

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
MINUTES FOR DECEMBER 20, 2021 MEETING**

Approved on January 17, 2022

Commission Members Present: Koi Boynton, Gordon Gebauer, Seth Jensen, George Lamphere, Mark Letorney

Also, Present: Melissa Manka – Town Planner, Mark & Beth Lane – Residents, Heather Armata – Resident, Eric Ford – Resident, Maureen Wilcox – Resident, Carol Winnfield – Resident, Barb Peck – Resident, Pat Haller – Resident, Barb Cady, Julie Beth Hindes – Birchline Consulting, Lori Johnson – Resident, Joe and Shelia Franz – Resident, Peg Nichols – Resident, Doris Bitrof – Resident, Taylor Newton – Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, Maura O'Brien – Resident, Brad Washburn – Green Mountain Engineering

The Meeting Began: 6:31pm

Amendments to Agenda: Shift Outreach, Strategy and Timeline of the 1705 property to 7:10, of the agenda - to ensure that the Planning Commission has enough time to thoughtfully consider resources and the timeline of that project.

Citizens to be Heard, Announcements, Correspondence & Other Business: No comments at this time.

Minutes of the November 15, 2021 Meeting:

VOTE: Gordon makes a motion to adopt the minutes, as amended, of November 15th. Mark seconded the motion. The motion carries.

Minutes of the December 13, 2021 Meeting: Not available

1705 Rte. 128 Property Project

- **Outreach Strategy, Timeline & Coordination w/ Wastewater Engagement Committee:** The Planning Commission has two major projects under way – The 1705 Property and the Community Wastewater project. The Wastewater Outreach Committee has voiced concern regarding the amount of time that can be devoted to each project, considering the intensity of work and the short timeline. While the Community Wastewater Project has brought on more community support with the Outreach Committee the 1705 Property has not found the same community support and is relying solely on the partners, commissioners and town staff. While we are fortunate that we have two projects that will add to the vibrancy and viability of our town, the time is becoming short and time that is needed for each project is not within our current human capacity. As we prepare for a bond vote we need to the time to ensure that we have all the details in place for a successful Wastewater project. The commissioners understand that delaying the 1705 project timeline does not meet the partners timelines or the property owners' timeline but we have reached our capacity. Melissa presented an ambitious timeline during our last meeting that demonstrates Wastewater needs to be the priority right now. We

can revamp the 1705 project when Wastewater is further along. Based on the capacity of the Commission, we can't hold another public meeting for 1705 right now. We need to ensure that we are focusing on ensuring that the community is getting accurate information. There has been some inaccurate information circulating regarding 1705 and we do need to clear up that confusion so that the right information is out there. We don't have enough people to manage the level of communication that needs to happen for both projects. Pat Haller points out that he has been volunteering for the Wastewater Public Outreach Committee but since November all community conversations have shifted to the 1705 property and he wished that that project had similar community volunteer support to respond to that public dialogue but they don't and if we could just put a hold on that project we can refocus efforts on the Wastewater project. It is further discussed that homes and buildings on the common need wastewater to continue to function and this project requires the PC's full attention. Eric Ford pointed out that Front Porch Forum is our community's primary communication tool and that the PC does not have the time or the capacity to respond to each of those posts in a full respectful way. He further points out that with ARPA funds and the state focusing on wastewater, this is the time to move this project forward and ensure that we continue to have a viable town. Carol Winnfield asked what was the plan for the town buildings prior to the Jackson Farm purchase. It is pointed out that there was no plan. The town was part of a study to explore capacity behind the White Church, now Common Hall. It was discovered that possible site would only serve the Common Hall, Town Office, Library and maybe the Brick Meeting House. That project did not move forward because the cost would be solely the burden of the tax payers, no grants or other funding would be available for such a closed system. Grants and other public funding is only available for Community based systems. The system behind the Common Hall would have been a mound system with pretreatment and the town would have to pay fully for the annual maintenance. That system would not provide enough capacity for the vision of the Common Hall, it would limit its capacity and uses. The only reason we know any of this is because we have had 10 years to study what the best options are for the town. The repetitiveness of this question demonstrates the need to engage the community and share information.

- **Amended Scope of Work & Timeline**

George proposed to extend the timeline of the 1705 Property and to continue to clarify misconceptions regarding the project but extend the project timeline in order to allow the PC time to focus on the Wastewater Project. Taylor Newton pointed out that he could move forward with informational webinars that will clarify the 1705 project for the community. Since the timeline is extended the PC and partners can take time to provide the public with a revised site concept. Taking the time crunch off the table will allow for more time to share through the website and online. It allows for more time to work on a conceptual plan. It will also allow for more time to create the visual renderings that will provide a better understanding of the street view. This will give us time to ensure that the public feel comfortable and heard. Once a new conceptual plan is in place, there would still be public meeting to present it. Melissa will work with SE Group on an extended timeline and scope of work that can be presented to the Selectboard.

