

**TOWN OF WESTFORD  
ARPA COMMITTEE MEETING  
Draft Minutes  
October 20, 2022**

**Members Present:** Dave Baczewski, Nanette Rogers, Bill Hill, George Lamphere, Greg Barrows, Martha Heath, Bree Drapa

**Also Present:** Callie Hamdy (Minute Clerk), Seth Jensen, Glenn Rogers, Sarah Pinto, Caroline Brown, Lori Johnson, Elisabeth Smith, Melissa Manka, Joel Fay, Sheila Franz, Barb Peck, Ben Bornstein

The meeting was called to order at 7:00p.m. and was held in person and via Zoom.

**CHANGES TO THE AGENDA**

There were no changes to the agenda.

**MINUTES**

Nanette Rogers made a motion to approve the August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022 minutes as amended. Martha seconded. Motion passed 7-0.

**ADMIN**

The next meeting will be November 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00pm at the Town Office.

**REVIEW/SCORE/DETERMINE RECOMMENDATION TO THE SELECTBOARD FOR PHASE 2 APPLICATIONS:**

Dave went over the process for the presentation of the Phase 2 applications. First the project representative will present and then the Committee members will score the project individually before going over their scoring.

Martha asked if the Selectboard had discussed not withholding the \$200,000 as they have more funds requested than they do money to give out. Dave clarified that the subject had come up. There's a thought that they will, if everything lines up, spend all the money.

Some of the project have priorities within them. Martha asked if the Committee could score those priorities separately? Dave explained he would prefer the Committee score projects not based on the monetary request. If there is a part the Committee feels is less valuable than the rest the Committee can comment on that to the Selectboard.

**Westford Conservation Committee**

The Conservation Commission was requesting funds to purchase a snowmobile to assist in grooming the trails at the school. A new machine would be relatively low maintenance and serve the town long term. There are supply chain issues with the original quote given by the Conservation Commission and they are looking for other dealers.

Bill Hill asked how long they anticipate the snowmobile lasting. Joel predicted at least fifteen years.

Bree asked if the Conservation Commission has ever talked about adaptive plans or trails that might be easy for wheelchair, stroller, wagon access. Sarah explained they've talked about it, but a lot comes down to funding, a lot of boardwalks would be needed.

The Committee Scored as below (out of a total potential score of 36):

Dave: 26  
Bree: 26  
Nanette: 24  
George: 26  
Greg: 24  
Martha: 26  
Bill: 24

The Committee voted 7/7 to approve the application as is.

The Conservation Commission was requesting funding for a storage shed. Joel explained they'd like the shed to store the snowmobile and the groomer under cover in a secure place that is accessible to whoever is doing the grooming. Right now, their machine is stored at a residence's barn. The shed will be located behind the school and the idea behind the design is that they'd be able to drive the snowmobile and groomer right in. Bree asked if they required EWSD permission to place the shed. The location was on Town Property. Bree asked if they had safeguards in place for child safety. They did. George asked for clarification if there would be room for the sled, groomer and brush-hogger? That was correct. The construction will be done via volunteer.

The Committee Scored as below (out of a total potential score of 36):

George: 25  
Greg: 28  
Martha: 25  
Dave: 24  
Bill: 24  
Bree: 25  
Nanette: 24

Lori Johnson was present. She thinks the Conservation Commission does a lot of good work and she thinks their items are important to fund.

The Committee Voted 7/7 to approve the application as is.

### **Town Website**

This was a proposal to fund the build out of a new Westford Town Website. The Town's website is outdated and doesn't serve the community well. It's not ADA compliant and there needs to be updates. The cost range from \$5,700 up to \$11,500. This would help the town communicate with the public and provide them with information. The new website must also be easy for town staff to maintain it as the current website is.

Seth Jensen was present. Digital accessibility is extremely important and increasing user friendliness is something that should be taken into consideration for this project.

The Committee Scored as below (out of a total potential score of 36):

George: 28  
Greg: 26  
Martha: 27  
Dave: 26  
Bill: 27

Bree: 28

Nanette: Recused

Ben Bernstein was present. The website is the official word of Westford and it's critical to have updates available as soon as possible for residents and taxpayers.

The Committee Voted 6/6 to approve the application as is. Nanette Recused herself.

