

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
Minutes for April 22, 2015 Meeting
Approved June 22, 2015

Commission/Board Members Present: David Adams, Casey Mathieu, Jeremy Berger, Wendy Doane, Gordon Gebauer, Seth Jensen, Mark Letorney, David Adams, Casey Mathieu, Dale Rodgers, Joel Fay and Sarah Pinto.

Absent: N/A

Also present: Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator), Dave Crane, Neal O'Brien, Joe Haller, Al Turgeon, Pat Haller, Patricia Hechmer, Martha Heath, Lynn Gauthier, David Gauthier, Don Pouliot, Chuck Custeau, Christopher Friesen, Bob Heiser, Tom Ofeo, Susan Schmidt, Tony Pouliot, Rich Golden, Mark Irish, Steve Knight, Ross Hughes, Ted Horton, Juliette Horton, Ben Wilson, Heather Armata, Danielle Vierling, Noel Bovtin and Martha Bennett.

The meeting began at 7:15p.m.

Brookside Road Conceptual Plan

David Adams, Selectboard Member, opened the Brookside Road Conceptual Plan meeting.

Pat Haller presented the proposed conceptual plan and key players to the Selectboard, Planning Commission, Conservation Commission and members of the public.

Bob Heisler from the Vermont Land Trust explained how his organization may be able to assist in bringing funds towards the purchase and conservation of the farm and forest land located on the western portion of the Jackson Farm.

Melissa explained the Town's interest in the wastewater capacity located on the western portion of the Jackson property. She said the Town has been researching alternative community wastewater solutions for the Town Center Area for more than 8 years in order to serve the existing municipal and community buildings, existing residential a commercial buildings as well as to allow future growth in the Town Center Area.

The meeting was then opened to the public for questions and answers.

Al Turgeon asked what the group should leave thinking about in the days and weeks to come.

Pat Haller answered that people should leave knowing there is a chance of preserving this farm with other direct benefits for the town. He said individuals should also speak with neighbors and friends about the proposal and let board members know how they feel about the project.

Gordon Gebauer asked what the next steps for board members are.

Pat Haller said he would like boards to deliberate on the proposal and formulize a position.

Bob Heisler said Town should determine if they desire part ownership of the land and/or involvement in the project and, if so, a group of interested residents should develop and present a couple different scenarios to the Town for appraisal and pursuit.

Marcus (?) asked what would happen if the Town's people invested time and energy into the project and other offers were placed on the land and accepted.

Pat Haller said he didn't know what would happen in that case. He said the Gauthier's have given him a closing date of May 2016, but perhaps some portions of the project could close sooner.

Tom Orfeo said the Town Center has been waiting for this opportunity for more than 25 years. He said this has to happen to allow development in the Town Center or the Town Center needs to move. He said this decision should be a done deal for the Town. Otherwise, he said there will be no future growth or development in the Town Center.

Dave Crane said funding needs to be found for conservation as well as development of the property.

Heather Armata said a developer could come in and build 50 generic, high-end homes when in actuality 20 affordability priced, well-designed homes would best suit the village. She said it would reduce taxes by encouraging families to move to Town and could be designed “by the people”.

Dave Crane said the Town needs to keep in mind the student capacity of the school. Also, he said the soils west of the northern lobe of suitable soils appear to also contain capacity and should be further investigated by the Town.

All agreed the school has plenty of student capacity.

Eliza Anderson suggested donations, crowd sourcing and educational grants or partnerships, such as with Shelburne Farms, as potential funding sources.

Pat Haller said those options will be investigated after obtaining more information on the structure of the purchase.

Seth Jensen said this is the first time he has ever been frightened for the community. He elaborated by stating people are leaving town, buildings are being abandoned and the taxes are increasing dramatically. He stressed the need to do something and not pass by this opportunity. He also thanked the Gauthiers and Hallers for beginning these discussions. Lastly, he reiterated doing nothing is not an option for Westford. Tony Pouliot asked individuals to sign up to help develop and implement a proposal that will best serve the Town and partners in the project. He said the farmland is a part of Westford’s history and legacy. He said Town’s people should discuss how much farm land they would like to remain open. He added that his family is willing to be an ally in the project and be as involved as needed.

Neal O’Brien said the depth to bedrock and depth to ground water should be researched with a geoprobe.

Heather Armata said the Town should look into self-financing.

David Adams suggested fundraising as opposed to crowd sourcing.

Amber Haller agreed that fundraising is a way for individuals to donate to and support the community as a whole.

Eliza Anderson stressed the Town is losing community and individuals need to stand up and fight for it.

Martha Heath said she loves the concept, but warns that the community will need also to be very organized in order to attempt to pull this proposal off in one year.

Don Pouliot said that the farm needs the Town’s support as well due to fluctuating milk prices.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:06 pm.

Submitted by,

Melissa Manka, Westford Planning Coordinator