

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
MINUTES FOR FEBRUARY 27, 2023 MEETING
Approved on March 20, 2023**

Commissioners Present: George Lamphere, Mark Letorney, Gordon Gebauer, Mo Reilly, Seth Jensen

Commissioners Absent:

Also Present: Melissa Manka (Town Planner), Harmony Cism (Planning Assistant, Minute Clerk), Kim Guidry, Ira Allen, Sheila Franz, Maureen Wilcox, Lori Johnson, Barb Peck

Meeting Began: 6:30pm

Amendments to Agenda

None.

Minutes of the February 6, 2023 Meeting:

G. Lamphere MOVED to approve the minutes as amended.

M. Letorney SECONDED the motion.

The motion passed 5-0.

Meeting Rules of Procedure:

G. Lamphere outlined the meeting rules of procedure for the public.

There will be a break at the end of the Community WW section for additional comments.

Citizens to be Heard – *Items not on Agenda:*

None.

Correspondence

No direct correspondence to the Planning Commission. On February 20, 2023, the Town Administrator forwarded an email from Joe Franz to the SB titled “Road Study Mission” and dated 2/16/23. This is just an FYI to the PC, no action needs to be taken.

Community Wastewater Project

Amended Step 2 CWSRF Application

M. Manka submitted all materials for the Amended Step 2 application to Tom Brown on 2/13/23. She then sent an email on 2/24/23 asking for an update, but Tom was out of the office. An email was received today stating that he has blocked out Thursday and Friday to process loans. By the end of this week we hope to get the authorization letter from Tom. The application has already been reviewed and approved by DEC prior to submission. Hope to have a more significant update next week.

G. Gebauer asked if we will hear from Tom immediately after he processes our application. M. Manka is hoping ours will be processed this week. He is motivated to get through these applications. Once he processes ours, we will get an Authorization Funding Letter (ALF) saying everything looks good and the application then goes to the bond bank for their official approval which could take a couple weeks to a month. Hopefully, it can be approved administratively and we will receive the ALF this week or next. M. Manka will forward the ALF to the Commissioners when she receives it.

State American Rescue Plan Act Grant (ARPA) Agreement

During the last meeting, we committed to providing comments and questions that were combined with those from the SB, and these were sent to Renee, who is drafting the agreement. Mel compiled comments from the consulting team, the Planning Commission, the SB, and herself. These were submitted on 2/15/23. We haven't heard back from Renee, but it could be taking a bit longer because this is a new process. M. Manka will check in with Renee, and expects to hear from her before the next meeting. G. Lamphere approves a "gentle nudge" to make sure we remain a priority. Westford's Grant Agreement is one of the first.

Community Recovery & Revitalization Program (CRRP) Grant

M. Manka received suggested revisions from Grant Writer Liz Curry, and M. Reilly double-checked those last week. The "commitment letter from prospective developer" is required. M. Manka reached out to the Common Hall and received a letter from them today. G. Lamphere reached out to the Westford Store. The grant is mostly ready to submit, we are just waiting to see if anything came in from the store. G. Lamphere will reach out to them again in the next couple of days. M. Reilly thinks we can submit what we have and let them begin their review, and additional documents can be added as they come in. M. Manka will submit the grant and let the Program Manager know that we are anticipating an additional letter.

Funding Stack Table & Amortization Schedule

The funding stack is keeping an account of what we have in terms of potential funding, and what funding we have received. New update includes a note that the construction funding is contingent on a successful bond vote. M. Manka will continue to include this document in the meeting packet, but it most likely will not need to be on the agenda.