### **Dog Warden**

Elisabeth Smith, one of the Dog Wardens, was present. The ask was for Dog Warden Supplies. Elisabeth has been dog warden for just over six months and has responded to approximately 30 calls from the beginning of her time to currently. A vast majority are lost dogs, many of which Elisabeth has transported in her vehicle. One incident included the need of a dog trap, which Elisabeth had to borrow. Elisabeth worries that she may get a call for an injured dog and will have no safe way to deal with it. She wants to be a resource the town people can count on. There is no budget in the dog warden supplies to help with a dog's injury. The most important part of her request is having a budget of retainer for the emergency vet which will allow at least two dogs to be seen by the emergency vet. Another is the safe capture of animals; a large dog trap would hugely benefit the dog wardens. Also included is an XL size kennel. Elisabeth currently holds dogs in her barn but it's not a secure enough location. She is also asking for bite proof gloves and a dog catcher pole amongst other items. These items would help Elisabeth do the job to the best of her abilities.

Bree asked if the emergency vet cost is expected to be paid back by owners if they're able to be found and is there a vehicle for donations to that fund? Elisabeth confirmed owners would be required to pay the funds back and Nanette confirmed that in the past we'd had donations submitted to the town and we have an account that we put that in.

Bill asked if \$2,000 is enough? Elisabeth had lowballed the amount in hopes to get any amount of money. There were a few more items that are less emergency but would be helpful such as a different heating system. Nanette suggested adding another \$1,000 to Elisabeth's request. Elisabeth believes that that additional amount would allow her to do an exceptional job.

The Committee Scored as below (out of a total potential score of 36):

George: 22

Greg: 25

Martha: 20

Dave: 21

Bill: 24

Bree: 24

Nanette: 21

The Committee Voted 7/7 to approve the application as is with a potential addendum for more money.

### **Westford Public Library**

Bree Drapa, librarian, was present. Asking for \$8,500 for prep work and for new gutters. This is a municipal building, and it is stewarded by the Board of Trustees at the Libraries and is a historic building on the Common. Over the time of its age, it's received a lot of repairs, the board has currently been working on a lot of water issues with the Library. In the 2019 Halloween storm the basement flooded and has since been mitigated. The library has also done a lot of drainage work. When they replaced all the rotted wood it was recommended that they put the gutters on the side of the building because they have a carpenter ant problem due to the

moisture. The gutters would preserve all the work that has been done up to this point. The gutters will not impact the view of the building from the front, nor its historical value.

The Committee Scored as below (out of a total potential score of 36):

George: 28

Greg: 28

Martha: 25

Dave: 28

Bill: 27

Bree: Recused

Nanette: 28

The Committee Voted 6/6 to approve the application as is. Bree recused herself.

### **Westford Community Wastewater Project**

Barb Peck was present and understands the ARPA money includes tax payer dollars and she wanted to say whether the committee is for or against currently the voters in Westford have not yet gone to bond vote to approve the project. Barb wants to make sure the money isn't wasted on the front end before the vote. Dave reiterated that this money allocation does not trump any public vote on the matter.

Melissa Manka, Town Planner, was present. The Planning Commission is requesting funds to complete final designs and permitting for the Wastewater Project which would be located on property already owned by the town and would serve the town's current and future needs. The town has already gotten \$3 million, and a bond vote is anticipated in 2023 which will hopefully move the project to construction.

The project would solve current critical wastewater needs. They believe the project scores highly in the rubric as it's a long term solution that provides economic and social resiliency and is one of the top concerns stated from residents in the ARPA's initial survey. There is also high percentage of interest from potential connectors. The project has been awarded \$3 million in state and federal funds. This project has immense support from the state and federal government and will serve as an example to other small communities. The ask is for \$300,000 of the local ARPA funds to be added to the funding stack which the voters will then vote and decide on.

Melissa explained that ultimately the request is to mainly assist in the Step 2 Clean Water Revolving Fund which we are currently in and will take us into end goal and permitting. Some of this is necessary to get the information residents are asking for prior to a bond vote. Most of it will be utilized at this step vs Step 3 which is construction.

Bree asked how Melissa and George arrived at the number for the request? They had been working with Birchline Planning for two years now running different financial scenarios and they felt that this number would be an ideal number to propose in order to get through Step 2 and assist with Step 3 for the construction funding stack in order to propose an affordable option to voters.

Martha asked for confirmation that the \$300,000 would go into the stack would none of it be spent until a public vote? That was incorrect as some would be used prior to a public vote to further the final design work. It would cover approximately \$125,00 to \$150,000 in Step 2 costs.

Seth Jensen was present. Because the Planning Commission has been trying to fund the engineer work with as little taxpayer money as possible they are very beholden to some very specific timelines. The local ARPA funds would allow things to move forward more quickly on these timelines. There is some need for flexibility for

timeliness because we're in Vermont and certain levels of environmental analysis needs to be done and that is the rationale for a portion being available for the Step 2. They need to make sure the community has enough information to make an informed decision as well. Wastewater was one of the projects specifically listed in the ARPA statute.

