

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
MINUTES FOR AUGUST 7, 2023 MEETING
Approved on August 21, 2023**

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

Commissioners Absent:

Also Present: Melissa Manka (Town Planner), Harmony Cism (Planning Assistant, Minute Clerk), Pat Haller (Outreach Committee), Barb Peck, Sheila Franz, Kim Guidrey, Ira Allen, Maureen Wilcox, Lori Johnson, Vicky Ross, Nanette Rogers (Town Administrator)

Meeting Began: 6:30pm

Amendments to Agenda

The VHB update on the intersection of Routes 128 & 104 will be removed from this agenda and added to the next meeting's agenda.

An executive session will be added to the end of tonight's meeting.

Minutes of the July 24, 2023 Meeting

G. Gebauer MOVED to accept the minutes as presented.

M. Reilly SECONDED the motion.

The motion passed 5-0.

Citizens to be Heard – Items not on Agenda

Vicky Ross asked what provisions have been made for project manager for the construction phase of the wastewater project and how much money has been estimated for this. M. Manka replied that the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) will have a project manager to oversee the construction and review invoices.

Vicky suggested hiring a professional project manager to manage the project from beginning to end, overseeing the entirety of construction.

Rte 128/104 Fairfax Intersection Meeting

Removed from tonight's agenda

COMMUNITY WASTEWATER PROJECT

Step 3 Funding Stack

M. Manka reported that there have been no changes to the document since 5/24/23. Recently, the SB shared that Lee McClenny wrote to Angela Farrington, who is overseeing administration of the program at the state level. She responded that the flood has created additional delays. ACCD's goal is to announce awards by the end of August. The PC appreciates Lee reaching out.

Project Schedule

No changes since the last PC meeting. Everything is still on track.

Action Item List

G. Lamphere reported that the goal is to get the action item list released tomorrow or Wed. This list contains various changes to % complete, dates, and trends. Action item #35 added. Action items #18-#20 and #26-#31 have been hidden and will be removed at a future date as they are being tracked as part of the State ARPA grant process. The Town Attorney has been added to action items #6, 9, 10, and 34. One change is coming for item #12: the start date is 10/13/23 and the completion date is 11/1/23.

G. Gebauer discussed item #10 regarding the ordinance: the draft ordinance is a complete document, but it is not final. Adoption likely won't happen until after the bond vote. M. Manka suggested adding another action item to finalize the ordinance. G. Lamphere will add this as item #36 and add TBDs.

Communication Schedule & Public Outreach

G. Gebauer reported that we are continuing to move toward a vote in Nov. The Outreach Committee is in the process of printing postcards to be mailed to residents to let them know when the vote is and where to find information. They are also printing the FAQs into a booklet for distribution to individuals who may not have access to the internet. The Committee will reach out to people with a 3–5-minute video with information about the vote. There will be a barbeque for service area property owners on 8/30 at the Brick Meeting House. This may be moved to Common Hall because the acoustics are better. This gathering will be similar to the informational community get-together that was held 2 years ago. Updates on project costs are anticipated. A public informational meeting will be held at the school on 9/13, with a second informational meeting tentatively scheduled for 10/18. These are separate from the formal warned meeting on 11/2. The Outreach Committee is meeting tomorrow.

Sewer Ordinance

On 7/31, a working meeting was held with the SB and the PC. JB Hinds presented a complete draft of the ordinance to the SB with highlights and annotations. The SB and the public had questions. No decisions were made by the SB. The draft ordinance is complete but not final. The goal for the next SB meeting is to discuss some issues and possibly make decisions. G. Gebauer will attend the 8/10 SB meeting. The ordinance is now in the SB's hands. The PC will be available as needed. The SB will make policy decisions about unallocated costs, priorities, funding of civic buildings, and how to allocate costs for structures other than single-family homes.

18 Questions

G. Gebauer reported that the PC has submitted responses to all but 3 of the questions. The Town Administrator received a response about the insurance question. The question of user fees is up to the SB. JB Hinds provided examples of what tax impacts would be for a range of bond votes. G. Gebauer will look at the questions again and see if more updates are needed. The SB is focused on ordinance and policy decisions.

