

HHFT Visitation Data Committee Meeting

Date: Monday, September 11, 2023

Time: 7:00 - 9:26 PM (EST)

Zoom Video Meeting

Attendees:

Henry Feldman, Village of Cold Spring; James Labate, Village of Cold Spring; Jeffrey Robbins, Town of Philipstown; Mary Kate Ephraim, Town of Philipstown; Chris Alice Winward, Village of Nelsonville; Thomas Campanile; Village of Nelsonville; and Sarah Mencher, City of Beacon; Amy Kacala, HHFT; MJ Martin, HHFT and Faye Premer, About the Work.

Discussing the RFP for a third-party consultant for the VDC:

Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail (**HHFT**) wanted to review RFP edits proposed by the Visitation Data Committee (VDC) that were substantively different than the scope or format originally envisioned so the group could reach consensus on how best to move forward to achieve its intended purpose. Notably, this included:

- A desire for the municipal representatives to hold separate meetings with their third-party consultant without HHFT members present.
- Integrity of the process
- Expansion in the scope of topics the group was interested in reviewing beyond the three topics for which the committee was created.

Committee Composition and Municipal Representatives' Independence

HHFT clarified that the intended composition of the VDC includes HHFT and AtW staff to work together collaboratively with the other VDC members.

The RFP is to bring in a third-party professional consultant to provide technical assistance to the municipal representatives as they review data.

HHFT noted it is worthwhile for the VDC collectively and all of the relevant consultants to have authentic conversation as ideas are brought up. If members of the committee have concerns or questions, it is important for the entire committee (including HHFT staff) to hear them, and discuss them.

Jeff Robbins expressed concerns from members of the VDC that HHFT (as the project sponsor) has an agenda with different interests from the rest of the VDC group

representing their different municipalities. Jeff noted that the communities impacted by the project should be represented and speak with their own voices. The VDC needs the opportunity to ask their consultant questions without HHFT being present and trying to control the agenda.

Chris Winward - saw the RFP as a means to hire an independent consultant to review the work done by the consultants hired by HHFT. The municipal representatives should have time to go back and ask the third-party consultant questions and review the data presented by HHFT and their consultants without HHFT staff present, which may not happen if they are reacting at the same time that information is being presented.

HHFT had extended the invitation to community representatives to form a collaborative committee to work through the visitation and traffic data being collected and studied in advance of the Environmental Review. HHFT would like to be a facilitator and will record notes for public transparency. We invites input into the process and cannot learn without hearing the municipal representatives' concerns and having discussions together. Having separate conversations will make the process more disjointed. HHFT envisioned the VDC having a kick-off meeting with the third-party consultant so they can be clear on what the consultant's scope and then being provided with some preparatory reading. There will be meetings with each of the two relevant HHFT consultants (AKRF and ORCA) to understand their scope of work and the data collection process so the municipal representatives have the foundational information required to conduct their review.

Sarah Mencher (Beacon) stated that she feels she has a different perspective as the only Beacon representative on the VDC. In her experience with working on committees in her school district, everyone is involved in the committee process, including the school board. She would not like to meet the consultant without HHFT present, because HHFT is the "expert in the room." Since the consultant will be hired by the committee, they will be reporting directly to the committee, not HHFT alone. The consultant needs to know that there is controversy.

Mary Kate Ephraim (Philipstown) noted there will be pressure from the municipal boards regarding the process and For optics, it will be beneficial for all municipal representatives to say some meetings will be conducted without HHFT present.

HHFT noted the VDC can determine protocols to ensure that HHFT will hold no special influence over the consultant. The entire VDC will be copied on any correspondence to the consultant.

Amy Kacala suggested the consultant could meet with the reps and boards of each municipality to make sure they are advancing the goals of each community? This could be an opportunity to air your concerns and talk with the consultant about municipal priorities.

James Labate (Cold Spring) discouraged the idea of having public meetings with municipalities throughout the process when the VDC may not have answers yet to the public's questions.

Several municipal representatives requested to have the opportunity to have additional time before or after committee meetings to meet with the third-party consultant without HHFT or AtW representatives present to digest information, ask questions, and prepare for the next meeting.

HHFT expressed that there has to be some structure to the number of meetings for the RFP bid process because it affects the costs for the bids. The consultants need scoping information to prepare proposals. Once chosen, we want the committee to be able to use the consultant resources efficiently and well.

James Labate (Cold Spring) - suggested the municipal representatives submit written questions internally to the group and then to the consultant to be as efficient as possible.

There was discussion as to whether questions sent to the consultant should be shared with HHFT staff or not.

