

EPA Housatonic River Citizens Coordinating Council

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Meeting Summary
Prepared October 2024

This document summarizes the discussion from the hybrid in-person and virtual meeting and organizes feedback and questions into themes. In some cases, questions and answers have been expanded to be able to better understand their meaning. **It is not a transcript.**

- Presentation slides shown at the meeting are available at <https://semspub.epa.gov/src/document/01/685759>
- A video recording of the entire meeting is available for review at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sdyn8vEpCow>

Welcome and introductions

CBI Facilitator Toby Berkman started the meeting by welcoming the CCC members and members of the public who joined online via a Zoom webinar. Mr. Berkman introduced himself and a new CBI Associate, Illustrious Ewhorlu, who recently joined CBI and will be assisting with the project. Mr. Berkman outlined his role in managing the meeting and provided a brief overview of the agenda, which included an update from the EPA, a TAG update, and an open discussion for CCC members. He also mentioned that a poll had been conducted earlier to gather input on topics of interest, which would guide the discussion later in the session.

Before moving forward, Mr. Berkman also highlighted the CCC's role as a vehicle for community involvement related to the GE-Pittsfield settlement agreement and handed the meeting over to the EPA for their update.

In the sections below, responses from EPA and other agencies to questions are included in italics.

EPA presentation

Documents Open for Public Input
(Slides 5)

Josh Fontaine provided a brief update as the project manager for the site. He noted that while no documents are currently open for formal public input, some will be available soon. Mr. Fontaine stated that the ongoing PCB Cleanup Challenge is active until November 12, and

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provided a link in the slides for public access to the Wazoku dashboard, which tracks solutions and interested parties. Additional key points from the update included:

- As of October 9, 2024, 15 solutions had been submitted, with 52 interested parties.
- The EPA case team is not involved in judging the challenge submissions; this is managed by a joint federal- [non-federal participant](#) panel.
- Upcoming documents will be released through January.

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Upcoming Submittals for Public Input

(Slide 6)

Next, Mr. Fontaine provided an update on upcoming documents of interest, stating that the revised transportation and disposal plan will be submitted for EPA review and approval the following week, and then will be open for public input. Mr. Fontaine also highlighted the anticipated conceptual remedial design plan for [Reach 6, which includes preliminary plans for](#) the hydraulic transport of contaminated sediments from Woods Pond was expected at the end of the month. Additional points from his update included:

- The revised transportation and disposal plan will be available for public input soon.
- The conceptual remedial design plan will include details on contaminated sediment transport from Woods Pond.
- Other important dates include the revised upland disposal facility (UDF) final design and operations and maintenance (O&M) plan due on December 20, and the revised quality of life and transport project operations plan due in November.
- Public input can be submitted to R1housatonic@epa.gov.

Lastly, Mr. Fontaine shared an overview of field work conducted since the last CCC meeting, and shared the dates and times of upcoming public meetings.

Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) Update

(Slide 9)

CCC member Charlie Cianfarini (Citizens for PCB Removal) provided an update on EPA's Technical Assistance Grant (TAG). Mr. Cianfarini noted that Dr. Mark Hermanson is no longer under contract with HRI as its TAG advisor, due to his increased professional commitments in Europe and Scandinavia, which complicated financial transactions. Mr. Cianfarini continued by saying HRI is actively seeking a new advisor and has been in communication with the Region 1 TAG administrator as they proceed with the transition process.

CCC Open Session

(Slide 11)

Mr. Berkman noted that this agenda item was intended to provide CCC members the opportunity to talk about whichever topics they preferred. To help the group identify topics of

interest, CBI had conducted an online poll before the meeting where members could share their interest in different topics, and Mr. Berkman began this session by sharing a list of the discussion topics that had garnered interest in the survey. These topics included EPA's recent announcement of a reorganization and restructuring of CCC meeting processes, which would result in fewer CCC meetings, CBI's conversation with GE about participating in CCC meetings, and multiple other topics suggested by CCC members.

Mr. Berkman also mentioned that CBI had conducted interviews with CCC members and shared a slide deck summarizing those interviews with the full CCC. He noted that CBI had presented the slide deck to a smaller group of CCC members who had chosen to join a separate call before the CCC meeting, and he offered to share the same presentation with the current group if there was interest.

Mr. Berkman asked for feedback on what the group would most like to discuss, and members expressed interest in hearing about Mr. Berkman's conversation with GE. Mr. Berkman noted that he had a conversation with a GE representative, Andy Silfer regarding GE's absence from CCC meetings. Mr. Berkman shared that he asked Mr. Silfer whether GE would consider rejoining CCC meetings now that the remedy had been finalized. He relayed the frustration felt by CCC members regarding GE's absence and their strong desire for GE to return, as well as their understanding that GE is required to attend CCC meetings.

