

Environment Corps

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Stormwater Corps Role Play Exercise (Spring 2022)

NRE 3150
Spring 2022

Role Playing Exercise

This exercise involves 3 classes and 2 homework assignments. In it, 14 of you will be playing the role of a local resident or other stakeholder in a town where there is a public hearing about a controversial construction project. 5 of you will be playing the role of a member of the Town Board that is holding the hearing, and 4 of you will be members of the press covering the proceedings. Read on for details!

The Town:

- The Town of Dicksonville, CT is a suburban town in central Connecticut with a population of just over 23,000.
- The Town is a mix of blue and white collar but has a sizeable population of affluent white-collar workers who commute to the nearby city of Chestertown.
- The Town Motto is: *Aqua Invenit Eius Modo Exin (Water Finds Its Way Downhill)*.
- The Town has a Board of Selectpersons of 5 individuals.
- Dicksonville is an MS4 community. It has a full time planner and Public Works Department with a crew of 5. The high school also has its own Maintenance Department.

The Project

- The Town is planning on major renovations to its one high school (Dicksonville High School) which has about 1400 students. The high school is well regarded and highly rated. The community is rabid about its sports teams, the Pavers, and is particularly crazy about the Lady Paver softball team, which has won the state L Class Championship for 4 of the past 5 years.
- The baseball and softball fields are in terrible shape and the DHS Sports Booster Club has been advocating for years to completely redo them, including adding restroom and food facilities, a large grandstand, and a large new parking lot. Current parking frequently overflows onto an unkempt field of long grass in the rear of the main building. This causes mud, stuck cars, and angry Paver fans. The Booster Club feels that the renovation is the perfect opportunity to get these upgrades and give the Lady Pavers a home field that befits their mighty program.
- Even before the renovation has been funded, the Lady Pavers have scheduled a car-wash fundraising event to help pay for a new Snack Shack (to be named Homer's, after the long-time Treasurer of the Booster Club who has just moved out of town to an opulent villa on Grand Caiman Island). Homer's is to be located at the end of the new parking lot on the pathway to the new baseball/softball diamond.

Some Facts & Figures:

- If a new parking lot were built in the abandoned field it would be approximately 3 acres.
- Part of the renovation includes a large new wing added to the school, with a footprint of about 450 ft x 175 ft.
- The preliminary plans for Homer's have it as approximately 25 ft x 14 ft with a 20ft x 20ft patio in front.
- The new walkway from the parking lot to the grandstand will be approximately 60 ft x 6 ft and is planned to be poured cement.

- The high school is located on a hill on a large parcel that used to be an apple orchard. It is centrally located within the watershed of Dietz Creek. Dietz Creek drains to the Connecticut River.
- The upper watershed of Dietz Creek has a number of large commercial properties (a grocery store, WalMart and Home Depot). The lower watershed is almost completely residential, with close-knit neighborhoods of ¼ to ½ acre properties.
- Drainage for the entire high school property is currently handled by a conventional piped system that has a single outfall to a plain old ditch that flows into a small, steep tributary stream that joins Dietz Creek not far from the base of the hill.
- During large rainstorms Dietz Creek sometimes overflows its banks and floods the yards and basements of residents nearby. There have been angry letters to the editor of the local newspaper, and talk of a town hearing, but nothing has occurred so far.
- Dietz Creek is within the part of the Lower CT River designated as a “Last Great Place,” and has ecologically valuable brackish wetlands at its confluence with the Connecticut. The wetlands are known to be a favorite nesting habitat of the Muddy Throated Warbler, a rare species that may soon go on the endangered list. Of late there have been occasional algal blooms during the summer in the general area. There is a local chapter of the Audubon Society that has been trying for years to protect the wetlands and surrounding area as open space.
- For the past two years, the Chair of the Conservation Commission has been advocating for the use of “Low Impact Development” (LID) practices in town. She organized a presentation by the UConn NEMO Program (by two very knowledgeable bald guys who she couldn’t seem to keep apart) and invited members of all commissions and the Board of Selectmen. Turnout was pretty good, 17 people. However, there was little traction until the MS4 permit got the attention of the Planning and Zoning Commission, who is now very interested in LID. P&Z is working on some draft “LID Friendly” regulations as per the permit requirements, but has not passed anything yet. The Conservation Commission, with a copy to P&Z, has written a memo strongly recommending that LID practices be used during the DHS renovation and that any new construction should not add any additional directly connected impervious cover, especially if the sports complex goes through.

