Jackson Dam Steering Committee
Draft Minutes
September 29, 2026 | Memorial Building | 6 pm to 7:30 pm

*The steering committee serves in an advisory capacity. No motions or votes were taken. These minutes document the discussion and follow up for public transparency.*

Shareable link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/KgVLr4yLWJeE9I7EQyyXHW6HZ2_iaDpX2NUdxp-ajlyGM9XV7Dmjkp5l9rSkKMM.fIbwK_5MwPlOHFbL
Passcode: =Be65&ES

In attendance: Emily Finnegan, CC NRCD; Reg Phelps; Norma Wiesen; Dave Gross; Derek Richardson; Lesa Cathcart; Renaud Demers; Jake Lester and Kristen Leahy, Town of Hardwick

Public Attendees: Audrey Grant, Carlotta Hayes

Absent: N/A

Meeting started at 6:00 pm.

## Purpose

Continue preparation for the October 5 public presentation, discuss the proposed Town Meeting ballot process, and identify priorities for continued public engagement.

The steering committee serves in an advisory capacity. These minutes document the committee's discussion and recommendations for public transparency.

## Organizational Business

The committee reviewed the September 10, 2026 meeting minutes and accepted them as complete.

## October 5 Public Presentation

The committee discussed the upcoming October 5 public meeting and the information that should be emphasized or clarified.

The group discussed the importance of establishing a clear factual foundation for the community, including why Jackson Dam is being evaluated, what has been learned through the feasibility study and hydraulic modeling, and what questions remain.

Members emphasized the importance of clear visuals and plain-language explanations, particularly when describing river behavior, the relationship between the dam and flooding, and the difference between the feasibility work already completed and the preliminary design work now underway.

The committee also discussed the need to distinguish between technical findings and a future community decision. The feasibility study identified dam removal as the preferred engineering alternative, but the Town has not decided to remove the dam.

## Request to Select Board / Town Meeting Ballot

The committee reviewed a proposed letter to the Hardwick Select Board requesting that the Board agree to place a question concerning the future of Jackson Dam before voters at the March 2027 Town Meeting using Australian ballot.

The discussion focused both on the importance of establishing a clear public decision point and on ensuring that the eventual ballot language accurately reflects the decision voters are being asked to make.

Jake Lester, Renaud Demers, and Lesa Cathcart indicated that they would like additional time to consider the wording of the proposed request. The other committee members present supported endorsing the letter and forwarding it to the Select Board.

The committee recognized that development of the specific ballot question will require additional discussion. Public engagement leading up to Town Meeting should provide voters with information about flooding and flood safety, sediment management, the lake and river, fish and wildlife, downstream effects, project costs and funding, and the responsibilities associated with the available alternatives.

## Future Public Engagement

The committee discussed public engagement following the October 5 presentation and ways to provide information to residents in smaller, more accessible pieces.

Reg Phelps recommended developing a simple one-page “What Do We Know?” information sheet that could be distributed regularly, potentially one page each month. The sheets could focus on one or more established facts about Jackson Dam and related questions. Suggested topics included the dam’s current condition, its high-hazard classification, liability insurance, and the relationship between Jackson Dam and Pottersville Dam.

The committee discussed whether the information sheets could be included with Hardwick Electric Department bills or Town water and sewer bills to reach residents who may not attend public meetings or regularly visit the Town website.

A question was also raised about why boards had previously been removed from the dam and whether the resulting additional space or storage had affected dam operations or river conditions. This was identified as an item requiring follow-up.

The committee continued to support using multiple forms of public engagement, including written materials, recorded presentations, question-and-answer resources, drop-in sessions and additional opportunities to hear from technical experts.

## Follow Up

- Kristen Leahy and Emily Finnegan will continue coordinating with SLR on the October 5 presentation and the information and visuals needed to explain the previous engineering work clearly.
- The request letter concerning an Australian ballot vote will move forward to the Select Board with the committee members' differing positions on the current wording reflected in the record.
- Staff will follow up with Hardwick Electric Department regarding the possibility of including Jackson Dam informational material with customer mailings or bills.
- Staff will also follow up on the question regarding removal of boards from the dam and the purpose and effect of the additional space created.
- The proposed ballot process and ballot question will continue to be discussed as the Town prepares for a possible March 2027 Australian ballot vote.
- The Town will continue updating the Jackson Dam project webpage and developing public information as additional technical information becomes available.

Meeting ended at approximately 7:30 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Kristen Leahy, Town of Hardwick*