



**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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RIVERWALK NORTH COMMUNITY MEETING #2

Minutes | Meeting #2 | October 21, 2025 7-8 PM

Westbrook Community Center, 426 Bridge Street

Agenda:		Purpose:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Project Overview<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Team Introductionb. Welcome and Statement of Project Goals for Meetingc. Project History and Where We Are2. Introduction to Brownfields Program & Funding (Credere)<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What does Brownfields mean?b. Why did this Project get funded?3. Review of the Project (Acorn)<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Current Alignmentb. Design Elements4. What we Heard at Meeting #1 (Acorn)<ol style="list-style-type: none">c. Overview of feedback from Neighborhood Meeting #1 (abutters)d. New Information to address feedback5. Neighborhood Meeting #2 Feedback6. Next Steps<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Due diligence and furthering concept design		<p>The City of Westbrook hosted a second community meeting to introduce and discuss the Riverwalk North project, a public access trail proposed along the northern side of the Presumpscot River. The team shared historical and environmental background, conceptual design elements, provided initial details to address feedback from Neighborhood Meeting #1, and solicited additional feedback from attendees. Concerns centered around privacy/safety, flooding, wildlife impacts, permitting, constructability/slopes, and overall project scope and vision.</p> <p>A follow up meeting, with a larger audience from around the neighborhood, will occur sometime in the new year (2026).</p>	
Attendance:			
City of Westbrook Robyn Saunders (Project Manager) Monique Cornett (Deputy Director Economic & Community Development) Chance Gagne (Administrative Assistant) Barry Dodd (Creative Services Administrator) Jennie Franceschi (Director of Planning and Code Enforcement)		Project Team <u>Credere</u> Rip Patten, PE, LSP, LEED-AP Allison Drouin, PG, LG <u>Acorn Engineering</u> Alexis Del Vecchio, RLA Jamie Hark	

1. Welcome

- Robyn Saunders, City Project Manager, welcomed all + did brief introductions of the project team.
 - Riverwalk North aims to clean up brownfields, improve public access, and support downtown revitalization. EPA grant of \$4 million secured.
- Robyn Saunders also reviewed the following project goals:
 - Environmental Cleanup + Brownfields Revitalization
 - Public Access + Connectivity (Closing the loop)
 - Funding Strategy + Fiscal Sustainability
 - Downtown Revitalization + Economic Vitality
 - Community Engagement + Inclusive Planning
 - Safe, Accessible + Environmentally Friendly Amenities

2. Project Background and Environmental History

- Rip Patten from Credere Associates presented a historical overview of the Riverwalk North site, showing land use evolution from the 1800s to today.
 - The site was previously a utility corridor used for hydroelectric transmission from a now-removed dam.
 - The land was acquired by the City from Sappi after the dam removal made the corridor obsolete for energy transmission.
 - The site qualifies for EPA Brownfields funding due to its industrial legacy.
- Environmental testing revealed:
 - Some metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) sporadically in soil.
 - Low levels of vinyl chloride previously detected in groundwater near the western end of the corridor.
 - General contamination levels are similar to other urban areas.
- The riverwalk project has been a long-term vision for the City as it was included in the 2000 Riverfront Master Plan, 2007 Downtown Revitalization Plan, 2015 preliminary design, and then in 2023 City acquired the property making the project possible.
- Funding and Brownfields Program Overview
 - The project received \$4 million in EPA Brownfields funding in 2024.
 - Funding is being used to support both environmental cleanup and design of the Riverwalk North trail. Focus is on using the funding for actual construction elements that will serve to cleanup the site and prevent exposure, like an engineered cover system.

3. Review of the Project Design

- Acorn Engineering shared early conceptual ideas for the trail alignment and indicated the design builds upon the preliminary 2015 design.
 - Proposed 10-foot-wide trail stretching from Bridge Street pedestrian bridge to Mentor Street.
 - Combination of on-grade paths and raised boardwalks to minimize environmental impact to wetlands and floodway and to accommodate steep slopes.

- One defined “pocket park” area and two river access points (e.g. for canoes).
- Focus on minimizing tree clearing and reducing intrusion into wetland and floodway zones.
- Vegetation plans include:
 - Removal of invasive species (knotweed, bittersweet) that make up 90% of the area using targeted methods.
 - Replacement with native shrubs and ground covers, as well as other stabilization measures.
- Final thought: it’s important to think of the Riverwalk North as part of the larger holistic park system in Westbrook to include Saccarappa Park, Riverbank Park, the existing riverwalk + boardwalk across the river, and future potential parks.
- Addressed feedback from meeting #1
 - Feedback focused on several key groupings (privacy & noise, flooding & vegetation, wildlife & natural impacts, safety & sanitation, access & design, and community vision)
 - Each grouping was reviewed with visual examples of how design elements can be considered to address the feedback received from abutters at the first Neighborhood meeting.
 - Several example trails throughout Maine that were also met with initial public concern were presented. These trail systems have now become jewels of the community (Androscoggin Riverwalk in Brunswick, Back Cove Trail in Portland, Brewer Riverwalk, Royal River Park in Yarmouth, Skowhegan Riverwalk, and the Greenbelt Pathway in South Portland).

4. Neighborhood Meeting #2 Feedback

- **Privacy and Noise:**
 - Several residents, especially those on Water Street, reiterated concerns about trail proximity to homes and a potential loss of privacy. Concerns were raised regarding duration of lighting and hours when lighting would be powered.
 - Suggestions included rerouting the trail to the street or sidewalk in front of affected homes and/or installing privacy fencing or buffers.
 - Other suggestions included using Garfield Street as the outlet instead of Water Street.
- **Flooding and Vegetation:**
 - Residents noted prior flooding events and expressed concern that vegetation removal could exacerbate water intrusion into yards + basements.
 - Residents also inquired on the methodology for controlling water levels in the impoundment area and possible cooperation with SAPPI during flooding events to protect the investment that is made in the riverwalk.
 - Resident also expressed concern over slopes and suggested that cross sections of the proposed design along the steep slope areas would be a helpful visualization at a future meeting.
- **Wildlife and Environmental Impact:**
 - One resident suggested working through the requirements for being within the 25-foot setback in lieu of moving the trail closer to residents, as well as improved river views with closer proximity.
- **Crime, Trash, and Safety:**

- Residents raised concerns about trespassing, vandalism, and theft, noting the trail runs through backyards. They also questioned police and emergency access.
- Concerns about inviting disruptive activity closer to homes were voiced.
- Suggestion was raised to inquire with residents that abut riverwalk south and Riverbank Park on their opinion of having the trail in close proximity to their homes.
- **Access and Design:**
 - No new concerns were raised.
- **Community Vision:**
 - Paul Drinan of the Rec and Con committee suggested inquiry with Rails to Trails Conservancy organization on data regarding safety before and after trail installations. Indicated data would likely indicate improved safety due to increased public presence.

5. Next Steps

- Completion of wetlands survey and invasive species mapping
- Interagency meeting with DEP, EPA, Fish and Wildlife, USACE
- Prepare site sections, especially for Water Street area.
- Incorporate feedback into conceptual design revisions.
- Post meeting notes and presentation on project website.
- Tentative schedule: Planning Board review early 2026; next community meeting spring 2026.