Mary Kate Ephraim (Philipstown) - suggested that the VDC could meet with the consultant without HHFT present but did not mind sharing questions with the HHFT.

MJ Martin (HHFT) - felt there will be a lot of general questions that will come up and HHFT can help the process move forward by answering questions proactively that the third-party consultant may not be able to answer. HHFT is also eager to have those bigger meetings with the general public and we want to make sure that we are all ready and prepared to help share the data with the public.

Sarah Mencher (Beacon) - suggested that there be one initial meeting held with the consultant without HHFT present once the consultant has been hired and then subsequent meetings could be held with the entire group. Then the VDC could have the option of having one or two more meetings without HHFT present if they deemed it necessary once they had an agenda in mind. At the least the municipal representatives could have one fully independent meeting in the beginning to ask questions and air grievances with direct access to the consultant as needed.

Extended discussion on structure of meetings with consultant:

It was proposed that there would be two to three allotted meetings for the municipal representatives to meet with the third-party consultant without HFHT present. The municipal representatives would come up with questions before those meetings and share their questions with HHFT, as well as the consultant. It was posited that the schedule of when those meetings occur would be most productive after HHFT's consultants (AKRF and ORCA) have presented some data to the rest of the VDC. There was a request to have time before or after the regular

meetings where municipal representatives had some time alone with the consultant like “executive session.”

HHFT suggested that the VDC could schedule additional blocks of 30 minutes after a full group meeting for the reps and consultant alone to have an immediate debrief. The initial meeting with the consultant could allow the VDC to appoint a point person from the group to communicate with the consultant to relay any additional follow-up questions that the group may have and schedule any additional meetings needed.

It was agreed that the municipal representatives will have independent time with the third-party consultant in the following ways:

- **Thirty minute add-on sessions after the substantive project consultant sessions (Traffic, Visitation)**
- **2-3 additional Zoom sessions with the consultant without HHFT present**

Integrity of the process

HHFT expressed concerns that the draft RFP had already been leaked to the PTH opposition group before it was in final form or had even been shared with municipal leaders. HHFT stated that there needs to be some agreement on disseminating information (how and when). The VDC should want to advance constructive dialogue and not contribute to more conflict and anxiety. HHFT agreed that we do not want to give out information that has not yet been fully reviewed, analyzed or prepared for the public to avoid misinterpretation. The VDC’s role is to distill and package that information for the public so there can be trust and transparency.

Jeff Robbins said HHFT’s efforts to control the process are not trust engendering. There is a history of distrust within the community. The municipal representatives would like to have the opportunity to meet without HHFT present to prepare and “catch up” with the amount of time HHFT has spent researching and developing the project.

Chris Winward (Nelsonville) expressed concerns about HHFT hiring and leading the work of the consultants.

Amy Kacala (HHFT) clarified that NYS Parks is the lead agency and that HHFT is not directing the work of all of the studies and consultants daily. There have been questions regarding how the data has been collected and will be used. We were hoping we would work through any questions or concerns together – the separation feels like we are avoiding building that trust. It is important that interim (draft) work of the committee not be shared until it is presented to the municipal boards in a public setting.

The VDC agreed to the request that draft materials being reviewed by the VDC not be distributed outside the committee.

Going forward, **HHFT** will mark draft materials as such so there is no confusion on what is interim work and what is work ready for public presentation. It will be expected that all committee members respect this protocol.

Expansion of Scope

The committee was established to review and help refine the traffic study, pedestrian study, and visitation projection as would inform the environmental review. The traffic and pedestrian studies essentially count cars or pedestrians at specific intersections or street crossings to assess traffic patterns (current) so as to project what future conditions might be as a result of the proposed project (Fjord Trail).

James Labate (Cold Spring) asked if the VDC will have the opportunity to expand the criteria included in the traffic study e.g. – illegal 3-point turns, double-parking, jaywalking, etc. in the Village of Cold Spring.

It was suggested that this might be incorporated into the visitation management studies performed by ORCA vs. the traffic studies, or could be a volunteer data collection exercise. ORCA will be meeting with the VDC to review their visitation simulation models.

Thomas Campanile (Nelsonville) wondered about the parking study and its relationship to the other data being studied. HHFT explained that there has been a parking and shuttle study and data from that study will be fed into the simulation models ORCA is creating.

Amy Kacala (HHFT) will revise the RFP and reshare it with the group for VDC feedback before sending it out to the list of potential consultants.

Special topic sessions will be added to provide background on topics of interest the committee indicated are relevant to their work: parking and alternatives analysis.