The Hearing

- The Board of Finance has told the Town Board that adding the sports improvements to the renovation would increase the cost to the town by around \$500K, or about 10% of the total \$5M projected cost.
- The Board members have decided that given the cost and the strong feelings expressed by various parties, before making the decision they will hold a Public Hearing to get a feel for all sides of the issue.
- The building renovation is a done deal. The issue is the proposed sports complex. Thus there are 3 options to be debated:
 - 1) No sports complex.
 - 2) Sports complex with traditional design.
 - 3) Sports complex with LID design.

People signed up to Testify

[Note: characters will be assigned by random drawing at the end of the class on 3/22/21]

- 1) **Phineas Flycatcher**, President, Dicksonville Chapter of the Connecticut Audubon Society. Phineas moved to town 6 years ago when he retired. He is a dedicated conservationist and an avid birdwatcher. He also is on the Board of the local land trust, which has been looking for funds to protect several large parcels at the mouth of Dietz Creek that are mostly wetland. Phineas believes that polluted stormwater is degrading the marshes and is in favor of Option #3.
- 2) **Selden Soddensocks**, local homeowner. Selden lives in a nice little neighborhood at the base of the hill upon which DHS sits – very close to the juncture of the tributary stream and Dietz Creek. Selden is a local businessman and a solid member of the community. But, his basement has been flooded 3 times in 5 years, and he’s angry over the lack of action by town officials. He is a Paver fan but is leaning in favor of Option #1. He doesn’t know much science but he knows where all that water comes from and doesn’t want more development on the hill.
- 3) **Edie Edamame**, President, DHS Sports Booster Club. Edie has lived in town all of her life and was a star pitcher for the Lady Pavers in the mid-1990’s, when they were perennial doormats of the conference. She became involved with the Boosters when her elder daughter was on the DHS soccer team, and now that her younger daughter is playing 3rd base for the Lady Pavers, has risen to the Presidency. Edie is in favor of Option #2, or whatever is the cheapest, easiest way to get the damn complex built!
- 4) **Gertrude Ganache**, recently retired local business woman. Gertrude retired 5 years ago, turning over her bakery, *Just Desert*, to her nephew. (The misspelling on the sign was noticed on opening day, but the sign was so expensive that she just kept it and went with it. She even added Prickly Pear Scones to her offerings). Gertrude goes to every Board of Finance, Board of Selectman, and Town meeting, where she points out the difficulty of living on a fixed income and the critical need for the town to keep taxes low. Now that she has lost the battle on the DHS renovation, to which she was strongly opposed, she favors Option #1. No unnecessary spending!
- 5) **Euripedes Euclid**, Town Planner. Euripedes has been the Town Planner for 13 years, now serving under his third First Selectman. He works mainly with the Planning and Zoning Commission, focusing on the Plan of Conservation and Development and the zoning regulations. In 2017, the Board of Selectmen handed him the job of being Dicksonville’s point person for MS4 compliance. He is a grizzled veteran of many argumentative hearings and would prefer to sit this one out, but feels that due to MS4 he should speak up in favor of Option #3.
- 6) **Larry “Leather” Mann**, local citizen. Larry was extremely frugal, and retired early. He was a site foreman for a local construction company run by Billy Bulldozer (see Town Board). In the spirit of the original Leatherman, Larry walks the same 17 mile loop through town every day, 365 days a year. Despite being in amazing physical condition, he dislikes organized sports. His walking loop takes him by the high school, and although he is well liked by the students he occasionally interacts with, he is not crazy about the sports complex being added, as it will disrupt the views on his loop. He is rumored to be dating Gertrude Ganache, although this has not been confirmed. He is going to testify in favor of Option #1.
- 7) **Aster Arborius**, Chair of the Conservation Commission. Aster moved to Dicksonville from Philadelphia about 10 years ago. She’s been on the CC for about 6 years. She was originally appointed because of her interest in preserving open space, but her interest has broadened to include other forms of environmental protection. She attended CLEAR’s Land Use Academy, and