According to Mr. Berkman, Mr. Silfer was appreciative of the discussion but made it clear that GE was not planning to rejoin CCC meetings at this time. Mr. Silfer explained that GE's focus is on community engagement related to implementing the remedy. As implementation progresses — as expected within the next year — GE will be increasing outreach to the specific communities impacted by the remedy. According to Mr. Silfer, GE views the CCC as a forum focused on opposing the remedy and revisiting resolved issues, and thus prefers to direct its community engagement elsewhere.

Mr. Silfer acknowledged that GE understands its obligations to engage in community outreach, and stressed that outreach will be especially important as implementation begins and information will need to be shared with local communities about upcoming work. Finally, Mr. Berkman said he asked Silfer whether GE would reconsider attending CCC meetings in the future, and Mr. Silfer responded by saying that if the CCC evolves into a forum that GE perceives as more productive for the type of engagement they prioritize, they would be open to reconsidering their participation.

Mr. Berkman opened the meeting up for members to talk and ask questions about topics of their choosing. CCC members asked the following questions and made the following comments. *Direct responses from EPA are in italics.*

- Could the Challenge timeline be extended if things show promise, or is it firmly fixed?
 - *EPA: The EPA's challenge timeline is set by Wazoku, the national contractor managing the platform, and while extensions can be requested, it's not in our control. Any changes depend on them and how they are pushing things forward.*

- Was the cost factor of \$100 per ton something Wazoku set, or was that an EPA request?
 - *EPA: EPA set the \$100 per ton target to ensure cost-effective solutions over offsite disposal. This is the first phase, which is for conceptual plans and is reviewed by an independent judging panel. Based on any awards given, there's a possibility for a second phase, which could involve implementing the work either in a lab setting or potentially in the field.*
- Who is leading the challenge at EPA?
 - *EPA: We don't have a lead and we work as a team. The GE team is the lead.*
- Could it be possible for future presentations (e.g., slide 7) to include hyperlinks to relevant documents for easy reference?
 - *EPA: EPA will consider this for future meetings. The GE [Pittsfield/Housatonic River website](#) managed by EPA has been continually updated to be more user-friendly.*
- Does the consent decree require GE to attend CCC meetings, given it mandates cooperation with the public and participation in public meetings?¹ Could EPA file a court motion to have GE attend CCC meetings, and overall be more aggressive about compelling GE's attendance based on past practice and expectations?
 - *EPA: The language in the consent decree references GE providing information and participating in community involvement, rather than mandating attendance at CCC meetings. EPA does not believe this language is strong enough to file a motion or pursue stipulated penalties.*
- Would you consider accepting a public petition to push for GE's attendance at CCC meetings, even if it's just an exercise to get GE on record?
 - *EPA: Community members are welcome to file a petition, and EPA will consider it. To bring an enforcement action in court, EPA would need to turn to the Department of Justice, which is another consideration.*
- Is it possible to increase CCC meetings from two to four per year to ensure more public input, given that key stakeholders like GE and local city representatives are not sitting at the table?
 - *EPA: We understand the need for more public engagement. While CCC meetings focus on member and EPA updates, EPA is open to feedback on additional public meetings to address key topics. For example, tomorrow's airborne PCB meeting resulted from a request for broader input on that topic, and EPA is considering other ways — like fact sheets or memos — to keep the community informed on major issues like the revised transportation and disposal plan.*
- Why not hold four CCC meetings a year, along with larger community meetings, so the public can get more input from agencies and local representatives?
 - *EPA: We're working to ensure different agencies are present at public meetings, though scheduling can be challenging, especially during the school year. For example, we had to push tomorrow's PCB meeting from September to now due to availability issues.*

¹ A CCC member quoted the following language from the Consent Decree, p. 394: "Settling Defendant shall...cooperate...in providing information...to the public, including the Citizens' Coordinating Council.... Settling Defendant shall participate in the preparation of such information for dissemination to the public, including the Citizens' Coordinating Council, and in public meetings...."

