

**TOWN OF WESTFORD  
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES  
MINUTES FOR AUGUST 3, 2020 MEETING  
Approved on August 17, 2020**

**Commission/Board Members Present:** Koi Boynton Gordon Gebauer, Seth Jensen, George Lamphere and Mark Letorney.

**Commission/Board Members Absent:**

**Also, Present** Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator), Ira Allen, Kim Guidry, Pat Hechmer, Bree Drapa, and Taylor Newton.

The meeting began at: 6:32 p.m.

**Amendments to Agenda**

No amendments accepted.

**Citizens to be Heard & Announcements**

B. Drapa and P. Hechmer, public library representatives, stated they were participating to ensure the library's best interest was included in the town center revitalization plans.

G. Lamphere said they were welcome to participate and asked them to please drop the Commission a note if there is something specific they would like addressed.

**Town Common Area Wi-Fi Signage Purchase**

M. Letorney stated that the signs have been printed.

M. Manka noted that hardware and posts still need to be purchased.

G. Gebauer MOVED to authorize the expense of up to \$250 for the project.

K. Boynton SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 – 0.

**July 23<sup>rd</sup> Selectboard Meeting Follow Up**

The Commission reviewed the five tasks that came out of the Selectboard-Planning Commission Joint Meeting.

1. Grant Writer – G. Lamphere asked whether K. Boynton would assist the Selectboard in drafting a job description for the Planning Commission and Selectboard to review. K. Boynton said yes.
2. Public Hearing – G. Lamphere stated that the notice has been posted and he is scheduled to have a follow up conversations with N. Rogers and V. Ross later this week and the Selectboard on August 13<sup>th</sup> to plan the structure and facilitation of the hearing.
3. Wastewater Capacity – M. Manka said she reached out to J. Hutchins to request any capacity information he had for the property east of the store. He responded that there is some capacity, but he does not have a report and/or capacity figures. G. Lamphere asked M. Manka to relay that information to B. Cleary.
4. Letter of Credit – G. Lamphere said he discussed the matter with N. Rogers and J. Andrews after the meeting and he believes G. Barrows will be investigating a line of credit.
5. Wi-Fi Signage – Addressed.

G. Gebauer asked if I. Allen could speak about the hotel property.

I. Allen stated he is concerned about the appearance of the property, especially if newer structures were placed beside it. He fears the appearance may be deemed offensive.

S. Jensen said the appearance of the hotel building is not offensive and he likes the diversity of having historic and newer form-based structures side by side. He noted the area surrounding the common is a designated village and tax credits are available for façade and interior code upgrades. He said the credits are state not federal, which makes them easier to handle and the credits can be sold to a bank. He added that there is a need for affordable rental property in town and his rentals fulfill that need.

M. Letorney spoke to the conceptual plan and assured everyone that the Commission will be conscious of the library and hotel buildings in their planning.

I. Allen said the building needs extensive upgrades which will affect the rent structure

G. Lamphere suggested reaching out to a housing partner. He added this may affect ownership and the town would not be a party to the transaction.

I. Allen said he would like to maintain ownership.

S. Jensen offered to provide I. Allen with tax credit information.

### **Vermont River Conservancy**

M. Letorney stated he had not heard anything more from S. Libby or G. Pigeon.

G. Lamphere asked that M. Letorney notify the Commission if any news comes in.

G. Gebauer asked how the site visit with S. Libby went and whether VRC is interested in the property.

M. Letorney and G. Lamphere responded that the site visit went very well, and S. Libby felt the project was a match for them. They agreed the town should take a back seat to allow VRC and G. Pigeon work out the details.

T. Newton said the town will need to correspond with VRC for information related to the VCDP application and to determine project structure. He also noted that the town needs site access.

It was agreed that T. Newton would work directly with VRC and M. Letorney and G. Pigeon would work on the site access letter.

### **Housing Partners for Town Center Revitalization Project**

G. Lamphere said it looks like Vermont River Conservancy (VRC) is a potential purchaser with Champlain Housing Trust (CHT) being the housing partner and Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity (GMHH) a builder. He noted that the latter two organizations expressed interest in partnering with us during a recent meeting he had with them. However, its yet to be seen whether they are a true fit for the project as much is unknown at this time.

T. Newton said he would like a letter from CHT stating that they are willing to be involved in the planning progress.

G. Lamphere said CHT would like a to see a site plan of the project.

M. Letorney said he could probably produce something for them in a few weeks.

T. Newton said he would need the CHT commitment letter prior to the VCDP application deadline.

M. Letorney said tasks with deadlines would be helpful.

G. Lamphere said he would put T. Newton in contact with CHT.

T. Newtown stressed the need to have the partners at the table when developing the site plan.

P. Hechmer asked about the stormwater planning.

M. Letorney said the stormwater effecting the library comes from Brookside Road and Route 128 while the stormwater effecting the 1705 property comes from the common drainage system. He said the latter would be the focus of the 1705 project.