found out there about the NEMO Program, which eventually led to her hosting a multi-commission presentation on stormwater management and LID. She is strongly in favor of Option #3.

- 8) **Darla “Double-Play” Dickson**, high school student. Darla is a junior at DHS, an Honors Student, and the Co-Captain of the Lady Pavers. She is a first team all-state shortstop known to the Boosters as the *Wizard of Dicksonville*. In fact, she descends from the town’s founding family. Her dream is to play her senior year in an upgraded facility, and she just wants it done, asap. She’s afraid that any environmental controversy will kill the project. She’s for Option #2.
- 9) **Campbell MacDougal Clippings**, DHS Head of Maintenance. Campbell is in charge of all maintenance of the high school, whether by himself, his two assistants, or through contractors. He is close to retirement and done things pretty much the same way for the last 20 years. He lives in a neighboring town. He would prefer not to have the sports complex (just more work) but is reluctant to say so. What he DOES know is that he is definitely not in favor of any new type of stormwater thingies that he would have to maintain. He is going to testify in favor of Option #2.
- 10) **Nayson (“Nay”) Sayer**, PhD and local resident. Nay has lived in town for many years. He is a retired professor of philosophy who taught at the prestigious Snarski Institute for 22 years. Nay is a fan of education, of course, but does not like sports. He views all sports other than chess as an atavistic set of violent rituals that play to the darker side of the human spirit and elevate physical prowess above accomplishments of the mind. He thus regards any expenditures on sports facilities as contrary to the best interests of the students, and is for Option #1. He has little interest in, or knowledge of, stormwater and flooding issues.
- 11) **Hypotenuse Q. Hedgepepper**, citizen and engineer. Hypotenuse is a partner and senior civil engineer for the local engineering firm of *Horatio, Hedgepepper, and Hogfish*. She did not grow up in town but did put 3 kids through the local school system, and has a strong sense of community spirit. Over the past 6-7 years her firm has been asked to design several LID practices (in other communities), including a porous asphalt parking lot and a green roof. She was cautious at first but is now a big fan. She is for Option #3.
- 12) **Dr. Sharde Fairley-Scheen**, a softball umpire who recently moved to Dicksonville and is opening a new optometrist practice in town. She has often been an umpire at Lady Pavers games, where she has become acquainted with the town’s often overly enthusiastic fan base. She is a strong advocate for the power of sports to build character in our youth, but also wary of its power to create unnecessary division within and between communities. She is hesitant to take a position that will be seen as taking sides that may alienate any potential patients for her new practice, and for that reason leans toward what she sees as the compromise approach – Option #2.
- 13) **Rhonda Raingarten**, environmentalist. Rhonda is a Community Stormwater Liaison with the Connecticut Chapter of Watersavers, a national nonprofit environmental group that focuses on water quality and quantity issues. Rhonda has worked for Watersavers for 5 years, since graduating with her MS in Environmental Sciences from a prestigious Ivy League university. She lives in New Haven and therefore is not a citizen of Dicksonville, but it is her job to add the Watersavers perspective to the discussion of these issues at the local level. She and her organization are big GSI/LID fans, and she is speaking in favor of Option #3.

