

Planning Commission - August 2020 Newsletter

The Planning Commission has been working for at least 10 years to find a solution to the lack of wastewater capacity in the village. We have the land on which an in-ground system can be constructed, we have a preliminary design, and we have an estimate of the construction costs. We are now working to find funding sources to pay for construction and reduce (or eliminate) any additional amount that the Town would be required to contribute. Towards that end, we are in the process of preparing a Preliminary Engineering Report, which is necessary to apply for State and Federal funding for this type of project. We likely will not know any more about potential funding sources for this project until early 2021.

As we reported in the March, 2020 newsletter, the Town is investigating how it might help spark economic development in the village, which in turn can help pay for construction and reduce user fees of the community wastewater system. The Town is also investigating how to provide additional space and resources for our Town Office that has outgrown its vault storage space.

In 2019, The Planning Commission established a subcommittee to investigate how the Town might become involved with the redevelopment of the 1705 VT Route 128 Property (Pigeon property) with the goal sparking economic revitalization in the Town Center. The owners of the Pigeon property have been working with the Town to help facilitate this investigation.

The Town has asked the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) for assistance analyzing and researching the property, specifically seeking to identify what steps would need to be taken to prepare the property for redevelopment and what the cost of that work would be. The purpose of this analysis is to determine if it is advantageous for the Town to work with the landowners to plan for future development on the property. This property is key to revitalization of the Town Center due to its location, size, access to the Browns River and ability to help jump start the community wastewater project. This property is valuable because it can help the Town achieve many of its revitalization goals for the Town Center and create improvements that will benefit the community including, housing, sidewalks, river access and parking.

In order to explore this possibility further, the Town needs to develop a preliminary site plan that will identify and address many site specific issues, including:

- provide river access for recreational purposes;
- provide the Town with an option for a new Town Office;
- create and implement a plan for remediation of the contaminated soils;
- delineate wetlands and limits of construction/development;
- provide for adequate water supply and wastewater disposal;
- identify setbacks and streetscape requirements;

Once the site plan is created, and if the Town decides to move forward, the vision is for the Town to partner with a public or private developer who will construct improvements on the property in accordance with the site plan.

The Town has had conversations with several potential development partners who have all expressed an interest in exploring a possible partnership with the Town, including:

- Vermont Housing Conservation Board;
- Vermont River Conservancy;
- Champlain Housing Trust;
- Habitat for Humanity;
- Northern Borders Regional Commission.

The Planning Commission has also had preliminary discussions with several local private developers who have expressed an interest in working with the Town on this project. Public and private developers can take advantage of the fact that development in and around the Town Common does not need Act-250 approval due to Westford having received Neighborhood Development Area (NDA) designation. Additionally, Westford's form-based code provides more predictability and certainty with regard to zoning approval within the village.

The goal of this project is to leverage and use the Pigeon property to not only solve the Town office problem, but to also incorporate community valued features into the final project, such as housing, sidewalks, river access and parking. The development of this property will be vital to help stimulate economic growth in the village while also enhancing the Town Common and Village.

In order to move forward with the research and analysis needed, the Town needs additional funding. The Town is seeking this funding through grants. The Town is eligible for a planning grant from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program which is administered through the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP). The grant amount Westford is seeking is \$60,000. The Town is required to contribute 10% of that amount in matching funds, which can be in-kind work and research, much of which has already occurred. The amount of preliminary work and research the Town and CCRPC have already undertaken (and will undertake in the future as the project moves forward) satisfies much, if not all, of this match amount. Based on the current projections, it appears that the Town will not have any out-of-pocket costs associated with this grant. **In order to be awarded the grant, the Town must hold a public hearing. The public hearing will occur on Thursday, August 27th during the Selectboard's regular meeting.**

Assuming the grant is awarded, the Town can then further investigate specific site issues and decide if it should move forward and, if so, under what specific conditions. The goal would be to find funding sources to pay for any costs the Town incurs such that taxpayers are not asked to contribute to the development of the property. This would include partnering with a developer to construct improvements on the property.

If you have questions about the planning grant the Town is applying for, please plan to attend the public hearing on August 27. If the Town does decide to move forward, there will be more community involvement and community decision making in the future.

Thank you,
The Westford Planning Commission