Another document that will be included in the meeting packets but not necessarily on the agenda is the amortization schedule. This includes different bond vote scenarios and the tax impacts they would have. It should be noted that it doesn't factor in user fees or operation and maintenance costs. Once we have more information, we can start to refine cost estimates and draft an ordinance. This amortization schedule will become more and more useful and accurate over time. G. Lamphere finds this schedule very helpful but thinks we should be careful, as it doesn't take the Grand List into account. It is difficult to translate into tax implications. M. Manka clarified that it does take into account last year's Grand List, but it will change year to year as the Grand List changes. S. Jensen says it will be useful for ordinance discussion. It is also worth noting that it shows what needs to be raised, not how it is raised (Grand List, user fees, aspects of budget). This will be an ongoing discussion with JB. O&M estimates have been considered but need to be refined before they can be added to this document.

Public Outreach

S. Jensen spoke about the meeting of the Outreach Committee last week. We are entering a new phase now that engineering is starting back up. There will be a pause on Wastewater Wednesday while the engineers gather more data. A shift to less frequent, more detailed discussions makes sense. As we get closer to the bond vote there will likely be a new set of FAQs. There was discussion about compiling the big questions that have come up around working with the engineers and getting that information out to the community. The Committee will plan a meeting to develop an engineering to bond vote strategy.

G. Gebauer added that at some point there will be more outreach needed from the PC, particularly with people in the service area. In forming the communication plan, there is a plan for in-person public outreach. This will be well before the bond vote. The outreach will give the community a refresher,

providing as much information as we have. There will likely be another outreach effort closer to the bond vote with more refined information.

S. Jensen noted that the finalizing of the survey work around the Common and Brookside Road will happen this spring. The Outreach Committee is planning a reintroduction letter to people in the service area. Members of the engineering team will meet one-on-one with property owners to go over site-specific details. It is common to have a staff member attend these meetings. If Amy & Peter ask, M. Manka will potentially go with them.

A newsletter and FPF post were submitted today.

Public Comment

None.

Project Based TIF

During the last meeting, the PC talked about the interest that Westford has in Project-Based TIF. Currently, there is no apparent need for Westford to participate. We would like to see the Legislature build in some language to support this type of funding. The PC sent a letter to the Representatives and people working on this at the state level, which received a positive response. The PC also reached out to Ted Brady (VLCT), who was appreciative. It is in the Legislature's hands at this point.

M. Letorney had a question on Ted's list of programs that would be considering TIF for funding. Did we leave the amount blank, or should we even be on this list? We don't have a project that fits a TIF, but we are listed in the spreadsheet. G. Lamphere replied that given that we don't plan to apply for a TIF program, but we haven't built out the funding stack yet, so we don't want to take this option off the table. S. Jensen observed that there is a period of time between a successful bond vote and being ready for construction. If TIF becomes an option in that gap, we should keep it as an option. A conversation with Ted is warranted to see if we belong on the spreadsheet. M. Letorney has spoken with Ted, who does want us on the spreadsheet. This is a big enough project that pieces of it may consider TIF, but we shouldn't bank on a TIF in our schedule as it doesn't relate to our project. However this is an effort at the legislative level that is worth our support. G. Lamphere proposed that use the "pending" number and add in the delta between total stack and the PCS. G. Lamphere will email Ted to update the sentence on the spreadsheet and let Ted know our thinking on this.

M. Manka added that the numbers will change when the cost estimate is revised.

1705 Newsletter Submission and FPF Posting

M. Letorney and G. Lamphere have been working on a draft and getting feedback and input from the Pigeon Family Trust. All parties agree it is almost ready to go. It is proposed to get the posting out on FPF and in the next newsletter. The April newsletter is a month away, so there is not necessarily a rush. It would be best to post to FPF and the newsletter at the same time. The PC will revisit this at the next meeting.