### **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**

T. Newton presented the updated scope of work.

The Commission discussed the fate of the existing dwelling and G. Lamphere noted that CHT may be interested in an affordable housing conversion, but that is not something GMHH would do. M. Manka thought it was too early to make a definitive decision. S. Jensen agreed there were too many factors in play to decide now. M. Letorney suggested leaving the fate of the home as the last project as development around it might inspire something or someone. He noted that G. Pigeon would like the home restored. T. Newton said the scope of work could include a structural engineer and architect to investigate the integrity of the building and necessary upgrades. M. Letorney said that was low on the priority list at the moment. M. Manka mentioned T. Newton's email suggesting the town could add developer RFQs or development schematics to the scope and T. Newton gave a further explanation. G. Lamphere suggested scope of work needs may become clearer after further discussions with CHT. M. Letorney asked whether CHT already had floor plans that have proven successful. T. Newton said he could ask. T. Newtown said he needs to ask G. Barrows how much general administrative time is expected for this project to refine the in-kind match amount. He said he expects a \$1,100 gap, adding that the Planning Commission or a third party would need to fill that gap in cash, service, or in-kind work. The Commission agreed to make a final determination at their August 17<sup>th</sup> meeting and once more information is acquired in order to make a fully informed decision.

### **Future Planning Commission Meetings & Project Management**

G. Lamphere asked whether the Commission was comfortable maintaining two meetings per month or whether more were warranted. He suggested dedicating more time to town center projects once the town plan is complete. G. Gebauer noted that after the town plan is complete the Commission will need to dedicate one of the two meetings to regulatory amendments. K. Boynton and M. Manka agreed they could not meet more than twice a month. M. Manka said additional staff would be necessary. M. Manka agreed with G. Gebauer that one meeting per month would need to be dedicated to regulatory amendments and suggested the creation of project and/or specific focus subcommittees comprised of interested persons and commissioners to work on town center tasks and report back to the Commission for action. T. Newton said he would like a small subcommittee of commissioners and partners to work on the 1705 project. It was agreed that M. Letorney, G. Lamphere, Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity (GMHH), Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), and the Vermont River Conservancy (VRC) should make up that subcommittee. The subcommittee would then report back to the Commission for approvals. M. Letorney said a team also needs to be created to work out funding and project management. S. Jensen said funding details were going to shift as information came in and partners coalesced. K. Boynton offered to ask M. Drapa if he could help. It was agreed that it should be a paid position rather than a volunteer position due to size and scope. S. Jensen offered to help with the funding vision. He stated if a face and/or a plan to knit different funding sources together was needed, he could help.

K. Boynton noted that there are funds for a grant writer and perhaps a grant could be pursued to pay for a funding/project manager position.

### **Public Outreach & Education Plan**

G. Gebauer asked about the status of the follow up FPF post. He suggested future posts be short and easily digestible.

G. Lamphere said the post would be sent out to Commissioners tomorrow morning and posted later in the day.

G. Gebauer offered to take on public outreach and education. He will refine the draft FAQs for inclusion on the project webpage as well as make regular FPF postings. He suggested the town also highlight other projects going on in the Town Center Area, such as the public Wi-Fi project.

M. Manka offered to maintain and update the project webpage.

The question was asked whether there would be two separate outreach initiatives for the 1705 property and community wastewater projects or one.

M. Manka suggested creating a webpage listing all the Town Center Area projects with links to webpages describing each project in more depth.

It was agreed that the focus should be the 1705 property now and as information comes in the Commission will address wastewater. It was noted that the Commission needs to wait for the Preliminary Engineering Report in order to provide the information the public is seeking regarding wastewater.

The Commission also discussed the need to have key community members support the Town Center Area projects publicly.

G. Lamphere offered to meet with community members on the Common to discuss the project proposals.

M. Manka suggested reaching out to the VCRD task force members first.

S. Jensen suggested painting this as a downtown revitalization project that serves community buildings. He also noted that wastewater is key to all of this work and the public needs to be aware of that.

M. Letorney felt the focus should be town center revitalization and since wastewater is just a natural extension of that it does not need its own focus, but rather it should be packaged as one project.

M. Manka expressed concern that if the 1705 project did not come to fruition the wastewater project would go down with it was presented as one package.

G. Lamphere suggested continuing to work on both projects and determining how to approach presentation and outreach once more information is obtained. He also noted that the Commission should build a downtown revitalization image soon and they need to discuss that plan. Lastly, he suggested the Commission dedicate more time each meeting to public comment. The Commission agreed on 15 minutes for public comment.

### **August 27<sup>th</sup> Selectboard Public Hearing**

T. Newton said he would give a presentation.

G. Lamphere noted that hearing procedures would be developed this week and V. Ross would facilitate the hearing. He asked the Commission to send him an email as to who would be participating in the hearing.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:55 p.m.

Submitted by,  
Melissa Manka, Westford Planning Coordinator