

**TOWN OF WESTFORD  
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES  
MINUTES FOR OCTOBER 19 2020 MEETING**

Approved on November 2, 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) Brad Washburn, Amy Marcellis, Julie Beth Hinds, and Lee McClenny.

The meeting began at: 6:30pm

**Amendments to Agenda**

**Citizens to be Heard, Announcements, Correspondence & Other Business**

Lee is here to educate himself as a new Westford resident. Welcome and thanks to Lee!

**Community Wastewater Status Report**

Brad has pulled together Birchline Planning and Stone Environmental. They are compiling the PER with revisions requested by the state. Working on the total project cost and building in pretreatment - we are currently at \$2.2M. Stone Environmental did the wetlands delineation with minor issues, which is good news. Signed a contract with UVM for archaeology. Committed to the November 11th date for a draft version 5 days prior to the meeting.

Seth has a timing question: When in the process do we start having conversations with the potential users? Brad believes that the PER needs to be complete with a solid vision of how the project will come together to make communication with the users easier. We should plan a public meeting after the PC & Select Board meeting. Amy added that once we have a PER that is a really good time to have the public process begin again. 1705 project likely fits in this and the affordability of this project and she will be sticking around to understand that better.

Gordon clarifying questions: The PER is giving a final number total cost and user fees. The draft will be submitted on November 11<sup>th</sup> for the November 16<sup>th</sup> meeting with the Select Board. Do we not have a PC meeting prior to the SB meeting? Melissa stated that the November 16<sup>th</sup> meeting would be the PC meeting. She has not heard back on the SB but believes they will discuss at this Thursday's meeting about a possible December meeting. Melissa also mentioned that Tom Brown called and asked if we are ready to take advantage of the new construction

funding that they have? Melissa told them where we are in the process and she could return with a better answer once the PC and SB meet to discuss the PER. In order to apply for that funding, we would need an approved PER, a bond vote, Step 2 complete and the Step 3 application in – all by June 30<sup>th</sup>. She let Tom know that we do hope that the funding will be available in 2022 but we likely would not be ready for the 2021 round. Brad pointed out that Tom was referring to the \$1.25M for loan forgiveness. Brad will have a conversation with Tom as well to see if there is a possible extension for that funding. Amy pointed out that all towns that have similar work in progress are far behind schedule.

George asked if the information coming our way on the November 11<sup>th</sup> would include anticipated dates such as this funding opportunity. Brad says yes that it is possible to include milestone dates in the report. As far as the engineering services agreement – the step 2 is drafted with Green Mountain Engineering Services and the other firms have not yet contributed but Brad has a good understanding of what needs to be done to complete step 2. The three firms will get together and pull all the pieces together. Brad did talk to Jeff Fairs from the state and he is reviewing the Westford project. He is hesitant to weigh in on the agreement until they have the PER in front of him. The agreement does have a solid start. The environmental side is what typically holds these projects up. Brad believes we are in good shape on the environmental front. The hydro geo work does need to happen to determine whether pretreatment is feasible.

### **Grant Writer Status Report**

Checked in with Nanette to see if we have any proposals. Melissa has asked for the grant review form, which did bring up process questions that we can address as this person comes on and we better understand how things work. George asked about other committees that would be interested – we discussed that the library and the Westford Common Hall would be interested and it feels funny for the PC to be the approving body of them having access to the grant writer. All of this is a longer conversation that should happen at a later meeting or between PC, SB, and Town Clerk.

### **1705 Rte. 128 Statues Report & Discussion**

Mark update: The Pigeon's did have insurance and that firm settled with the state of Vermont to continue assessment of the property. George has not pursued an appraiser and is waiting for the Brownfields process to be further along. The Wetlands delineation is complete. The VTrans drainage pipe coming off the common was delineated as a man-made stream. Brock Freyer from the state confirmed that the VTrans drainage pipe does not have a boundary around it. George wonders if that call on the VTrans drainage would allow it to be moved? It does need to be moved because it can't be built over and a right of way would be around it. The VT River Conservancy would not develop a plan for the property until after they purchase the property. Mark contacted VTrans regarding the pipe and was directed to Ed Pierce – he would allow for us to have street scape with sidewalk and trees and no alteration to Rt. 128. The Village designation has helped us through this process to establish streetscape and a village

atmosphere. We would be subject to VTrans signage. Gordon asked where the drainage pipe exits – it is behind the hotel where the Japanese knotweed is and is currently marked by an orange flag.

