

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
Minutes for January 21, 2015 Meeting
Approved February 11 2015

Commission/Board Members Present: Jeremy Berger, Wendy Doane, Gordon Gebauer, Seth Jensen and Mark Letorney.

Absent:

Also present: Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator), David Gauthier, Ira Allen, Andrea Letorney, Marilyn Thomas, Barb Peck, Dale Rodgers, Joel Fay, Alex Weinhagen, Chuck McGill, Sarah Pinto, John Doane, Trish Indoe and Michael Kirick.

The meeting began at 6:30 p.m.

2015 Town Plan Public Hearing Prep

The Planning Commission prepared the Brick Meeting House for the 2015 Town Plan Public Hearing.

2015 Town Plan Public Hearing

Jeremy gave a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed 2015 Town Plan and associated maps. The hearing was then opened to the public for comment.

Ira Allen commended the Commission on their efforts.

Barb Peck asked the Commission to explain what was meant by the term “greenway”.

Sarah Pinto, Conservation Commission Chair, stated “greenway” was a broad definition for a non-automotive route connecting different locations. She said this could be a mixture of roadways, trails and properties that allow for transportation by alternative means (e.g. biking, horseback riding, walking, etc.).

Barb Peck asked what was meant by “flood resiliency”.

Melissa explained that it was a mixture of flood preparedness and education, replacing undersized or deteriorating public infrastructure, informing residents of undersized or deteriorating private infrastructure, continuing to prohibit development in floodplains, etc.

David Gauthier asked the Planning Commission to contact Vermont Gas in order to request their service in Westford.

Jeremy said the Commission would discuss his request. However, he said it is unlikely Westford has the density necessary for Vermont Gas to make a profit given the cost of installing a natural gas pipeline.

Alex Weinhagen asked if the proposed forestry district was included in the last Plan.

Melissa said yes.

Alex Weinhagen said the Implementation Plan format made it difficult to determine the Town’s direction and what the Town needed to do to meet its goals. Also, he added that the Implementation Plan was too long and suggested the Commission include a “top 10 list” at the beginning of the Implementation Plan or Town Plan.

David Gauthier asked who would be paying for the proposed community wastewater disposal system in the Town Center Area.

Jeremy said the Town has been using grant funds to explore potential community wastewater disposal areas and will request tax funds in FY 16 to further explore the capacity behind the

White Church. He added that the system would benefit the Town as a whole by servicing municipal and community structures, allowing for business in the Town Center Area, providing residents with goods and services, and contributing to the tax base.

Seth added that the Town needs to find a replacement wastewater system to serve the Library and Town Office as soon as possible in due to the fact that the existing system serving those structures is substandard. He said tax payers will need to address this issue eventually and its more cost effective and efficient to do so now rather than after a septic failure. He also noted that connection fees could reimburse the Town for a system it has no choice but to build the future.

Gordon said the community wastewater system would serve public and community buildings first and foremost and any remaining capacity would be doled out on a fee for service basis. However, he said the details still need to be worked out, if and when a feasible location is found.

Barb Peck said she was concerned with the way wildlife corridors were depicted on Map 10 and said they do not appear to be delineated using scientific data.

Alex Weinhagen agreed and stated his concern that the arrows were too general and didn't even depict riparian areas as wildlife corridors. He suggested wildlife corridors be omitted from Map 10 and described within the text.

Alex Weinhagen suggested that the tables in the Population and Housing Section be converted to charts and graphs in order to make the data more user friendly. Furthermore, he suggested that the demographic chart include past, present and future projections. Lastly, he said the Population and Housing Section incorrectly states school enrollment is expected to decline when in fact it is expected to maintain.

Michael Kirick suggested the Town conduct a group net-metering study to determine whether it's feasible for the Town to produce its own energy to power the municipal buildings.

Ira noted that January 31st is the date of an all-day visioning workshop for the elementary school.

Barb Peck said this is very important due to the fact that the fate of the school will have a great impact on the Town's demographics and tax generating ability.

Mark MOVED to close the public hearing.

Seth SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 – 0.

Planning Commission Work Plan

The Planning Commission reviewed and slightly revised their work plan.

Minutes of the December 15, 2014 & January 7, 2015 Meetings

The Planning Commission will review minutes at their next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:28 pm.

Submitted by,

Melissa Manka, Westford Planning Coordinator