

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
MINUTES FOR SEPTEMBER 14, 2020 MEETING
Approved on October 5, 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) and William Cleary.

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

Amendments to Agenda

The Planning Commission added discussion of interim bylaws to allow for campgrounds to their agenda at 8:20pm.

Citizens to be Heard, Announcements, Correspondence & Other Business

B. Cleary said he was attending the meeting to stay informed and listen to discussions about campgrounds. He noted that the Commission cannot think of every possible use and suggested delegating power to the DRB to determine whether a use is appropriate, if possible. M. Manka said she would contact VLCT to inquire as to whether delegation of that authority was possible.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

M. Manka reported that the grant application was submitted on September 9th, the hearing on the application will be held on November 5th (time to be determined) and awards are announced in December.

Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessment

M. Manka gave a summary of her September 8th memo to the Commission. She informed the Commission that the property owners have applicable insurance, which is rare. She noted that the Town is in a holding pattern while LE Environmental, DEC and the Trust's insurance company work out the details. She also noted that the Petroleum Clean Up funds are no longer available to the Town due to the insurance policy. The Town will be brought back into the discussion once insurance coverage and funding options are sorted out.

1705 Vision & Plan

G. Lamphere said he envisions the 1705 project including 2-4 commercial enterprises and 4-6 affordable dwelling units with wastewater being part of the project. He noted that potable water would be nice to have but is not required. He also stated pedestrian infrastructure, river access and public parking would be a part of the development.

K. Boynton asked what type of commercial development was planned.

G. Lamphere responded commercial development would potentially be comprised of retail, office, and daycare space.

K. Boynton asked whether we were asking too much from a small plot of land as on-site parking seems limiting. She suggested looking off-site for parking. She also noted that based on the community survey housing is needed and 6 units seems reasonable. She said office space makes sense but questions whether a lot of commercial development is feasible.

M. Letorney said he envisions 2 buildings with 1 being afforded housing and the other commercial

or commercial and affordable housing. He believes the property can only support 4 – 5 dwelling units.

G. Lamphere said our housing partners will need to weigh in.

K. Boynton asked whether we have commercial developers lined up.

M. Letorney said no.

G. Lamphere wanted everyone to know that he learned in his discussions with Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity and Champlain Housing Trust that they are not amenable to restoring old homes.

K. Boynton agreed that it would be difficult to renovate and keep up the existing home.

G. Lamphere noted that some residents would like it preserved.

M. Letorney said the perfect situation would be if they could find someone to renovate and reuse the building and noted that the building may need to be moved.

G. Gebauer said he envisions housing, commercial and small-scale retail in 3 buildings not including the town offices. He noted that we need a site plan deciding restrictions and limitations. He would like to see the post office moved to the center as well.

G. Lamphere said he'd draft a narrative of objectives for the Commission to agree to so that vision is captured in one place.

S. Jensen said he envisions 4 – 8 dwelling units depending on the site with a healthy nonresidential piece to diversify the grand list. He said that ratio will be determined during the CDBG process. He noted that the housing partners are what makes this project competitive and will bring the necessary funding. He also noted that the wells serving the development could be monitored as a potential public water supply in the future - stating phase 1 could be private wells and phase 2 public wells. He added that the town should not rule out food-based business until we know whether pretreatment on the Jackson property is an option. Otherwise, the uses should be office and housing.

Vermont River Conservancy

M. Manka gave a summary of her August 18th memo.

FY 21 Municipal Planning Grant / Project Management

M. Manka gave a summary of the grant and noted that the town could apply for the grant to hire a project manager for town center revitalization projects. She warned that there is not much time to draft and gain approval for the grant as its due October 1st. She also noted that a project manager may be premature as the project is still in its infancy with many unknowns. She mentioned the grant due to recent inquiries into hiring a project manager.

B. Cleary stated that Greg Barrows, Treasurer, could assist with the financial piece.

K. Boynton said the housing partners will take care of a lot of the project management. She noted there is much to be determined, but the partners have more capacity than the town.

M. Letorney stated there is a need for a financial controller.

G. Lamphere suggested they revisit the MPG during the 2021 grant cycle. He also noted that the Commission or Taylor Newtown may be able to handle project management. He added that Selectboard support is need for financial management.

S. Jensen said outreach to users is going to be an important piece and it may make sense for a MPG application. He suggested small meetings with potential users to inform them of the project details once known as well as to explain the cost-benefit of connecting.

M. Manka said they may be able to use the UPWP for public outreach, which has been suggested by the CCRPC.

Grant Writer

K. Boynton requested comment on the grant writer RFP by Friday. She will discuss the possibility of a grant writing committee with Julie Andrews.

Public Outreach & Education

G. Gebauer said he revised and updated the Q&A and will send it out to the Commission for review. He noted that perhaps David Gauthier did not read the Q&A and suggested emailing it to him.

G. Lamphere offered to respond to D. Gauthier with the link to the Q&A and ask him what he feels the Commission is missing. He will also respond to Barb Peck.

G. Gebauer noted that they are waiting for the grant award and preliminary engineering report and suggested the next public outreach push happen after they have that information in hand. He would also like to develop a website or new webpage to place all town center revitalization related matter in one place and make it easily digestible. He noted that they are in a holding pattern now.

G. Lamphere said a timeline would be helpful for the public and said he'd work with M. Manka to create one. He also suggested creation of a public outreach subcommittee lead by one Commissioner and members of the public. He would like the Commission to think about that option prior to our next meeting. He also said the webpage should include visuals and links to public outreach efforts and community surveys.

M. Letorney said it would take a great deal of time to get a subcommittee up to speed.

G. Gebauer said perhaps focus groups would be more effective and efficient.

Town Center Area - Community Wastewater

M. Manka gave a summary of her August 17th memo. She said the consultants have requested an October 5th Planning Commission meeting and October 8th Selectboard meeting to discuss the draft Preliminary Engineering Report and Step 2 Engineering Services Agreement

Draft Planning Commission Budget

The Planning Commission reviewed and discussed their draft FY 22 budget.

S. Jensen noted they may need outside assistance when working on the regulatory amendments.

B. Cleary suggested they legitimize their budget if they are not using the full amount on an annual basis.

G. Gebauer MOVED to approve the FY 22 budget as written.

M. Letorney SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 – 0.

Planning Commission Town Report

The Planning Commission reviewed the draft outline prepared by G. Lamphere. G. Lamphere asked that comments and suggestions be made to the google doc in the coming days.

Wrap up & Next Meeting

The Commission reviewed G. Gebauer' s memo to the Selectboard regarding staggering Planning Commissioner terms so that the majority of the Commission doesn't have their term expire in the same year.

G. Lamphere MOVED to approve the Planning Commission term memo.

S. Jensen SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5- 0.

G. Gebauer will send the finalized document to M. Manka to submit to the Selectboard for consideration.

The Commission agreed to discuss interim regulations at their next meeting.

M. Manka said she would contact Tonya for updates to the Recreation Section of the Town Plan.

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

Submitted by,
Melissa Manka, Westford Planning Coordinator