The thing of concern is a 30 ft right of way around the new drainage pipe. If it is not moved, we will need to devote green space to a pipe. Melissa suggested that we relocate it towards the Brick Meeting House but it would require treatment. That option is being explored. George asked whether it could be located to the South. That brings Mark to the storm water update. Tyler Billingsly is the community volunteer taking this on and he believes we will need more than one treatment area and will need to consider from the library all the way down to the Hotel and it will be a Common plan that will treat, maintain and monitor the stormwater system, which will require regular reports to the state. We would need 3 or 4 treatment areas around the library, town office and another one or two around the development. The green strip could be between the property and the hotel property.

Melissa asked if we could we use disconnects and buffers instead of extensive stormwater treatment? We would need to apply for construction permit for stormwater. Amy is still at the meeting and she confirms that we would end up with 2 stormwater permits for the construction and the treatment for the impervious surface that is included in the project.

Seth sent an email to the subcommittee regarding running the numbers on whether the revegetation credit is worth it for this site. Amy says it is always worth it to run the numbers for revegetation and reforestation because it is the lowest cost option to make up for the impervious surface. It is also driven by the soil conditions that you are disconnecting to. Gordon asked - what does disconnect mean? If you were to put catch basins along the parking spaces with pipes catching run off that is connected. If those parking spaces come into connection to green space and enough of it - then it is a water quality practice. We are looking at a 30-foot connected space and therefore would need 60 feet of greenspace to be considered a corrective action.

Ideally having a system that is disconnected is the better option? Yes, if your site can do it – disconnection revegetation, reforestation is the lowest cost option you can do. Given the development plan that could be hard. It could be done for parts of the site but full disconnection would be hard especially with Route 128 there. Right now, volunteers are working on this to develop a plan that will come together much easier. George asks Amy if she sees anything that is a cause for pause or concern. Besides what we have already discussed, no, because we don't know what is under the ground, yet. The VTrans pipe is helpful because it is not a wetland. Depending on what the Brownfields work turn up there is opportunity to use parking as multifunctional space with landscaping. Treescaping can help to manage water very well.

Melissa is wondering if we should anticipate one step tank per building. Amy confirms that the PER is planning one step tank per building because they can be sized up. Seth asks if one step tank for multiple buildings is a bad idea – if the ownership profile will not change and

depending on the uses of the buildings it could be done. This is a great thing to continue to talk about during the community process to determine if cost can be adjusted.

Mark thought density should be a conversation the current plan includes a 4 unit residential and 4 unit commercial. John designed 4 units with common space. Mark thinks we need to determine density for that building. The other option for reducing density is the reducing the size of the commercial building and the parking for that building. George asked Mark to walk us through the mockup of the site. Mark agrees but wants all to understand that it is all dependent on what the brownfields turn up. The commercial building is closest to the likely contamination thinking that it would provide parking cover for the brownfields' contamination. The buildings are two story and provide greenspace and a path down to the Browns. The parking would all be within the buffers of the wetland. George wonders if we have gotten feedback from the housing partners to see if they are ok with the plan and if they would be happy with this. Mark has shared it with VRC but not a housing partner.

Melissa states that if the drainage pipe is no longer in this location could we recapture that space so that buildings could come more north/south. Mark is hoping to ask the impact specialist from the state but he has not gotten the name of that person. Brock did state it is not a class 2 wetland so it is not about accounting for impact it is just a space that was a drainage ditch – possibly but it would be good to have the specialist confirm that.

Seth agrees that we should investigate whether the drainage ditch can be filled after removal to provide for reconfiguration of the residential property. There are two questions ratio of housing and commercial space – which should be fairly balanced to meet the VHC application. We should address the Japanese knotweed if we are addressing the drainage pipe. The top of slope could move back if that pipe is coming out. In terms of size of units and types of units – I think we covered that in our vision statement. We should have a conversation with housing partners to see if we are meeting their desired numbers. We should engage with our housing partners soon.

Seth believes we should evaluate down slope options for parking. George asked Seth about ratio of residential and commercial – he believes that 50/50 is a good ratio but we are leaving out the Pigeon house. Seth wouldn't want to see the housing drop down to one or two units because it will not be as competitive for funding. Mark points out that we do have the second floor of the commercial building for possible residential. George is asking if 50/50 is not enough. Melissa points out that bringing in the housing partners and commercial developers in now makes sense to formulate the plan and to see what is realistic on their end.

Gordon brought up the Pigeon house and what should be considered – does it stay and provide affordable housing as is – or does it need to be removed to meet the needs of our housing partners. Melissa suggests that keeping the historic shell is an option and building on it. Rehabbing a historic building is not an easy task so it would be great to engage other people on what options exist for that house. Mark would like to see the Pigeon property sold. If we don't want to use the land then we should sell it and focus on the other portions of the property.

