

Westford Town Common Wastewater Project
Outreach Committee Meeting Tuesday, December 13, 2022

Attending on Zoom, Committee: Gordon Gebauer; Eric Ford; Seth Jensen; Melissa Manka; Wendy Doane.

Attending on Zoom, Consultants: Amy Macrellis; JB Hinds

At Town Office: Melissa Manka; Rich Golden Brookside Road; Ben Stark; Paul Bernhold, Pearwood Lane

On Zoom: Lori Johnson, Maureen Wilcox, Maura O'Brien, Mark Letorney, Carol Winfield, Ira Allen; owmarly

1. Correspondence

11/13 emailed request from M. Wilcox to 'warn' outreach committee meetings on Front Porch Forum. Gordon explained we follow Vermont law and recommendations of VLCT for small or ad hoc committees to post notices as required by law.

Carol asked if she should ho

2. Minutes of 11/15.

Eric moved and Wendy seconded approval of minutes; motion carried (Seth, Eric, Gordon, Wendy).

3. Project Status Update

Melissa updated the committee that the Town is waiting for issuance of the Facilities Plan. She and Amy have a meeting with DEC this afternoon to review the Project Cost Summary in the draft ESA. Melissa noted that the PC presented the local ARPA application to the Select Board, which approved \$150,000 of the \$300,000 requested, contingent upon a positive bond vote.

4. Visuals, Graphics, and Communication Materials

The team went through the timeline graphic which is live on the website. DEC has reviewed this and would like to recommend that the timeframes are more in the terms of seasons than months since DEC will have review at each stage. The Town Clerk also has asked that a vote be noted for November, when voters are more accustomed to voting. JB will update the timeline this morning with Melissa and circulate to the committee for further review.

Wendy is hoping to prepare a single 8 ½ x 11 fact sheet with Essential Facts, since the FAQs are extensive. Seth noted that Mo Reilly on the Planning Commission asked for the same thing and feels it would be highly beneficial. Wendy would like to work on this in early February; Eric noted that this would be most useful in spring, since there is so much that is still undetermined.

Having greater certainty on the cost profile and funding stack also argues for waiting. The committee agreed to work on it for February-ish review by the Planning Commission.

Eric asked (and the members created in google drive) for a master communications schedule. This is now a tab on the master schedule file in the committee google drive. Eric will start to put together a master schedule and then monthly for posts, mailings, and other outreach materials.

The Committee discussed communications costs. The ESA includes \$5,000. It will be important to understand the bulk mailing cost, which Melissa will do. The committee is assuming 1,000 pieces maximum. The consensus is that the \$5,000 budget in the ESA is sufficient. Eric noted that the AV services provided by LCTV is a no-cost service.

Gordon moved on to newsletter topics. Newsletter content is due December 27th. Provided DEC issues the Facilities Plan by December 23, Gordon, Melissa and Seth can craft a short post to go into the Newsletter, Front Porch Forum, and website. If the documents are not received, a post will go in by January for the February edition. Gordon noted that anything drafted must be reviewed by the PC first.

Amy asked if the success in securing ARPA funds would be worth celebrating in a post. JB noted that with the \$150,000 in local ARPA, the Town is close to \$3 million in grant funding. Melissa noted that the Town is seeking Community Revitalization and Recovery funding as well. Eric suggested a 'here's where we've come, here's what we're looking forward to in the future' theme. Gordon and Melissa will draft this language and present to the PC for approval for the December 27th deadline.

5. Communications Plan and Memos

Gordon noted that the plan will be the 3rd tab on the spreadsheet. The Planning Commission has forwarded to the Select Board three memos providing depth of detail on the project. The next memo needed is what an ordinance is, how it works, the Select Board's obligations as the elected legislative body to adopt one, and how the Planning Commission can help the Select Board initiate this work. That memo should be prepared by the PC and submitted to the Select Board by the end of January. JB and Gordon will work on that memo and check in with Amy on her recent experience with other towns. The memo will need to be reviewed by the PC by the end of January, and presented to the Select Board in February. Amy noted that the ordinance has important implications for the wider community that should be highlighted, such as connection policy. The ordinance makes these types of policy decisions 'real.'

Gordon noted that the text in the memos should be incorporated into community outreach.

6. Scheduling next meeting

A placeholder for January 18, 2023 at 10 AM has been scheduled.

7. Citizens to Be Heard

Carol Winfield:

1. This meeting is listed as “wastewater community public engagement working group.” Is this a public engagement meeting?
 - a. Gordon – the group was created by the PC to provide assistance to the PC with ideas and suggestions for public outreach.
2. Recognizing that there is a lot of detail that is unknown, making an announcement that the project is being worked on would help with the number of people who are wondering what is happening with the project. Providing meeting notice on Front Porch Forum would help more people be aware that things are happening. It provides a benchmark for people who may not go through posted meeting notices.
3. Carol recommended “Every Door Direct” mailings for outreach; this goes to every Westford post office. This might be less expensive for some mailings.

Rich Golden:

1. Does the Planning Commission or Select Board have the authority to shut down the project before the Bond Vote?
 - a. It is the Planning Commission’s goal to bring this to a bond vote. To bring this to a bond vote, the Select Board will have to take certain steps. If the Select Board does not take those steps, the bond vote will not take place.
 - b. To date, while the Select Board has not taken a public position in favor of or opposing the wastewater system, the Select Board has supported taking the steps to bring the project forward to a bond vote.

Paul Bernhaltz:

1. Wouldn’t the Planning Commission, if information was presented that the system “would overflow” or “wouldn’t work,” stop the project?
 - a. If the PC had received information that there were adverse environmental impacts, its decisions might have been different; however, the investigations and research indicate quite the opposite, that this would be an environmentally beneficial project.
2. There is nothing to “celebrate” about the \$150,000 since it’s got a “major contingency” of a successful bond vote. Any language needs to mention that this pledge of funds is contingent on a successful bond vote.
 - a. It is understood that a bond vote is required for the use of any pledged grant funds. The bond vote will, however,
 - b. Melissa noted that the subsidies received to date do NOT have a contingency.

Ira Allen:

1. There is a feeling that the construction costs are fairly well established. For Ira, the ongoing maintenance costs and monthly charges will be especially important in making a

decision. It is important to have realistic statements of ongoing monthly and annual costs.

- a. This is an important and helpful comment, and an important part of the work to be completed as soon as possible in 2023.

Ben Stark:

1. I'm concerned with the final way that you dispose of the effluent. I thought this would be a conventional leach field rather than drip irrigation. To my knowledge, drip irrigation has never been done for a large community
 - a. Amy Macrellis: Subsurface drip disposal (as distinct from "drip irrigation" is well established in Vermont and the Northeast as a municipal wastewater dispersal system. It has been used in systems 3 to 4 times the size of what is proposed for Westford. The rules are the same as for conventional trench dispersal systems to ensure protection of public health and the environment. Amy can send information as a follow up.
2. Is there any reason a conventional leach field system would not be used?
 - a. Amy Macrellis: the primary reason is that subsurface drip disposal is far more space efficient. Trenches involve a 4' space between each trench, which is not necessary with drip lines. There is a much smaller disturbance footprint and 2' spacing for drip lines. The disposal field will take up much less space in a subsurface drip disposal system.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Juli Beth Hinds