

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
MINUTES FOR NOVEMBER 16, 2020 MEETING
Approved on December 7, 2020**

Commission/Board Members Present: Gordon Gebauer, Seth Jensen, George Lamphere, Mark Letorney

Commission/Board Members Absent: Koi Boynton

Also, Present: Melissa Manka, Westford Planning Coordinator; Amy Macrellis-Stone Environmental; Brad Washburn-GME; Juli Beth Hinds– Birchline Planning, Paul Birnholz-Westford resident; Barb Cady-Westford resident.

The meeting began at: 6:33 p.m.

Amendments to Agenda

S. Jensen asked for 10 minutes to address the PC about a topic. Chairman G. Lamphere said we would take that issue up at about 7:30ish.

Citizens to be Heard, Announcements, Correspondence & Other Business

None.

Draft Preliminary Engineering Report (PER).

Brad Washburn from Green Mountain Engineering started the discussion. He explained that the State of Vermont required a PER and has a template for how the report should be presented. GME followed that template.

There are several sections to the PER including history, environmental, technical/engineering, and financial. The history we are all familiar with, so we will not discuss that in detail. The environmental issues will be addressed by Amy Macrellis and the financial issues by Juli Beth Hinds. Brad Washburn will address the technical and engineering issues.

Tech/Engineering

The Town owns the land on which the disposal field will be located. The disposal field and surrounding site have been studied and we know what is there. The layout of the disposal field will likely be the same for whichever alternative the Town selects to get the effluent there. The Town has no major land acquisition hurdles in order to get the effluent to the disposal field. The GME design proposes a low-pressure sewer system with four (4) different alternatives for collection, pre-treatment, and disposal. Each alternative uses the same disposal field on Brookside Road.

Alternative 1 includes the installation of STEP tanks at each parcel and conveyance in a common 2-inch low pressure force main to the dosing pump station located on Brookside Road. The pump station will dose the community disposal field at calculated intervals. This alternative does not include pre-treatment and relies on the pumps at each parcel to transport the effluent to the dosing pump station on Brookside Road.

Alternative No. 2 includes the installation of STEP tanks at each parcel and conveyance in a common 2-inch low pressure force main to a pre-treatment system located near the disposal field. Effluent will enter the treatment units and recirculate within the system until the desired treatment quality is achieved, after which the effluent will be released to a 4,000-gallon pump station that will dose the community disposal field at calculated intervals.

This alternative includes pre-treatment for the effluent at a site near the disposal field, but still relies on the pumps at each parcel to transport the effluent to the disposal field.

Alternative 3 includes the installation of STEP tanks at each parcel and conveyance in a common 2-inch low pressure force main to a 10,000-gallon precast pump station located near the Town Common. A 2-inch low pressure force main will be constructed adjacent to the 3-inch collection force main to convey effluent from the upper five parcels located on Brookside Road to the dosing pump station. Effluent will then be pumped to a 3,500-gallon dosing pump station adjacent to Brookside Road, which will dose the community disposal field at calculated intervals.

This alternative includes a central pump station near the Town Common for the purpose of collecting the effluent from parcels around the Common and then transporting that effluent to the disposal field on Brookside Rd.

Alternative No. 4 includes the installation of STEP tanks at each parcel and conveyance in a common 2-inch low pressure force main to a 10,000-gallon precast pump station located near the Town Common. A 2-inch low pressure force main will be constructed adjacent to the 4-inch collection force main to convey effluent from the upper five parcels located on Brookside Road to the dosing pump station. Effluent will then be pumped in a 3-inch low pressure force main to a pre-treatment system located off Brookside road. Effluent will enter the treatment units and recirculate within the system until the desired treatment quality is achieved, after which the effluent will be released to a 4,000-gallon pump station that will dose the community disposal field at calculated intervals.

This alternative includes both pre-treatment and a central pump station located near the Town Common.

Pre-treatment is included in alternatives 2 and 4 in order to increase the capacity of the disposal field. Current capacity without pre-treatment is 12,600 gpd. Additional testing must be completed at the disposal field site in order to ascertain the amount of additional capacity that can be achieved using pre-treatment. This testing will not occur until Spring 2021.

Brad is not in favor of alternatives 1 or 2 due to the distance the effluent would have to travel from the most distant potential parcel to the disposal field 3600 feet away. He stated that the pumps at the parcels farthest away from the disposal field would be at the limit of their capacity for a low-pressure system given the distance and head that would need to be achieved. For these reasons, he supports alternative 3 or 4. The advantage of alternative 4 is that it may give the Town significant additional capacity. Final analysis will not be available until additional testing is performed in Spring 2021.

Mark Letorney: asked if the ideal location for the 10,000-gallon central pumping station is in the Village near the Common. He also asked about the size of its footprint.

Brad indicated that the ideal location would be near the Village and Common, although the exact location is yet to be determined. The size of the station footprint is about 8' x 10' and will be pre-cast concrete.

Mark Letorney: thinks a central pump station makes sense but due to its size and need to be in the center of the Village, its exact location is critical.

