

**TOWN OF WESTFORD  
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES  
MINUTES FOR JULY 3, 2023 MEETING  
Approved on July 24, 2023**

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

**Commissioners Absent:** George Lamphere

**Also Present:** Melissa Manka (Town Planner), Harmony Cism (Planning Assistant, Minute Clerk), Lori Johnson, Ira Allen, Kim Guidrey, Pat Haller

**Meeting Began:** 6:30pm

**Amendments to Agenda**

None.

**Minutes of the June 19, 2023 Meeting**

G. Gebauer MOVED to accept the minutes as presented.

M. Letorney SECONDED the motion.

The motion passed 4-0.

**Meeting Rules of Procedure**

M. Manka outlined the meeting rules of procedure for the public.

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

None.

**Correspondence**

The PC received a notice from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) that we are due to renew the village designation. This designation is due for renewal every 8 years. M. Manka will complete the application for review and submission approval on August 21, 2023.

The PC received an email from Barb Peck about the GeoProbe locations. No determination has yet been made as to where the alignment will be. 2 goals of the project are to try to run the line as close as possible to the properties that will connect, and to try not to damage any trees. The alignment hasn't been set yet; the location is TBD. Pat Haller added when the Outreach Committee has their scheduled walk from the Common to field, these questions can be presented to engineers at that time. This walk is tentatively scheduled for the end of September.

The PC received correspondence regarding a VTrans project at the intersection of Routes 104 and 128 in Fairfax. S. Jensen clarified that VTrans is trying a new approach for project scoping. They are reaching out to communities earlier in the pre-scoping process and looking for input from surrounding municipalities. This is the time to raise concerns to VTrans. M. Letorney will attend one of the meetings and update the PC in August.

**Community Wastewater Project**

**Step 3 Funding Stack**

No update since the last meeting. M. Manka has not received anything from CRRP. There are no changes to the funding stack. M. Manka will check in and see if there are any updates. The funding stack and all schedules are displayed upstairs in the Town Office for the public to view/copy as needed. These documents will be regularly updated.

#### **Action Item List**

No changes since the last PC meeting. M. Manka will work with G. Lamphere to revise and update the action item list for the next meeting.

#### **Project Schedule**

No changes. GeoProbe was completed June 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. Follow-up information will be available in the coming months. Stone Environmental will work on updating existing plans in preliminary engineering, updating designs, and reaching out to individuals for needed information.

#### **Communication Schedule & Public Outreach**

S. Jensen reported that we will be approaching the time when we start to get more information from engineers and that information will need to be provided to the public in anticipation of a November bond vote. Flyers have been made to direct people to the website. There is no need to have a presence at the Town 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration, as there is no new information. The next big event will take place at the end of July with a meeting with interested groups in the service area. This will be an opportunity for those who might connect to ask questions. An engineer and Birchline will likely be there. Post card/emails will go out to residents in the service area.

#### **June 22<sup>nd</sup> Selectboard Meeting**

S. Jensen reported that the SB has continued reviewing the 18 questions. They reviewed the PC's responses relating to emergency eligibility for FEMA, as well as questions about the interface between drinking water and the system. There were some public comments related to ordinance questions that the PC will discuss tonight. There are also questions about the difference between reserve capacity vs. capacity exceeding the current design flow. The SB remains engaged.

#### **Sewer Ordinance & 18 Questions**

G. Gebauer provided the most recent draft of the questions. At the last meeting, the PC discussed their thoughts on what might be recommended to the SB as policy, specifically regarding civic buildings and multi-family structures. For discussion tonight, G. Gebauer summarized questions 2, 3, 8, 9, 16, and 17. The questions have been reorganized into topics (operation, funding, system, etc.). The hope is to be able to have this document and a memo explaining what it is ready to go to the SB by the end of the week for their meeting the following week.

*Question 2: Will not-for-profit or "civic" entities (WCH, BMHS, Historical Society, etc.) buildings be treated as private residential property, as municipal buildings, or as something else regarding paying for costs of construction, operation, and maintenance?*

These civic buildings have a lot of value to the community, so it is worth considering treating them differently. The Westford Common Hall and the Red Brick Meeting House are both doing updates. Once the updates are complete, these buildings will have the potential to host more events that can help them move toward financial sustainability. The town currently provides assistance to both buildings but would like to move away from that when possible. These civic buildings will be assigned a large capacity, more than single family homes. However, they won't

use that capacity every day. Birchline has suggested waiting for more refined numbers before making the final decision. There should be dialogue between the SB and the boards of these civic buildings to better understand their goals. To account for increased flow from events, the system has a timed release to avoid flooding. The system is designed so it won't get overwhelmed due to large events.

