock Indian Nation as a voting member of the Management Committee.

Vote held: *All in favor, no members abstained, none opposed- Motion Approved*
Shavonne Smith will be formally made aware of the Management committee motion to welcome her representation.

10:15 Presentation of Suffolk County FY24 Workplan activities & budget (Joyce Novak, PhD, PEP

Executive Director)

SAV:

Questions were raised as to how SAV monitoring will be different than prior years. The TAC met with approval for recommending a new technique that will allow us to align with others doing this work in the region, including data from big-picture Aerial surveys every 5 years, and be coupled with LISS efforts.

10:20 ACTION: Management Committee vote to recommend Suffolk County FY24 Workplan to Policy Committee for approval.

Vote held: All in favor, no members abstained, none opposed- Motion Approved

10:20 Presentation of Stony Brook University FY24 Workplan activities & budget (Joyce Novak, PhD, PEP Executive Director)

Staff development:

The Committee discussed the benefit of investing in leadership training/ staff development. It was suggested this become a line item for continued development in the future, perhaps not every year but continued. The programs at Columbia and Stanford University were noted for leadership training opportunities. The program has never sought out training like this since this staff came into place. Paul Shepson noted that he sees this as a very important investment for PEP and that this will pay off.

Nutrient management outreach personnel:

Ann Welker inquired if this role would be able to eventually develop into providing direct assistance for homeowners. Joyce assured the committee that the second half of this outreach position's salary is devoted to directly helping homeowners with applications for funding nutrient reduction projects.

PRBs:

Discussion was had on the workplan outlining \$50,000 of local government funds to monitor PRB installed at Three Mile Harbor. Joyce added context that two years ago, PEP became involved with this project. Last year was the first year of monitoring data collection after installation. Concern was shown for the value of the monitoring costs compared to the value of the installation. Questions were raised on if there are 10 more PRBs installed across the estuary, how will that monitoring be funded? The monitoring is necessary to be sure there are meaningful results that justify the implementation. Joyce Novak references PEP process calls for the TAC have that discussion. The end result of this monitoring is to understand if there is quantifiable reduction in nitrogen from this PRB.

Questions were raised on if there is a goal to use this monitoring to assist a regulating body to come up with standards of design and implementation.

A discussion was had on how many pilots are needed before regulating bodies call for a pause of implementation of additional pilots/projects until there is some sort of guidance for PRB implementation. Kevin McDonald recognized that effort spent on unregulated pilots such as this takes effort away from known solutions for reducing the nutrient load through septic upgrades.

Legislator Ann Welker added that even in the absence of quantifiable data, she suggests that every bulkhead have a PRB in front of it as it is a low-cost simple project that can be done in combination with the reinstallation of bulkhead.

Kevin McDonald responded that he agreed this could be nominal addition to a project but there is no guarantee that groundwater flow from source contamination is going through the bulkhead. It is fine if a private homeowner is interested in that, but concern was raised that this is public money, not private money.

Ann noted this is a pilot as is the PRB in Hampton Bays in Southampton Town. In Hampton Bays there is fairly long linear footage with different treatments that address some of the concerns raised here. Joyce Novak discussed that in terms of first-year results in Three Mile Harbor site there was not quantifiable reduction of nutrients, and it is thought to be because it is not catching the plume. This is where these projects can become expensive.

It was clarified that the \$50k is something we have already committed to through the project's 5-year monitoring plan that was agreed upon with the local government. We will run into challenges if they are looking to add to this amount of money tweaking or adding test wells to potentially get to the plume.

Sue Van Patten clarified that the dollar number for support each year for this monitoring is not previously agreed upon. This \$50k is what was proposed for the second year of monitoring.

Discussions were had on long-term monitoring costs, and how the evaluation process is vital to understanding the value invested is worth the benefit return. What is our evaluation process?

Kevin McDonald noted Ken Zegel's expertise in this realm.

Ken Zegel asked if there is the possibility of an experienced third party to review data for pilot result verification. He recognized there are experienced firms across the country with expertise because PRBs are all that they do. Not to discourage partners involved in the project, but experience is limited in the space in Suffolk County, and stresses the data is only as good as the evaluations that come out of it. Ken Zegel asked if all of this monitoring money is to collect samples or if it could be used to have third-party verification done.