Brad Washburn: The central pump station does not need a pre-treatment component to work properly. Pre-treatment can get the Town more capacity. The central pump station is much more efficient, safer and will prolong the other components of the system. He supports Alternatives 3 and 4 because of the inclusion of a central pump station. The determination of whether to use pre-treatment will be made once additional investigation is completed in Spring 2021.

Amy Macrellis is responsible for the environmental aspects of the PER. The Westford wastewater project we are considering has done a good job of minimizing environmental impacts and has no land acquisition issues. The collection and infrastructure systems will be located mostly within the Town's ROW and on lands the Town already owns. This project has many positive benefits that puts it in a good position for approval and financing.

Other environmental issues--No wetlands were found at or adjacent to the disposal field. No success finding any stream or evidence of a stream on the east side between the disposal field and Brookside Rd. These results mean that we do not need to obtain a wetland permit or a stream alteration permit. We will need to obtain an Indirect Discharge Permit from the State and this is a big undertaking. We may also need to obtain a 'Minor' Act-250 permit. We do not yet know for certain if it will be required.

Brad Washburn: There has not yet been a full archaeological analysis of the site, only a desktop review by the State. There will have to be an on-site inspection by the State before this analysis can be completed.

Juli Beth Hinds addressed the financial realities of the project. The range of total construction costs is from \$1.9 Million to \$2.4 Million and depends on which alternative the Town chooses. The range of total annual operation and maintenance costs (O&M) is from 20,000-\$26,000. Pre-treatment itself will cost about \$300,000. The Town needs to consider the costs of pre-treatment vs. the benefit. Pre-treatment can extend the life of the system and allow for more users, which can be financially advantageous to the Town in the future. Whether or not the Town should go with pre-treatment will depend on the results of additional testing in Spring 2021.

The biggest impact to the amount of money the Town will have to pay for construction and O&M relates to grant funding, primarily from the CWSRLF. Grant funding can range from 0% to 100%. In the current cycle of CWSRLF grants, the Town stands a very good chance of receiving 50% grant funding. In addition, any bond that must be approved now is repayable over 30 years, instead of 20 years, which had been the norm.

Juli Beth Hinds: The next big issue that can determine costs relates to the number of users who connect to the new system and when those connections occur, and how the Town decides to fund the Town's O&M costs for municipal buildings. Mandatory connections will allow the Town to consider financial arrangements that reduce the cost to all taxpayers.

If a 50% grant is received, and most users who can connect actually do connect to the new system, then the O&M expenses for each user would be about \$85/month (\$1020/year). Under this scenario, each taxpayer would be charged approximately \$25/year in additional taxes to pay for the Town's share of O&M expenses.

Seth Jensen stated that an annual O&M cost to users of about \$1000/year (assuming a 50% grant) is more affordable and reliable than having to install an on-site system on their parcels. He also suggests that the PC do outreach to the people who are in the service area of the new system in order to ascertain how many plan to connect to the system and when. Property owners may also find that by connecting to the new system, they will be able to increase their capacity. This can be important to residential property owners who have bedrooms in their home that cannot be used because their on-site systems are not adequate. He believes it is more important to have conversations with property owners about the benefits of connecting rather than require everyone within the service area to connect. It may also be possible to develop a system where property owners can buy, in advance, future capacity for when they will need/want to connect. This can also help the town with funding. Also, it may not make sense for some lots to connect. Rather than require connections, does it make sense for these property owners to pay some O&M costs, and reserve the ability to connect (lower cost) at some point in the future. Juli Beth said YES there is a way to structure this type of system and it can be a good alternative.

Seth Jensen: The less visible the central pump station is the better. More likely to see voter approval also.

Brad Washburn asked for the PC to submit comments on the draft PER within the next few weeks so that the consultants will have time to alter the report, if necessary, before the SB meeting on December 10th.

Mark Letorney strongly supports alternative 4 which includes pre-treatment and a central pump station. He thinks both of these measures will help extend the life of the system regardless of whether we gain a lot of additional capacity with pre-treatment.

Brad, Amy & Juli Beth: The part of the system that we call pre-treatment is actually advanced treatment. It occurs just before the effluent is dosed onto the disposal field. The septic tanks at each parcel are anerobic. The effluent is pumped up Brookside Road to a treatment system (advanced treatment) and then to leach field. The treatment system is in the ground.

Seth Jensen: Think of it as the first anerobic treatment occurs in the STEP tank at each parcel. Then the effluent is pumped through series of pumps to the second treatment (advanced treatment) in the ground near the disposal field. Then the resulting effluent is pumped to the leach field.

Juli Beth Hinds: Systems that have pre-treatment have much greater longevity and much better history than those that do not. Big difference. In addition, grease traps and other measures for commercial properties can also be valuable for extending the life of the system.

Mark Letorney: Pre-treatment will preserve the leach field.

George Lamphere: We will get feedback to Brad before the 12/10/2020 SB meeting.

Draft Clean Water State Revolving Fund—Step 2

Amy Macrellis: Understands the PC workload and the challenges trying to do a bond vote in March 2021 presents. Just be aware that we are not sure if the same grant funds will be available in the next fiscal year.