- **PPF/Newsletter Articles, Project Website, Prerecorded Webinars**

Gordon will move forward with the Front Porch Forum post from the project partners. The PC should review and suggest updates for the website. Consider in January. Taylor's webinars will

be prerecorded and will provide the History of the Project, Scope of Work, Organizational Partners and Roles, Zoning Regulations and Constraints, Review of the Revised Conceptual Plan. Thanks to Taylor for taking the time to create those.

- **Green Mountain Gazette Request**

There was an article that ran December 2nd. Let's wait until we are ready to add to what already ran on December 2nd.

- **Community Meeting Content**

The Community Meeting will be pushed out. It can include the revised conceptual plan and site survey that is being completed now.

- **Revised Conceptual Plans & Survey Plat**

The site survey is bringing up a number of challenges. At one time the property was multiple parcels and in the 1800s the land transferred and merged. The town does own a sliver of land between the right of way and the Pigeon house in the Southwest Corner. There is a chunk of river frontage, where the mill was, that appears to have never transferred to anyone. These things need to be clarified and will be included in a survey report. Regional plan approved funds to have the River Conservancy enter into an umbrella program that provides clean-up funds.

Community Wastewater Project (Brad Washburn reported out for Green Mountain Engineering)

- **Connection Interest**

Green Mountain Engineering conducted site visits with end users to discuss hook up. Brad Washburn talked the field crew and they have begun to plot out the connections and where the system runs along the road. There are 34 properties visited – 53% interested, 21% might be interested, 15% not interested, 6% vacant, 3% had no contact. The overall interest is to connect during the time of construction.

- **Progress Report**

Preliminary designs and existing conditions are being worked up at Green Mountain Engineering. The team is taking feedback from end users and incorporating that into the plan. They are tracking changes from the preliminary engineering to the final design. Nothing has changed too much. Stone Environmental completed the geo hydro. They are currently looking at disposal field capacity. Testing is positive. We could look at maximizing the system and changing from in ground to drip disposal field. Changing the technology, the system could gain significant capacity. Drip disposal would eliminate the need for pretreatment and provide 30,000 gallons a day – well beyond what was anticipated. Operation and maintenance costs savings might also be a factor for a drip system.

- **Project Timelines & Work Plan**

The PC requested what the next output from GME – what is it and when? The PC pointed out that we are working on getting accurate numbers to inform the bond vote. If the project changes to drip disposal fields then we need to understand the impact of that. Brad talked with the state and they confirmed that we would need to submit a supplemental engineering. Brad could have the preliminary final design by the second week in January. It is identified that this could impact the bond vote schedule. The goal was to have final design prior to the bond vote. It is pointed out that cost numbers could be provided by January 13th. The Town Report is due to the printers on January 17th. Brad could get costs to us by Monday.

- **Funding**

The PC has not heard from the state. It was anticipated that we would hear by mid-December. The proposal is currently sitting with the Governor. His timeline has slowed down since the new variant hit. It is anticipated that we will know before the holiday what we can anticipate from the state ARPA funding. Once we know this, we can work with Northern Border Regional Commission on finalizing that award. This will allow us to communicate our funding package to the voters.

- **Step 1 & 2 CWSRF**

Jeff Fehers has begun to review the environmental document t. The holdup is the question regarding phase 1B archeological. Therefore, we need the Step 2 to get approval on the environmental. Phase 1B could be the first step in the Step 2, having that complete will allow the town to submit for reimbursement. It was discussed that this does timeline does not stray from their process – archeological is common in the Step 2.

- **Public Outreach**

The Committee continues to meet and discuss outreach. The committee has recently provided a Newsletter article and is currently considering what needs to happen between now and the bond vote. Just like the PC, they are awaiting a funding update. More information can be provided in the January Newsletter and they committee is considering what information they can provide on a more regular basis. The plan is to have a public meeting in February to inform the bond vote. At that time, we will understand our funding package and the operation and maintenance costs. Thanks goes out to the committee for all the work.

Barb Park as an engineering question regarding what will it look like down Brookside Road? Will there be manholes? It is pointed out that since no solids are moving down the line it is typically free of debris. There might be access points along driveways or in the right of way but we do not know what it looks like.

Workplan: Melissa introduced a new work plan format. The goal was to provide everyone with a clearer understanding of everything that is going on. It is decided to try it. January 34d is the next PC meeting. At that point we will have SE Group's new timeline. We can also include the project website review, conceptual plan, webinars. Wastewater should be first on the agenda with new information on field layout, cost estimates, bond vote schedule.

January Newsletter/FPF Article: Gordon's draft is good to go. A wastewater update will be coming for the Newsletter and FPF.

ARPA Committee & Requesting Local ARPA Dollars: The committee has identified a process that needs to be presented to the Selectboard for approval. This will happen on Wednesday. It needs to be decided if the PC wants to apply for local ARPA funds. We need to look at it holistically and understand how that impacts other funding sources. Second phase of Step 2 should be considered for local ARPA funds. This will allow the project to be more seamless and not waiting on funding. The SB will decide how fund are spent. It is still not clear what other projects are out there.

Adjourned 9:01pm