It was clarified that as currently proposed; data collection and evaluation is the work of Molly Graffam at Cornell Cooperative Extension of SC with a sub-award of a portion of this \$50k to Ron Paulson's company to collect some data and work with monitoring wells. Ron Paulson has previously worked at Cornell Cooperative Extension on PRB projects like this one.

The first-year monitoring analysis and report are available.

It was noted that the sub-award contract includes all data available.

Ken Zegel continued the conversation by saying that PRBs are not as simple as they initially seem, with that, Zegel suggested third-party verification will give a good perspective to get the most out of the data collected. This is one tool in the toolbox but added that source control should be first. Suggested keeping in mind that this option includes the risk of unintended consequences and the initial expense associated with implementation. He stressed the need for management to be based on individual waterbody needs and goals.

Joyce Novak Confirmed the PEP will go back to the Local government and proposal team with points raised by the Management Committee.

Kevin McDonald noted the NEP Technology Transfer conference is an opportunity to recognize the best

working application of the process for implementing PRBs.

Kevin McDonald reiterated concerns for implementation not meaning true nutrient reduction and the cost-benefit risk of effort investment. One million dollars of funding toward this effort could be used on 40 septic/IA systems that could have been upgraded which would guarantee results to reduce the load.

Joyce Novak added she has reached out to other NEPs and NEERs that shared similar concerns. The Committee discussed concerns about normalizing this process without data backing up effectiveness. Joyce Novak reiterated that this is the purpose of this monitoring effort. If data is collected and analyzed managers can make appropriate decisions. It was noted that in PRB designs the plume dynamics are modeled and those models are only as good as data input into the model, therefore creating the need for investing in data collection.

Jeremy Campbell asked if any negative impacts are associated as a lot of work is done to identify locations, is water running through filters affecting the state of water quality? Are we doing more harm than good?

Joyce Novak noted that at this site there is a significant increase in iron, and this is adjacent to the Accabonac marsh system which raises concerns.

Jeremy noted that PRBs are 2nd or third to our first tool of addressing the source. Pilot projects should be encouraged but a priority ranking should be recognized for BMPs.

Sue Van Patten stated that the NYSDEC will release PRB guidance that is in development with Stony Brook University and Suffolk County later this year. It was highlighted that this is an engineered solution and should follow the same process as any engineered solution- first, an effort to stop the source then a site feasibility study with alternatives discussed. This NYSDEC document will spell out this process, but we cannot guarantee it will be used by managers. NYSDEC is not looking to permit and regulate these as of right now. Expressed hope for the solute transport model results to help with finding sites where this tool is best fit for implementation. PRBs were previously funded through WQPIP but there was a siting issue as there was not enough nitrogen to worry about areas chosen and not enough known about the implementation process. Sue Van Patten shared that it is possible for these to be funded by WQIP again once we have proper siting with data from the Solute Transport Model and a guide/process for implementation. The guide will highlight that this is not a replacement for addressing the source, this is a tool for addressing legacy pollutants that do exist in specific areas.

Joyce Novak also pointed out that this was discussed when PEP began this conversation when it was presented to TAC, and they decided they wanted to further explore and document these points.

It is not the committee's intention to pull out of this commitment at this point but Zegel's suggestion for a third-party investigation is a good idea.

Chris Clapp added that the public is not looking at this for what it is: removing legacy pollutants for a limited amount of time, a short-term mitigation tool that highlights the need for the source to be addressed on its own.

We know the site parameters and how to find the plume is vital for PRBs to work. PEP concern is in the effort put toward troubleshooting these systems, as you need to find plumes and monitor them accordingly.

Joyce Novak noted the importance of this project to collect data that shows if this is something to continue to invest in across the watershed and share with managers.

Theresa Masin called attention to three concerns. 1) concern about these systems being insufficient to address legacy pollution. LI groundwater continues hundreds of feet deep into upper glacial and magothy aquifers, these PRBs will only skim the surface if they intercept groundwater at all. This will be insufficient to address groundwater issues.