14) **Sirius Sliderule**, Town Engineer. Sirius has been the Town Engineer for 32 years and is nearing retirement. He has done things pretty much the same way since he started the job, and his view is that stormwater needs to get into the drainage system ASAP, period. He is not comfortable with new technology and is especially worried about maintenance issues that may arise with any new approaches. But he does feel that it would be unpopular for him to speak against the sports complex itself. So, he is speaking out for Option #2.

Dicksonville, Town Board

15) Aloysius Washee, First Selectman

Aloysius (“Wish”) Washee has been on the Dicksonville Town Board for 6 years, but this is his first term as First Selectman. Wish is a well-liked figure in town, famous for elaborate Halloween displays (complete with giant carved pumpkins), and his frequent laps around the downtown area with his Saint Bernard, Bernard. Wish always seems to agree with whomever he is talking to, and it is said by some in town that he is hard to pin down on any given subject. He is definitely in support of renovating the high school, a little worried about the extra expense of the athletic upgrades, and more than a little worried about the angry homeowners that have been challenging him to do something about their flooded basements.

16) Billy Bulldozer, Second Selectman

Billy has lived in Dicksonville since he was born. As a child, he spent every waking hour playing with toy trucks in his sandbox, making elaborate construction sites in his back yard. He currently spends every waking hour making elaborate construction sites in Dicksonville and Chestertown. His business and economic development in the town are primary concerns for him. Although he has heard about these fancy “green stormwater” features, he is skeptical of how much benefit they will actually have, and wishes things would just go back to the “good old days” of construction, without all of these tree huggers slowing everything down.

17) Vera Verdant

Vera was elected to the Dicksonville Board of Selectmen in 2019. She moved to Dicksonville 3 years ago from upstate NY, where she lived in solitude in a Yurt in the Adirondacks for 15 years. She was driven to run for the Board to put a stop to the pillaging of Dicksonville’s dwindling natural areas by the “short-sighted and ill-informed pursuit of more development.” She is not a huge supporter of sports beyond self-officiating sports like Ultimate Frisbee, where the true goals are comradery, personal development, and basic joy. Vera thinks the town’s money would be better spent on planting trees and removing unnecessary pavement than on a new sports complex for the Lady Pavers, whose name alone she finds offensive. Still, she has reluctantly accepted that the sports complex will move forward and is intent on making the project an educational showcase for protecting natural resources and combating climate change.

18) Greta Goreberg

Greta has lived in town all her life. She teaches Intro Biology, Physics, and Environmental Science at the high school. For the past 15 years, she has become more and more concerned about climate change and its environmental, economic and social impacts around the world and right here in Dicksonville. She sees everything through the lens of its relation to the climate crisis.

19) Bruce Boyer-Barrett.

Bruce is a retired Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of Geography at UConn. He lives on the other side of town from the high school and so has no direct experience with the flooding problem. But he prides himself on his scientific viewpoint and evaluates everything on the factual information presented to him. He intends to do the same with this controversy and has no prior leanings one way or another.

Reporters

20) Rachel Glad-Now, MSNBC. Rachel has been a reporter/anchor for MSNBC for 12 years, and is widely known to have liberal leanings. She is known for the detailed “back stories” that she researches for the pieces on her show. Her second cousin lives in Dicksonville and so this local controversy has come to her attention as something that might interest her viewers.

21) Genevieve Smythe-Smythe, BBC Radio News. Genevieve is a climate and environmental reporter for BBC, and has a weekly 30 minute radio program featuring local stories that she feels are illustrative of global problems and are more relatable to her listeners than “big picture” news.

22) I.M. Wright, local radio host. I.M. hosts a daily talk show on WCTR, the “Voice of the Connecticut River Valley.” The name of the show is “No Nonsense” and he prides himself on his conservative views and on “cutting through all the political correctness” to get to the heart of the matter.

23) Jimmy Olson, reporter for the school newspaper. Jimmy is a senior at DHS and has been on the school newspaper, “Going Viral,” since he was a freshman. He sees himself as protecting the rights and interests of the student body.