- If a critical topic comes up, could CCC members request an emergency meeting instead of waiting six months?
 - *EPA: Yes. We're open to hearing requests.*
- Why was the Falls Village hard copy repository closed without informing HEAL, and will EPA reinstate it? Could EPA keep hard copies accessible downstairs? Could CCC members provide input on which documents go to the Hunt Library?
 - *EPA: EPA addressed these questions in a CCC-wide email that covered the library locations and the documents that were sent there. We're not eliminating the hard copy repository at the Hunt Library. We discussed options with the library director, who suggested making the documents electronic with a link to our repository available on the library website, due to space limitations and the low use of hard copies. EPA does not determine the location of where the Hunt Library keeps the repository. No final decision on their location has been made yet. Key documents, like the UDF, transportation and quality of life plans, will still go to libraries in Lenox, Lee, Pittsfield, and Falls Village. Only requested key items will be archived moving forward.*
- The recent cleanup and demolition of GE buildings have energized young people in Pittsfield, who are engaging through social media. There should be more frequent CCC meetings to discuss emerging issues like air monitoring and the cleanup of areas outside the consent decree, so people can connect with the EPA, Mass DEP, and other officials.
 - *EPA: EPA plans to address questions about air monitoring in a larger forum that everyone can participate in. This way, everyone would have access to questions and responses on this issue.*
- Community members are expressing a strong desire for more real-time information and data sharing about the cleanup, ideally through a transparent website where people can see what's happening in different parts of the cleanup and on various properties in as close to real time as possible. It would be useful for the CCC to find out what different groups want to access so everyone can stay informed. Could CCC members gather input from our constituents to identify the information they want, perhaps by compiling their questions and ideas between meetings?
 - *CBI: In the pre-meeting survey, members shared their interest on this topic, and suggested CCC could help by bringing constituents together to provide input to EPA and GE on data sharing.*
 - *EPA: Regarding the next quality of life plan revision, we're hoping to include more details about GE's notification approach. If CCC members share any ways we can improve it, we'll definitely share that with GE.*
- Why can't there be real-time air monitoring and notification provided to the community about PCB spikes, so people can protect themselves? Why does it take so long to process the data?
 - *EPA: Real-time PCB air monitoring isn't possible because it takes 14 to 20 days to get results, even though we send out the data within about four hours of receiving it. There are multiple steps involved, including collecting samples, running the tests, and sending everything to the lab. That's been the standard turnaround time for about 25 years. The air monitoring system is working as*

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intended, as the monitors outside GE and PETA properties did not exceed any standards. Immediate actions like closing windows aren't necessary.

- CBI: There could be an opportunity here to involve the community in how data from GE and others is presented, and ensure its shared clearly and provides adequate notice. This would help information be more accessible and meaningful to everyone.
- Could we add a feature to the website that shows trend graphs of data levels over time? Even if it's not real-time, it would illustrate patterns and tie into quality of life planning.
 - EPA: That's the essence of quality of life planning. It's meant to address the notification process for air monitoring and similar issues. We still need to wait for those details, but the plan is set to come out on November 22.
- Can we, as the CCC, focus on shared goals for the quality of life plan and submit unified comments to amplify our voices? What if some members want to work together on this but others do not?
 - CBI: It might be that some of or the majority of the group wants to take action, and while it won't represent the entire CCC, we can try it. CBI can help facilitate communication between meetings, within reasonable limits, if that's of interest.
- Can the CCC invite Carol Tucker, acting director for Environmental Justice, Children's Health, and Environmental Review for Region 1, to a meeting?
- Confidentiality should not affect how the CCC operates. We should keep things open to the full group and to the public.
 - CBI: CBI had conversations with some CCC members on a not-for-attribution basis to learn about how people felt meetings were going and how they could be improved. We provided a slide summary of those conversations to EPA and to the CCC, and could share more about what we heard if that is of interest to the group. If someone contacts CBI and requests confidentiality on a sensitive matter, as mediators we will respect that request.
- Could CBI simplify and shorten its written presentations to make the information more accessible and understandable to everyone?
 - CBI: Yes. Thank you for the feedback.

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Public comments and questions

Comments from members of the public focused on:

- Why EPA hasn't coordinated with healthcare agencies for regular medical monitoring, testing, or education on PCB risks for vulnerable groups in Pittsfield, despite known health risks and high local PCB exposure;
- A suggestion that the EPA should ensure coordinated efforts with other agencies to address PCB-related health risks in Pittsfield, so that residents will not bear the burden alone;
- Why local dairy products aren't included in the EPA's routine PCB testing, given their tendency to accumulate contaminants;
- How long it takes to test soil;

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- Whether alerts to local areas could be issued when demolishing PCB-contaminated buildings or digging at sites where PCBs might become airborne;
- If the EPA is coordinating on the cleanup of eight unsafe dams north of the site, whether removing dams could shift sediment and impact the Bell Air Dam;
- If PCBs rise and remain contained within a "bubble";
- Concern about the 14-day PCB soil testing delay for contractors and the reliability of meeting the 25 parts per million standard; and
- The cost difference between disposing of PCB material in a UDF versus transporting it by rail to a licensed dry landfill off-site.