In addition, 2) we do not know what these systems are doing to micro-biomes of soil. Concerned for its interception of beneficial bacteria and micro fungi that are on soils that assist in the breakdown of nitrogen in its natural process. The creation of this anoxic environment can be detrimental to the beneficial microbes needed. If there is a monitoring plan these microbes need to be monitored as well. 3) It needs to be clear to homeowners that having a PRB in a bulkhead does not mean other nutrient mitigation can be avoided. Despite the PRB, overland runoff is still an issue.

These concerns need to be addressed in conversations moving forward.

Actionable items: Return to local government with a conversation on third-party verification as well as microbiome soil monitoring.

SAV Sea turtle monitoring project:

Seagrass interactions with A federally protected species.

South shore estuary reserve partnership suggested. Joyce Novak discussed if they are interested in doing something similar in tandem, we are happy to collaborate and write a LI report.

NYS budget comments:

Kevin McDonald stated the almost finalized budget number for PEP is agreed at 750,000; this is a 200k increase and the program will have to adjust to add this amount. Joyce Novak added that this is planned to be used for the other half of the nutrient reduction personnel and the rest be used for a nutrient reduction or habitat project that will be passed by the TAC.

Communication Strategy +:

Kevin McDonald noted Javier Laureano (Policy Committee) shared thoughts of PEP doing lots of monitoring and hopes for PEP to do more implementation and communication. Communication by local media, digital, print, and radio to communicate estuary issues and citizen responsibility. He noted he is hopeful to commit more money to communication after the communication strategy is done.

Chris Clapp added it may be even more impactful for a media strategy to include workshops to train our core partners on what those messages are and how to deliver them through their life experiences, so they continue communication planning for the future such as nutrient reduction activities.

Kevin McDonald added that if we agree for this staff to take classes and leadership training to speak the same language and communicate what is effective and strategic about what PEP does, it makes sense to do this same training across our partners at the town level that currently function in their own silos. If there is the opportunity for technology transfers- we should be offering it and if there is something for us to learn- we should be engaging them to gain that. The aggregate of the effort should be better than the individual pieces.

ACTION: Management Committee vote to recommend Stony Brook University FY24 Workplan to Policy Committee for approval with contingency.

With contingency, vote held: *All in favor, no members abstained, none opposed- Motion Approved.*

11:15 Management Committee to discuss PEP support for the recommendation for the addition of Seaweed aquaculture practices to the existing Suffolk County Lease Program.

Jeremy Campbell asked PEP to continue to work on a pathway to develop a seaweed market. Sue Van Patten noted that NYSDEC is reviewing the economic study based in LIS now and the economic viability is recognized and there is interest by aquaculture professionals. This is for both seaweed and kelp and DEC is actively looking to develop an industry and active markets for these products.

Chris Clapp added that there could be a major market if all fertilizer used had been sourced locally. Markets aside, growing seaweed has ecological benefits that align with PEP CCMP goals.

Ann Welker added that there are conversions currently on creating a processing facility within county or LI to take material, dry, and process it for fertilizer or in the future food product use as is done in CT and Maine. SC support for this was confirmed by Lisa Broughten.

Theresa Masin clarified this is only native species as well as suggests any letter of support states Native species.

ACTION: Management Committee to decide whether PEP sends a letter of support for the addition of seaweed to the existing Suffolk County Aquaculture Lease Program.

Vote held: *Lisa Broughten abstained, Rest in favor, none opposed- Motion Approved.*

11:30 PEP Updates (PEP Program Office)

- PEP Active Project Updates
- Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Funded Project Updates
- Fish Pass Updates *Alewife season! *
- PEP Outreach Updates
- PEP Committee Updates
- Update on Agricultural Stewardship working group, **Corey Humphrey**
- Peconic Bay Scallop Technical Review Committee, **Chris Clapp**
- Local Government Committee, **Chairperson TBD**
- PEPC,
- Citizens Advisory Council, **Kevin McDonald**
- Water Quality Monitoring Collaborative, **Joyce Novak**
- Technical Advisory Council, Matt **Sclafani**

Joyce Novak clarified that Suffolk County Department of Health does not contribute direct funds to PEP, but the ability to direct capital funds for projects like the ones discussed. Highlighted the way that PEP

works with Suffolk County is extremely important and valued.