*Question 3: Will multiple housing units or "affordable housing" units be treated differently from other private residential housing regarding costs of construction, operation, and maintenance? Will there be any incentives?*

As these structures are privately owned, it is more challenging to provide the same discount that civic buildings receive. The PC recommends that multi-unit apartments get charged based on a lower flow, perhaps a bedroom based or GPD basis. Policy consideration should be charged equitably. The GPD rate will need to be figured out. The consultant team recommended against a tiered system not based on allocation. Assistance programs are available to help pay utility bills. How to charge multi-unit building for O&M costs should be based on allocation. If the town wants to incentivize new construction of state-defined affordable housing, they could reduce costs at connection fee. For existing structures that are expanded, O&M costs go up with increased capacity. There wouldn't be a new connection fee. There may need to be an allocation fee to reimburse the town to recoup costs. Town pays for unallocated capacity. The O&M costs are set. More users in the system will bring down O&M costs for everyone. The PC will get input from Amy and JB. Pat Haller added that the town will be paying for electricity for 2 pump stations. Electrical costs will increase with new users. O&M increases will happen in small increments. Big, fixed costs won't increase.

*Question 8: What are the terms attached to grants and other funds in the funding stack? What parts are potentially vulnerable to loss if construction takes longer than anticipated (i.e., how much additional money might taxpayers have to provide, under what circumstances)?*

Each funding source is contingent on a successful bond vote. ARPA funds need to be spent by 12/31/26. Citizens want numbers. The PC should get info out and let the public know specifics. Numbers can change as the project progresses. Funding sources are interrelated. Timing is very important. ARPA funds will cover over half of the anticipated costs. The PC strives to maximize each grant to its full potential. This is the biggest project Westford has undertaken, so there is a lot of shock at the cost. However, it is a relatively small WW system overall. A failed bond vote could lose many ARPA funded sources.

*Question 9: What is the likelihood of cost overruns? Is there a plan if an overrun does occur? Is there/should there be a risk assessment?*

This is a big project for our town, but it is not an unusual design or project in the world of WW. Significant overruns are not anticipated. This will be a long-term benefit to the community. There is a much greater risk to voting no. Voting no puts the cost on future generations. Quantity based bids can easily be tracked. There are many built-in controls throughout the process. More information is needed from Amy and JB about outlining the bid process/warranty policy.

*Question 16: What is the appropriate "reserve" capacity for the system? How many buildings, toilets/sinks, and people should the design include to accommodate growth in population inside the service area? Should the design include the possibility of geographic growth, too?*

Total capacity will be around 24K gallons. Connected capacity will be about 10K-12K. The general rule of thumb is that 10% of capacity be kept in reserve. The SB may also want to consider including additional reserve capacity for existing buildings to connect in future. Future development should also be taken into consideration (relocation of the Post Office, etc.). These are policy decisions for the SB. Structures that are in existence at the time of construction should have the option to connect if their systems fail. Town priorities include the Post Office, childcare facilities, affordable housing, and a public restroom at the Town Office. The town needs enough capacity to allow for future connections without compromising the reserve. This will be discussed with consultants.

*Question 17: Will the system design be robust enough to deal with extreme cold, power outages, or other threats to reliable operation? How are system users compensated for any suspension in service?*

There will be generators. There will be a system operator who deals with outages. This system uses many of the same components that are used in conventional systems. Dispersal field is the main difference, as it will be pressure dosed. Perc-Rite is distributed by Oakson and is used all over New England and the whole country. Oakson has published documents, lists, and videos that are very informative and go a long way toward answering this question in detail. Less water will be used during power outages. There is also the possibility of FEMA reimbursements. Other utilities don't compensate for interruptions in service.

A draft ordinance was originally sent to the SB in the fall of 2021. Amy is working on filling in language for SB to review. The PC will provide the SB with sample ordinances from other towns (Warren's is similar to our situation). Ordinances are updated by the SB every couple of years. A new draft ordinance should be ready by the end of the month.

Amy developed a spread sheet covering all aspects of the WW project. The PC should meet with the SB just to discuss this spreadsheet. It explains a lot of projected finances with inflation rates, and can be built on. This will answer a lot of the financial questions. It will need to be refined by plugging in numbers as the project moves on.

At the 7/13/23 SB meeting, the PC will provide the 2<sup>nd</sup> update on questions as well as sample ordinances and bonds from other towns.

#### **Public Comment**

Pat Haller said that the RBMH and WCH won't need much capacity in the near future. They can apply for more capacity when needed. M. Manka stated that Stone has explained that the infrastructure is sized for future capacity. There will be a waiting period for future connections who don't connect at the time of construction. This is a monitoring phase before additional connections can be added.

Pat stated that 24,300 gallons are allocated by the state. Meters could be used to show that we are using more if/when needed. G. Gebauer said that the town would benefit from meters at each building. It is easier to meter potable water than wastewater. Telemetry can be used to measure WW usage by tracking how many times it pumps each day.

### **2023 Work Plan**

The 7/17/23 meeting will be moved to 7/24/23. Topics to be discussed will include the 18 Questions, Amy's spreadsheet, action item list, project schedule, communication schedule, draft ordinance, VTrans update, and financial statement.

**Adjourn: 8:51pm**