



October 11, 2006

Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.

Ref: 81003.06

Massachusetts SubCouncil,
Housatonic River NRD Fund
c/o Woodlot Alternatives, Inc.
30 Park Drive
Topsham, ME 04086-1737

Re: Beaded Necklace Housatonic River Greenway Proposal – Evaluation Response

Dear Members of the Massachusetts SubCouncil:

Our team—Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., (VHB), the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), and the Berkshire Bike Path Council (BBPC)—has reviewed the Trustees' Evaluation Summary Memorandum released on September 21st and offers the following comment letter.

Our proposal is an attempt to fulfill some of the major goals of The Housatonic River Restoration (HRR) Planning Process. The HRR Plan included a vision of connecting communities of the Berkshires through a comprehensive bikeway/greenway in the Housatonic River Watershed, evocatively described as a "beaded necklace". We have interpreted HRR's vision, which was developed through a multi-year community planning process, as a deeply ingrained wish by local residents to turn the Housatonic's damages into a positive legacy. Although it is unfortunate that there has not been greater public involvement in the process during this proposal submission and review phase, it is important to remember the extraordinary public process undertaken by the HRR previously, and to refer back to the kinds of projects that the public said that it wanted. Over 1,200 residents of Berkshire County participated in the development of the plan, and one of the most popular requests was for more trails, bike paths, and greenways to encourage recreation in the watershed.

A legacy need not be the direct restoration of the river's natural resources for which our application apparently lost points for having not addressed. Where we scored well, on the extensive geographic appeal of a county-wide bike path/greenway, and on the technical feasibility of the proposal, we are pleased that the state and federal reviewers recognized our efforts to identify a project that, as distinguished from others in the applicant pool, has the potential for the greatest increase of public recreational access.

Coincidentally, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) just announced that it will be holding a series of public meetings this fall on the development of a statewide bicycling network. Reviewers noted that our application has no letters of support from municipalities but like the EOT, we have purposefully not approached the communities in a piecemeal fashion. A critical element of the proposed planning project is community outreach and public involvement in the siting

of trails and bike paths. The objective of the EOT's meetings will be to collect public input about the state's current conditions, **potential cross-state corridors**, and recommended improvements. The Beaded Necklace Plan is right on target in terms of where funding is likely to be directed in the near future as EOT's Massachusetts Bicycle Plan progresses. The same benefits that we detail in our application are echoed by EOT—that such networks “improve bicycle transportation, as well as promote multi-modal transportation, recreation, tourism, and economic vitality.” These are the very tangible benefits which will result from projects made possible by a comprehensive plan, as we have proposed.

The Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation's review of the NRD proposals, dated October 6, 2006, did not recommend funding simply because other projects in the category could be put into service more quickly. Upon reviewing the other proposals, we agree that several are excellent—but which in the recreational category will have the greatest long-term impact to redress injuries to the Housatonic Watershed? It is curious that there is a rush to implement projects after a lengthy, deliberative grant-making process, when the grants' value could be multiplied significantly through proper planning. Considering that a land acquisition project, of immediate use to the people, is a strong candidate for NRD funding, we feel that a diversity of other projects with somewhat longer timelines but equal benefits compliment the big picture enormously. As quoted from the HRR Plan, “A short-term blast of activities and acquisitions will fall short of the goal. A true restoration will require a sustained comprehensive approach that reaches into classrooms, provides opportunities for people to connect to the river, and forges a new community ethic of river stewardship.”

It is also surprising to us that no score was given to the “leveraging of additional resources” for ensuing “on-the-ground” work, where in reality, having a comprehensive plan will specifically enable the funding of design and construction of trails, parks, and bikeways. Planning funds are typically the most difficult to secure, but once a solid plan is in place, there are numerous potential federal, state, and philanthropic sources of funding. The beads and connecting segments of the necklace will be developed as funds are leveraged by the plan—and it is our application's stated *commitment* to actively follow through with pursuit of such funds from the Commonwealth's DCR, EOT, EOEA, MHD, private organizations like the Bikes Belong Coalition, and most importantly from the federal government, such as monies associated with SAFETEA-LU. Congressman Olver has been particularly interested in funding these types of projects after initial planning and feasibility work.

Planning is a legitimate effort, one that is critical to involve interested stakeholders in the public process, and is necessary to ensure the proper outcome of the project. A reviewer commented that there is “no guarantee that projects ‘on the ground’ will be developed, funded and implemented”, but we can guarantee that there will be no projects of this type without first planning them to the highest of technical, social, and economic feasibility standards. Interestingly, another reviewer noted that “the plan would not be expected to degrade over time and would be valuable in the future even if it wasn't constructed immediately.” These contrasting views are understandable but the concerns about time and implementation, again, beg to be clarified. As a planning study, the Beaded Necklace project is fortunate to not have any NEPA/MEPA issues, so there is no impediment to the immediate commencement of work. Moreover, and as indicated on page 11 and elsewhere in our application, as

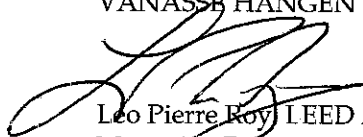


part of the overall master plan, we will also develop an in-depth implementation plan to bring specific projects to fruition and build momentum for the entire Beaded Necklace project.

In making your final evaluation, please return to review the original proposals, not just the summary sheets. The proposal texts themselves best describe the projects, and include the letters of support and detail necessary for you to make the most informed decisions. The product of this work will not be a study that sits on a shelf, but a detailed, implementable action plan for getting trails and bike paths funded, designed, and built. We encourage you to review examples of our work products at the website we've established for the project at <http://www.vhb.com/housatonic/>. You, the Trustees, are about to make decisions that the people of the Berkshires have been awaiting for a long time, and that have the potential to affect the quality of life in the Housatonic Watershed for years to come. In making these grants, please approve projects that will provide lasting benefits to those who have lost their use and enjoyment of the natural resources. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

VANASSE HANGEN BRUSTLIN, INC.



Leo Pierre Roy LEED AP
Managing Director, Environmental and Energy Services