CAC Updates:

Kevin McDonald expressed the benefit of the CAC visit to Albany and the good impression made on Deborah Glick that ultimately contributed to the NYS executive budget next year starting at \$750,000. Noted that Southampton Town CPF committee is seeing homeowners facing decisions to invest more in their waterfront homes or sell to town CPF funds in consideration of hassles from storm and erosion events.

Expressed special gratitude to Valerie Virgona for her coordination of this effort!

CAC is also focused on the communication plan with contractors to write plans for how to tell the story of town, county, state, and fed govt all investing in water quality and how it affects citizens.

Tommy John Schiavoni added that there are shoreline retreat opportunities as market values of properties are affected by advancing shorelines. Negotiations can happen to get prices below market value due to the recognition of coastal flooding & erosion issues.

The Assembly passed amendments for a ballot measure to invest in septic system upgrades at local level to match federal and state funding along with strategic sewer investments. Major movement in our effort to reduce source pollution for enhanced water quality.

Broad Cove:

Note to inquire with PLT about parking lot access using a permeable pavement option.

12:00 Public Portion / Additional Comments

Theresa Masin added that the Town of Southampton accepted the general impact statement for the Riverside treatment plan. 1)takes industrial-zoned parcels out of commission for development and 2) is in line with the Peconic TMDL that says sewerage of high-density communities may be necessary to reach Nitrogen reduction goals. Moving along quickly and hopeful to be adopted soon.

Thank you!

2024 Management Committee meetings:

~~–January 10, 2024~~, rescheduled Jan 31, 2024

~~–April 17, 2024~~

- July 10, 2024: Possible Field Trip Meeting, more info in coming weeks!

- October 2024 Joint Meeting: RESCHEDULE TBD

Attendance: * indicates joined via zoom.

Chair: Sue Van Patten, Watershed Section B, Section Chief; NYS LINAP Coordinator (NYSDEC, Division of Water)

***Vice-Chair Lisa Broughton**, Water Quality and Energy Director (Suffolk County Dept of Economic Development and Planning) //stepped away briefly from 10:37a-11a

Cassie Bauer, Bureau Chief, Marine Habitat (NYSDEC, Division of Marine Resources)

Jeremy Campbell, South Shore Estuary Reserve Director (NYS Department of State)

***Ken Zegel**, PE, Chief - Office of Ecology (Suffolk County Dept of Health)

~~**Corey Humphrey**, District Manager (SC Soil and Water Conservation District)~~

***Catherine Stark & Ann Welker**, (Suffolk County Legislators, Districts 1 and 2) // *Late arrival Ann Welker enter 10:19a; Catherine Stark enter 11:06a*

TBD (Chair of PEP Local Government Committee)

***Matt Sclafani**, PhD, Cornell Cooperative Extension (Chair, Technical Advisory Committee) // *lacked audio but confirmed votes in chat*

Chris Clapp, (Vice-Chair, Citizens Advisory Committee)

Paul Shepson, PhD, Dean SoMAS, Stony Brook University (Host representative) // *left meeting at noon*

TBD (Local Government Representative)

***Elizabeth Butler**, Watershed and Estuary Protection Section Supervisor (EPA) // *Vote proxied to *Michael Flood as acting section supervisor*

Additional in-person attendees: Joyce Novak (PEP), Jade Blennau (PEP), Rachel Friedman (PEP), Shauna Kammath (NYSDEC), Rebecca Shuford (NYSG), Kevin McDonald (CAC Chair & TNC)

Zoom participants:

Theresa Masin (PEP NRSC & Southampton Town), Angela Noncarrow (Senator Palumbo's Office), Gavin Cohen (Shinnecock Environmental Department), Irene Donohue (Office of Legislator Ann Welker), Aimee Boucher (EPA Region 2), Michael Flood (EPA), Cole Yastrzemeski (Legislator Welker's Office), Tommy John Schiavoni (Town of Southampton)