August 10th & August 24th Selectboard Meetings

G. Gebauer will attend the 8/10 SB meeting.

G. Lamphere, M. Manka, Amy Macrellis, and Peter Lazorchak will attend the 8/24 SB meeting. The PC will potentially invite JB to discuss preliminary plans and updated cost estimates. The SB will have to make an informal decision to have a bond vote. This will be a significant meeting. The PC anticipates more information in the next week or so.

G. Lamphere stated that the PC recognizes that this is a significant project affecting current and future generations. The professional engineers and consultants have been working hard to support our community in this project. They have extensive experience in community WW system design, development, permitting, construction, and ongoing O&M oversight. The State of VT DEC has vetted and proven processes with strict requirements for final oversight of a project. This defines and guides the PC in discussions and decision-making processes. The PC welcomes continued engagement with the community. The SB is leading bond vote language, warnings, and timeline. The PC will continue to support the project as needed. The latest information on the WW project is available on the website. There are many unanswered questions coming into more clarity. The PC will continue to address unanswered questions as more information is gained. The goal is, has been, and will continue to be, to bring this project to a well-informed town-wide vote where all residents will have the opportunity to weigh in.

Public Comment

Barb Peck asked for a point of clarification. Two meetings have been scheduled for 9/13 and 11/2. Will both meetings be held at the school? Will one or both be moderated by Ed Chase? If so, what additional information will be at the 2nd meeting?

G. Gebauer replied that 9/13 is an informational meeting at the school. Ed will not be moderating. This meeting will be a chance for people to ask questions and make comments. Updates will be provided, etc. The 11/2 meeting will need to be warned by the SB under state law before the bond vote. Once a written warning is out, the SB also needs to have public hearing regarding the bond itself. The SB runs that meeting, which is a public hearing. Barb asked if ballots are mailed out prior to November. Nanette Rogers explained that the 11/2 hearing is dictated by state statute. The Town is required to hold a public hearing within 10 days preceding the vote. Yes, it is after the ballots are available (20 days before vote), which is all dictated by state statute. Ed Chase will likely be moderating at the 11/2 hearing. M. Manka added that 10/18 is reserved as another public outreach meeting. All will be held at the school.

Pat Haller asked about the ordinance and what expectations the PC might have for policy decisions that the SB makes. Should we put those decisions on the Westford Future website? G. Lamphere replied that written memos or resolutions will be added to the website.

Sheila Franz asked if there will be an informational meeting on 10/18. M. Manka responded that yes – a meeting has been tentatively scheduled.

G. Lamphere clarified that these 3 meetings are planned but not warned yet. They are subject to change based on SB decisions.

Correspondence

The PC received correspondence from Maureen Wilcox with a list of questions. After review, town staff feels that the questions have been recently answered or will be answered in the near future as the project objectives and milestones are met. JB can look at the questions.

G. Lamphere thanked everyone for their engagement and involvement in this important project. He gave a reminder that previously asked questions can be found on the website and meeting minutes from PC and SB meetings. Highly qualified engineers and consultants are working on this. The PC appreciates their efforts to bring this to a well-informed town wide vote where everyone can weigh in. The PC will continue to get info out as it becomes available, and they welcome continued engagement.

2023 Work Plan

8/21: The PC will have updated total project cost estimates. Amy Macrellis and Peter Lazorchak will be present. JB Hinds and Emily Hackett will be invited. The PC will review updated plans and cost estimates. The PC will prepare for the SB meeting on August 24th, go over action item list, communication schedule, and project schedule. The SB will have a work plan for the next couple of months to make sure we are meeting statutory requirements. Other topics for this meeting will include the outreach funding request, the 128/104 Intersection, and Village Center Designation renewal.

8/30: Service area barbeque

9/5: Special PC meeting to prep for the public outreach meeting. The PC may also need to discuss the Village Center Designation renewal.

9/18: Topics will include WW items, FY '25 budget request, FY 2024 Town report, quarterly financial report, and fee schedule. G. Lamphere will be absent from this meeting.

Executive Session

G. Lamphere MOVED to enter executive session.

G. Gebauer SECONDED the motion.

The motion passed 5-0.

The board entered executive session at 7:37pm.

G. Lamphere MOVED to exit executive session at 7:45pm.

G. Gebauer SECONDED the motion.

The motion passed 5-0.

Adjourn: 7:46pm