Town Common Area Stormwater Treatment Assessment

The PC is working on wrapping up the VDCP scope of work so that the grant can be closed out. There is the VDCP Grant for the cleanup of the 1705 property and also a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Grant for Regional Planning to look at storm water coming off the Common and 128, as well as the culvert under 128 which drains onto the 1705 property and outlets into Brown's River. M. Manka is working with

KAS, Button, and SE Group to finish the scope of work and close it out. She has also had an initial meeting with Regional Planning, KAS, and Hoyle & Tanner. KAS was doing the work for 1705, and Hoyle & Tanner was hired by Regional Planning to look at Route 128 and the culvert, and the draining of the Common. Since starting the UPWP project, there have been changes in cost and a lot of staff changeover. Hoyle & Tanner worked on updating the scope of work and their cost estimate. In the last discussion, it was determined that the culvert may be realigned, the solution is to keep the culvert in that general location as opposed to having it outlet in a different area around the Common. KAS and Hoyle & Tanner determined that it is best to focus on that area and fix what is going on there. The culvert is failing as the outlet is about 10 feet above grade and high velocity is causing erosion. Oil & Tanner refined their work plan to focus on coming up with the best solution for replacement of the culvert and dealing with drainage off the Common and 128, and how that Interfaces with the 1705 property. The updated cost estimate increased the Commission match amount by \$500. PC approval is needed to increase the match amount.

M. Letorney asked if there was talk about a treatment area or a sediment area as a catch basin for culvert discharge. M. Manka replied that they will look at underground settling or filtration. The ultimate plan for the outlet is to lower the culvert and have an area to disperse energy and slow down the water velocity. M. Manka has had conversations with Stacy Pomeroy, who is the State River Scientist. There is agreement that beyond the outfall where there is already significant erosion, we shouldn't further disturb the area from that point down to the river. There is natural vegetation there holding the soil and pH in place. There has been discussion of potential solutions, including natural debris check dams. An email has been sent to George Pigeon with an FYI that we are finishing up the scope of work. We have not received a response, so M. Manka will reach out with another email before KAS begins their work in earnest.

S. Jensen recalled the Fitzgerald Report that was done several years ago which identified several catch basins that could potentially benefit from larger sumps. The PC had discussed larger sumps or some agreement to make things easier for the Road Crew when they clean out the culverts. M. Manka said that they will look at the catch basin right before it crosses Route 128, and the Common in general. The solution that the Fitzgerald Report came up with was to detach the catch basins from the Common drainage since no one is maintaining them. VTrans has no interest in our culverts since the Town put them in. This was done when the drainage was put in. S. Jensen recommended that the chain of catch basins should be part of the scope of work, and that redesign/redirection should be done when 128 is trenched. G. Lamphere asked if it would be helpful to invite Oil & Tanner and/or KAS to the next meeting. M. Letorney said that he would prefer a site visit. M. Manka stated that we cannot expand the scope of work without increasing cost. M. Letorney wants to make sure that any work done fits into the larger scope of stormwater management.

2023 Work Plan

The next agenda will be dependent on what we have received from the State. We are waiting for an Amended Step 2 update, feedback from the State on the State ARPA Grant Agreement, and review by ACCV on the CRRP application.

G. Lamphere said that there are items that don't normally fall on our agenda that will be coming up, including UPWP and SB activity. G. Gebauer added that the agenda for the next SB meeting includes talk about 20% matching funds for a traffic study, which should be noted though it doesn't directly affect the PC.

S. Jensen added that we should discuss the town office rehab study process, and the concept of upsetting the bond payment with shared-use space. Westford will not be eligible for grant funds. G. Lamphere

commented that this is a Town Administrator and Selectboard Project. The PC is not involved in this project, so there is no need for it to be on the PC's agenda.

UPWP stormwater work status update will be on the next agenda. The brownfield article will be discussed before April. Potential upcoming SB meetings and topics will be on the agenda as well, along with WW updates. The next meeting will be on 3/20/23. There will only be one meeting in March unless something comes up.

Barb Peck asked why there seems to be a division between the PC and the SB on the feasibility study for the Town Office. Are both committees waiting for the other to step up and ask if help is needed? Is there a division? The PC replied that there is no division at all. The PC is simply not involved. The SB has taken it on as their project, and they will ask for assistance if they need it. The PC will be happy to get involved if asked/needed.

Adjourn: 8:05pm