EPA offered direct replies to several of the comments:

- The EPA's primary role is to ensure GE's compliance with the consent decree and oversee cleanup efforts, while health concerns like PCB monitoring and studies are handled by the Department of Public Health.
- EPA has been coordinating with the Pittsfield Board of Health and City Council on health concerns, including the Allendale School, for the past 20 years.
- Previous testing focused on farming areas, but there are no commercial farms in high PCB concentration zones; further details can be provided if needed.
- The turnaround time for soil PCB testing is typically 14 to 21 days due to factors like sample collection, lab processing steps, and potential lab backlogs from increased remediation projects.
- Air monitoring measures and dust control methods like water trucks are in place during PCB remediation, and while timely alerts are challenging, EPA aims to improve communication on future activities
- The EPA manages specific dams under the consent decree, while the Bell Air Dam is overseen by city and state agencies, which follow standard sediment control practices during dam removal.
- The [air monitors for PCB levels are located on the site perimeter to track potential exposure to nearby neighborhoods, and updated air monitoring data from GE's \[Building 12\]\(#\) demolition is now available on the website.](#)
- Airborne PCBs at current levels don't pose a concern, but PCBs in high concentrations — particularly in fish and direct contact areas — are the problem.
- The cost of disposing of PCB material is about \$50 per ton at the UDF and over \$300 per ton for off-site disposal at various licensed landfills.

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Closing

Mr. Berkman closed the meeting by reviewing the action items discussed, including plans to follow up with participants for additional topic suggestions and inviting those interested in taking a more active role in setting the agenda to connect with him. He noted a request for collaboration on improving website data collection and stated he would reach out via email to gauge interest and facilitate connections among participants. He also encouraged the group to bring any proposals or ideas to the next larger meeting and acknowledged the upcoming meeting scheduled the next day. The meeting was adjourned at about 8:34 PM.

Appendix A: CCC members & agency staff in attendance (in-person and virtual)

CCC members

- [Valerie Anderson, Housatonic Clean River Coalition](#)
- [Jack Anstine, Housatonic River Commission \(replacing Lynn Fowler\)](#)
- [Charlie Cianfarini, Citizens for PCB Removal](#)
- [Becky Cushing Gop, Mass Audubon](#)
- [Ben Guidi, MA DEP](#)
- [Judy Herkimer, Housatonic Environmental Action League](#)
- [Julia Thomas, Clean Berkshire Collective](#)

EPA staff

- [Ashlin Brooks](#)
- [Courtney Carroll](#)
- [Alex Carli-Dorsey](#)
- [Lauren Draper](#)
- [Rich Fisher](#)
- [Josh Fontaine](#)
- [John Kilborn](#)
- [Jo Anne Kittrell](#)
- [Anni Loughlin](#)
- [Christopher Smith](#)
- [Dean Tagliaferro](#)

Members of the public who gave public comment

- [Kaitlyn Pierce](#)
- [Robert Ovesen](#)
- [Michael Lucia](#)
- [Gail Ceresia](#)
- [David Harrington](#)

*One member of the public did not identify themselves when asking their question.

Consensus Building Institute (CBI) facilitation staff

- Toby Berkman
- Illustrious Ewhorlu

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Valerie Andersen, Housatonic Clean River Coalition¶
Josh Bloom, Lee resident¶
Charlie Cianfarini, Citizens for PCB Removal¶
Audrey Cole, Housatonic Environmental Action League (HEAL)¶
Becky Cushing Gop, Mass Audubon¶
Lynn Fowler, HEAL¶
Ben Guidi, MassDEP¶
Tim Gray, HRI¶
Traci Iott, CT DEEP¶
Judy Herkimer, HEAL¶
Debra Kelly, Lenox Against the Dump¶
James McGrath, City of Pittsfield¶
Carol Papp, CT DEEP¶
Melissa Provencher, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission¶
Sage Radachowsky, Stop the Dumps¶
James Wilusz, Tri Town Health District¶
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team¶
John Ziegler, MassDEP¶

EPA staff¶

Ashlin Brooks¶
Alex Carli-Dorsey¶
Tim Conway¶
Josh Fontaine¶
John Kilborn¶
Anni Loughlin¶
Christopher Smith¶

Members of the public who gave public comment¶

Denny Alsop¶
Gail Ceresia¶
Dr. Ruby Chang¶
Dr. Charles Kenny¶
Danny from Lenox¶
Shirley Miller¶