

Meeting held on Zoom 10:30 AM EST Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup> 2022

Attending: Melissa Manka, staff; Gordon Gebauer, Seth Jensen, Planning Commission; Eric Ford, Heather Armata, Committee; Amy Macrellis, Stone Environmental, JB Hinds, Birchline Planning, project consultants.

Gordon Gebauer is chair of the meeting.

1. June 7<sup>th</sup> and July 7<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes have not yet been approved. As these have not been reviewed the minutes will be approved at the next meeting.
2. Project updates.

Amy Macrellis provided an update on meetings being held between the Town and Vermont DEC. There are reviews ongoing of the supplemental PER, EID, and FONSI/ Facilities Plan approval as well as the Step II Engineering Services Agreement (ESA). Both Stone and Birchline are working without a contract at this time.

Step I	Finding of No Significant Impact Approval of Facilities Plan	October 17 <sup>th</sup> hearing
Step II	Engineering Services Agreement	When DEC releases draft ESA for Town approval

We anticipate the state will issue a Notice of Intent to Issue a FONSI within weeks. Jeff Fehrs has not engaged yet with the project cost summary spreadsheet to determine what costs are standard and non-standard. DEC has to make a determination; there is nothing that the Town or consultants can approve at this point. Melissa will talk to Tom Brown and JB will speak to Lynnette Claudon about the need to ensure these determinations are made immediately.

3. FONSI public hearing (tentatively scheduled for October 17<sup>th</sup>).

Amy explained the usual run of show. Vermont DEC will formally open the hearing (which can be a warned agenda item at another town public meeting and is planned for the Planning Commission meeting on October 17<sup>th</sup>). This will not be a separate meeting. The mandatory 30 day public review period for a FONSI begins the day DEC issues the notice; the public hearing is held within the 30 day review period; and after the close of the comment period, DEC responds to comments and finalizes the FONSI. At that point the Phase I Facilities Plan is complete.

The project consultant will review disclosed environmental impacts and proposed mitigation measures. The public has an opportunity to comment on the proposed environmental mitigation measures only. Based on any public comment, the State will issue a FONSI, approve the Facilities Plan, and formally close out Phase I of the process.

The identified environmental impacts of this project are work in wetlands and wetland buffers, especially around the town office and library, with limited areas on the lower part of the Maple Shade field. The force main also crosses a limited area of prime agricultural soils that may be able to be avoided. There is a very wide range of environmental potentials reviewed, and the project does not trigger these.

It has been made clear, and understood by DEC, that the Town's adopted Town Plan, zoning, and state designations all are in alignment to prevent environmental impacts from growth anticipated to result from the project. The Vermont Department of Community Development has made clear to DEC that Westford's designations and the project service area are aligned.

For outreach, participation by people who can make positive comments on the potential environmental benefits, or their concerns about what will happen if the project does not proceed, must be recorded by DEC along with any concerns about the disclosure of impacts and mitigation. This is a structured process.

#### 4. Bond Vote Timing

The next important decision point will be the selection of a time for the bond vote. Amy noted that the bond vote can be held at such time as there is sufficient certainty about the project extent and cost to bond for sufficient funding to cover the project, with ample contingencies in the warning language.

Seth asked whether town residents don't understand the obligations incurred (and not) in a bond vote, or if a few people are vocally not-understanding the obligations. JB asked whether the Select Board has sufficient understanding of the obligations incurred in the ESA and a bond vote. Melissa said the SB has a 'basic understanding' of the amended Step II ESA but will want local ARPA or additional subsidy clearly demonstrated as available before they will issue a final approval.

Amy asked about the SB decision process and timeline on local ARPA. The committee will review applications after September 30<sup>th</sup> when applications are due. The committee has not set a timeline for review (there are about 12 applications). The State is also making noise about additional subsidy; Melissa and Seth said they feel the Select Board will

approve the ESA expenditures up to that amount even before the final ARPA decisions are made. Seth noted a petition is being circulated to support a 'best' 'fix' under the Town Office parking lot that will likely come up at the ARPA hearing.

#### 5. Re-Starting Outreach

There is now a pro-wastewater group organizing. Eric noted that the wastewater committee is advisory to and comprised of members of the Planning Commission. JB noted that citizens can request to meet with the committee, or with staff, and it is valuable to align understanding of the project and its regulatory/financial steps among as many parties as possible. Gordon noted that there's a distinction between an advisory committee directing a local group versus providing information; this group can provide information to any autonomous group that will then act on its own. It will be highly beneficial to ensure that any groups have accurate information.

There is an important question whether to restart outreach before or after the FONSI hearing. The FONSI hearing will require an overview of the scope of the project. The group's consensus is to re-start public outreach after the FONSI hearing so that Step I is in the proverbial rear view mirror. To that end the committee's next meeting should focus on the timeline for November, forward.

Eric noted that there are now three websites – one managed by the committee, one against the project, and one in favor of the project. The time for the bond vote will dictate much of the outreach plan. A plan already exists, and can be revitalized once the bond vote timing is set.

One question was whether to put anything in the town newsletter; Melissa noted that DEC has not yet warned the FONSI period, so the notice will be relatively minimal. A coordinated series of posts in the newsletter will be needed after the Phase II process begins. Gordon noted there will be a lot of reminding-why-we're-here. Eric noted that the most important time for outreach is 4 to 6 weeks before a bond vote; anything before then is 'chatter.' JB asked whether a bond vote as late as November is going to be consistent with the State ARPA contract; Melissa said yes, the only jeopardy is the NBRC funding.

JB gave the team a tour of the Trello board. It is open and all are members and able to use it now. JB and Eric will work on a FONSI outline document. A Doodle will be Doodled for post-October 17.

Respectfully submitted,  
JB Hinds

Westford Wastewater Committee  
Meeting Minutes Sept 20 2022