Melissa Manka: The Step-2 Engineering Services Agreement (ESA) for final design and permitting is ready. It will be submitted to the State for approval. If approved, then the Town will receive 100% financing for the engineering services.

Brad Washburn: There is a new person reviewing these ESAs at the State level. He will not review the ESA until the PER is completed. Brad wants to have additional conversations with then State regarding the ESA and the timing of its review.

Amy Macrellis: The environmental review and archeological studies need to be completed before the PER can be completed and submitted to the State for review.

Melissa Manka: A Step-2 ESA is necessary at 100% funding. We need to work towards getting the ESA approved now as it is not tied to a bond vote.

Gordon Gebauer expressed reservations about trying to do a bond vote in March in light of everything else that the PC has to do before then and the limited amount of time Melissa has to contribute.

Seth Jensen does not want to pass up the opportunity for 50% grant funding but also is concerned that we need to fill in all contingencies in the PER and ESA in order to fully understand the ramifications of a bond vote.

Line of Credit.

The Selectboard has questions about the line of credit, principally about the amount and purposes. George Lamphere offered to communicate with Greg Barrows (treasurer) before the next meeting to find out what the issues are.

Juli Beth Hinds: Waitsfield had a \$300,000 line of credit for its wastewater system and that amount was sufficient to help support a multi-million-dollar project.

Seth Jensen: AMENDED AGENDA ITEM: Seth suggests that we keep our funding partners up to date on our progress, including ANR and other State agencies. Important to keep them informed

so they know why we are taking certain actions and how those actions help our progress.

Work Plan.

Will the CCRPC be part of the PC meeting on December 7th? The CCRPC has requested that the PC review the CCRPC comments to the proposed Town Plan. The PC meeting on December 7th had been reserved for discussing amendments to the WLUDR. But it is important to get the Town Plan approved and we do need approval of CCRPC to do that. Decided that the December 7th meeting will include review of CCRPC comments and a discussion of amendments to the WLUDR.

Discussion about Potential Bond Vote in March 2021.

Seth Jensen: From an intellectual perspective, it makes sense to move forward with a bond vote in March. But it is critical that voters understand loan forgiveness and grants and bond votes with loan forgiveness. While it makes sense to move forward, it does not seem possible to present the necessary information to the public in such a short amount of time. Perhaps we can do a bond vote at the same time the school budget vote occurs in April or May. The obvious risk of waiting until next fiscal year is that the 50% grant funding will no longer be available.

Mark Letorney: Strongly supports bond vote in March 2021 presented with the vision for the Town's future. Thinks it is a vision that the voters will support when we provide educational outreach. Believes the bond will pass if community buy into the vision. Does not think passage of time will make any difference in public perception.

George Lamphere: If we move forward with a bond vote at this time, we need to put pressure on others involved in this process to step up and get the needed reports and decisions to the PC in a timely manner.

Melissa Manka: PER does not have final numbers and will not necessarily know those final numbers before we go to bond vote in March 2021.

Seth Jensen: We can make the contingency amount of the bond smaller and smaller the further out we go and the more precise the PER and ESA become. 50% forgiveness is the right avenue, but can we realistically get that message out to voters by March 2021.

Gordon Gebauer: With everything the PC has on its plate now, it seems unrealistic to think we can take on this additional big project. While 50% grant funding is nice, it will not mean anything if we can't convince the voters. He does not have additional time to devote to getting this ready and has doubts others do as well. If the PC decides to go for the bond vote in March, then its members need to volunteer to take on the necessary tasks to achieve that goal.

George Lamphere: Not comfortable going to bond vote in March with the current level of uncertainty surrounding the constructions costs, and O&M, including pre-treatment issues. Wants everything tied up so we can answer everyone's questions when we do go for a bond.

Melissa Manka: The current funding opportunity expires June 30, 2021. The next round of funding will run from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. The PC also needs to speak with Nanette about when she is willing to conduct a bond vote and whether we can do it between 4-1-21 and 6-30-2021.

George Lamphere: We are not likely going to reach consensus tonight on this issue. Let us step back a bit, think about it, get information from Nanette, and then revisit the issue at our next meeting.

Status Updates.

Town Plan—Koi and Gordon proof-read the draft Town Plan and submitted comments to Melissa. The CCRPC staff will review the document and submit comments that the PC will review at its next meeting.

Grant Writer—The Town has received 6 applications. Julia Andrews will work on reviewing them while Koi is unavailable.

VCDP Grant Application—As of the meeting date, there was no new information. Waiting to hear if we are awarded the grant.

1705 Project—Not a lot of action. Waiting on formalities to get appraisal ordered. Need appraisal before moving forward with discussions with landowners and VRC. The landowners will give the Town a right of first refusal.... needed for remediation plan.

Website update—Gordon will be speaking with the web designer Tuesday the 17th and the designer will begin working on the project.

Wrap Up.

PC members are to send their comments on the PER to George no later than November 23rd and he will forward them to Brad Washburn by November 25th. Put comment into WORD or email.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:02 p.m.

Submitted by,
Gordon Gebauer, Westford Planning Commissioner