George would like to be clear that those really aren't our decisions at this time. It might be our opinion but we are just looking at options at this point. A great deal of this is speculative because we need more information to determine what the final plan is but he appreciates Mark's opinion that it should be sold. Seth points out that a private buyer would be eligible for the tax credits for abatement. Doing some of that prework rehab could help a private buyer.

Melissa has noticed that the Common road is going to be used for the store as well as recreation visitors. Melissa sees the parking on the other side of the common is for the residential and municipal pieces. She thinks we should explore how the river access will be used – swimming, tubing options. Would thinking through these uses allow us to reduce the parking on the 1705 property.

George is reviewing what our goals here is - to look at what it could look like to engage partners.

VTrans yield lane is an option to allow for diagonal parking. Could we revise the public lands and trails section in our town plan to add a sentence about protecting our common's green space. Melissa and Koi brought up that the Town Plan is at the final stages of completion, we did include language regarding the preservation of the Common in the facilities section of the Town Plan and we can't open that back up now to edit an entire section. Melissa offered that perhaps we could add language to the implementation plan but not open the whole town plan. Seth would like it reflected that when we investigate solutions for Common Rd, we should explore the lower impact of impervious surface and greenspace impact options and ensure they are considered.

Julie Beth asked If the Commission has talked with White and Burke about the Pigeon property? Seth spoke with David White and he provided some ideas and asked that he come back and talk when the project is further along. He was skeptical about retail space being there but perhaps the store has demonstrated that use is an option now. Paul Connor in South Burlington could provide some information on similar development projects.

Tandem parking is allowable for residential space but overall, we should be considering 3.5 for commercial and 1.5 for residential.

### **Public Outreach & Education Website**

Gordon is considering providing one page where all the information is located. Currently, our town site has a link in the middle column but you have to go much deeper to find the waste water reports and 1705 information. Gordon is proposing that we place it on one page and provide from the general to the specifics. The summary is a good idea that leads into q&a and then from there have the surveys, studies and reports. Everything is provided in the vision statement, summary, q&a and then is reinforced with the specifics down at the bottom of the page with the links. Even including the newsletter posts by date and have the community surveys and outreach that we have done will be included.

On the town website do we add a column or do we provide a link in the second column on the current website? Gordon wonders if this is the right approach. The group agreed that a link form the second column would be preferred.

Mark suggests providing some visuals and more engaging language on the landing page. The vision statement as a narrative as opposed to link could provide that. There could be a community photo – events on the common that build community spirit. The store should be a PC victory because of the zoning regulations that we created. George boils it down to yes, the direction is good but we should have a landing page that would be more dynamic in engaging for the community. Gordon was considering looking for a community volunteer to build the landing page and links but we could work with the Montgomery web developer that charges \$20/hour.

*VOTE:*

*George makes a motion to authorize \$200 form special projects fund*

*Seth seconds the motion*

*Discussion: Melissa will check to see if we need a contract and follow up with Gordon. George clarifies that it is an hourly rate and not a contract.*

*Gordon would discuss and bring him to the website to discuss what we are thinking and what we would like it to look like.*

*All in favor, motion passes: 5 - 0.*

Gordon is asking for feedback on the summary and George points out that it would need updating periodically because it will change. The hope is that Gordon or Melissa can make the changes over time. A general timeline or infographic might be useful. Would we have that now or do we need our reports? We could build a timeline without reports and point out PC milestones. Could we also include some community quotes to bring community perspective in?

Capturing information from Jeff on how a public system will support his expansion will help with future grant applications. Focusing on store lot and 1705 would be very helpful in applications. Could commissioners collect quotes form community members as we talk about the waste water system and send them to Gordon?

Send comments on the summary directly to Gordon. The q&a was updated with the engineer's statement that a phased system would not be feasible. That letter will also be included.

### **Draft of Town Report**

George is almost done and will share for comment and feedback.

Added to agenda: Gilman and Briggs invoice for wetlands delineation the contract was \$1,002 and their invoice was \$69 over contract. We could approve it or ask that they stay within the contracted amount. We would need a formal vote for the

*VOTE:*

*George makes a motion.*

*Mark seconds the motion.*

*No discussion*

*All in favor, motion approved: 5 – 0.*

**2020 Workplan**

The town plan needs to be proofed. Koi and Gordon will review the town plan for edits by November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Wrap up & Next Meeting**

November 2<sup>nd</sup> will be focused on regulations. Koi will be out until December and Gordon is on the hook for notes.

The town is looking to reduce the budget to reduce taxes but we will work on preserving the PC budget. Mark asked if there is a number that they are trying to reach. George does not have that number but knows that others have come in with larger asks. We have been in discussion with Julia about using special projects funding to reformat the regulations document because we do not have that capacity – so they do know that we need it for that.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:47 p.m.

Submitted by,

Koi Boynton, Westford Planning Commissioner