The Assignments

Characters will be randomly chosen at the end of class on March 22nd.

There are two (2) papers associated with this exercise (see additional info below):

- (1) a short character development paper
- (2) a paper describing your position about the issue at hand:
 - For those testifying: your 3-minute testimony.
 - For the Council members: your decision and why.
 - For the Press: an article/radio script for your news outlet.

Note that you will be graded on the paper, not the live testimony, so don't stress about your turn at the podium.

1. Character Development Paper (due Tuesday March 29)

Everyone will write a 1-2 page character development paper. The paper is not focused on the high school project itself. The purpose is to demonstrate how your views developed, and why. It should include personal information like your age, work background and current occupation, educational background, family make-up, events in the past have shaped your decision making, etc. Take your assigned character's brief description from above and think about how "you" got there. What's important to you? What is your view on stormwater and/or innovative stormwater management (if you even have a view, that is)? Have some fun with this. Be creative. Feel free to borrow from people in the news or from your personal acquaintances.

2. Position Paper (due Thursday April 7 BUT those testifying will need a draft to guide their testimony on the classes of 3/31 or 4/5).

2a. For the 14 speakers: your testimony for the Public Hearing

You will be submitting written testimony in the form of a 2-3 page paper. You will use this paper as the basis for your oral testimony at the Town Council public hearing (March 31 or April 5). **Your oral testimony will be limited to three (3) minutes.**

Things to consider for your paper:

- Your bottom line is to support the Option given in your character's write-up in "People Signed Up to Testify" (or in a few cases to choose an option if none is given).
- Your task is to make an argument that supports your character's position. Try to put yourself in the position of the person you are playing, even if you don't agree with it. Use your character support paper. Think about what someone in real life would do when faced with these issues.
- Think also of the arguments that people who oppose your position will make and come up with counter arguments. This is an effective way of taking the steam out of their testimony when it's their turn. You will have time during the hearing to ask questions of the other people testifying.
- Consider your audience. Who are you trying to get to accept your arguments? Some people already are on your side, some are open-minded and others will oppose you no matter what you say. Anticipate questions and answer them before they are asked when presenting your testimony.

- Think about some of the “real world” issues we have talked about in class as you craft your testimony.

Things to consider for your testimony in class:

- A good testimony (both written and oral) starts with a self-introduction, a thank-you to the Board for the opportunity to speak, and a little about yourself (thus the Development Paper). In almost all cases it’s preferable if you state your position right up front.
- For your oral testimony, hit the high points. The time goes by quickly. Reading testimony is never as effective as a more relaxed speaking style, so consider reading only if you feel that it’s the only way you’ll get through all your points in the allotted time.
- Practice out loud. 3 minutes goes much faster than you think. We will be timing you and will cut you off if you go over.
- There will be a few minutes of Q&A, moderated by the Board, after your testimony.
- We will assign a random order for your oral testimony and post it on Blackboard.

b. For the 5 Selectpersons: a 2-3 page summary stating which Option you are voting for, and why.

Your paper should be based on your personal opinions, but supported by what you learned from the testimony of the citizens. You will be reading this decision to the class on April 7. Be specific in naming what testimony was helpful to you in making your decision, and/or what testimony you disagreed with and why. Note that while you may have a leaning one way or another coming in, it’s quite possible that you could be swayed to a different position by the testimony. Your oral presentation will be limited to three (3) minutes. See tips above about practicing and presenting.

c. For the 4 Members of the Press: a 2- 3 page article/script for your news outlet after all testimony is in and before the council renders a decision.

You will be reading this to the class on April 7. You can ask questions at the hearing but also can interview those who testified and members of the council during the public hearing process. You can slant the article in any way that you think your news organization might do, but be sure to relate your piece to testimony at the hearing (even if your choices are....selective). Your oral presentation will be limited to three (3) minutes. See tips above about practicing and presenting.

→ If you have any questions or need to talk something out, do not hesitate to email any or all of us (after midnight, email Mike only).

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