Martha summarized that maybe about half the request could be used before a vote and the other half would be only spent if there was a positive vote. George explained they haven't necessarily thought of it that way, they've thought of it as a funding stack portion and with the thought in mind that wastewater was one of the original types of projects specifically desired to be used for ARPA funds when it was released locally.

Bree commented that she works at the library which is part of the potential wastewater connection area and she'd never heard that between the town office and the library we only have a capacity of six employees not accounting for visitors, town meetings, etc. as mentioned by the Planning Commission. The town is currently violating existing plans and permits by just having the number of minimal employees that they have. With the current wastewater the Brick Meeting House and The Common Hall cannot serve food. All the vibrancy that we're talking about in a lot of these applications are operating illegally without this wastewater. When considering spending money on different projects they must also consider the foundation of wastewater. We can't keep doing what we're doing for sustainability in Bree's mind.

Greg asked if we're going to spend \$150,000 on Step 2 would the other half be earmarked for making part of the town's matching funds so that we don't spend up front? Melissa thought an important piece of clarification is that they're working with the Clean Water State Revolving fund which has certain steps that need to be checked off. All those steps together as part of the CWSRF is one project and every step rolls into the next step as far as costs go. It's very complex and fluid, it's all one large process that the state breaks down and that's where asking for at the town level for a bit of flexibility because all the other programs the wastewater project is using do not have any flexibility.

Bill wanted to explore the timeline. If he interpreted the application correctly it predicts the first quarter of 2026 for project completion assuming a successful bond vote in 2023. That was correct. The 2026 timeline include a year of risk from the Planning Commission. Bill doesn't think a \$3 million dollar project never has 'no risk' as written on the application, there's got to be some things to consider. Melissa explained they're not stating there are zero risks and they do identify a few risks in the document.

Lori Johnson was present. She pointed out that most of the money is going to be earmarked to be used for engineering studies before the bond vote. So, if the bond vote fails the ARPA money has been squandered in her opinion. Regarding Bree's concern she'd done her own studies and doesn't think the library and town office are at risk because in her opinion there are alternatives for those buildings' wastewater needs. She thinks the town locked themselves into the 90 gallons per day and doesn't think the municipal buildings being at risk is an accurate assessment. Barb Peck agreed with Lori. Barb thinks there needs to be conditional scoring with the approval because she wants the committee to look at the facts and see where the Planning Commission is with the project. Sheila Franz was present she wanted to point out that she agrees that 50% of the allocation seems high considering they haven't voted yet. She also believes there is an alternative to wastewater for less money. She feels the Planning Commission is only focused on wastewater and hasn't focused on alternatives or investigated them.

Seth Jensen was present. He thinks Lori's conclusion is that we are still limited to 90 gallons per day. He would like them to take a step back and think about why don't we just do best fix in systems that require variances and say forget it? We know the soils around the common are very wet. What we know from soil borings there is seasonal high water 4 inches from the ground. That's not enough distance according to Vermont to safely install a septic system including a mound. That is the groundwater that the kids at the library, seniors at senior lunch

and residents uses. Up the road there is a property that has six feet of ground water. If it were your well, and it is your well because this deals with public buildings, what would you prefer and want? In Seth's opinion his neighbors having clean drinking water is worth \$300,000.

Martha asked George if they know if it will increase tax rates around town? George explained they don't know for sure but can say with confidence that's a focus of everything they do. They believe a successful bond vote would mean that the system is maintained and run based on user fees and that there's not really an objective or goal or even belief that they could get successfully through a bond vote if voters pay individual users user fees. It's up to the selectboard what they want to do for the town office and civic buildings, that's out of the Planning Commission's control. Would there be increases based on those or do they want to build the cost of those fees into the budget? They don't know. Martha asked for clarification that if they vote yest for a bond, that will mean they'd still pay for that bond right? Yes that was correct.

Bree asked if homes were able to increase their number of bedrooms or ability to have an auxiliary apartment building. Would that increase the grand list and those people's taxes would increase? Commercial properties already pay a higher rate of taxes although there is not a huge difference. Nanette is not sure about number of bedrooms but if somebody adds an auxiliary apartment building that would increase their property value and thus taxes.

Martha explained that if this doesn't happen and it doesn't go through bond vote, the office and library are still going to have to do something which will cause taxes to increase.

The Committee Scored as below (out of a total potential score of 36):

George: Recused

Greg: 24

Martha: 24

Dave: 22

Bill: 18

Bree: 26

Nanette: 20

George Recused himself.

The Committee Voted 3/6 to approve the application as is.

The Committee Voted 3/6 to approve the application on a conditional approval that the use of funds timeline be further clarified.

Adjourn: 10:30