

**TOWN OF WESTFORD  
WASTEWATER ALTERNATIVES COMMITTEE  
MINUTES FOR MARCH 12, 2024 MEETING**

**Members Present:** Holly Delisle (Town Administrator), George Lamphere (Planning Commissioner), Ron Rodjenski (Moderator), Harmony Cism (Planning Assistant, Minute Clerk), Paul Birnholz, Bill Hill, Lori Johnson, Carol Winfield

**Members Absent:** Jeremy Berger, Martha Heath

**Also Present:** Wendy Doane (Selectboard), Pat Haller (Selectboard), Maureen Wilcox

**Meeting Began:** 3:00pm

**Public Comment/Items Not on Agenda:**

Lori Johnson reported that she contacted George Pigeon and got permission to talk to his septic engineer to find out what the septic capacity is on the 1705 property. This engineer had designed a plan for a mound system with enough capacity for a 4-bedroom home. Secondary pre-treatment would allow for more capacity. If the current home on the property was not used, and the well was abandoned, there would be no need for a well shield, which would free up more land for septic. The engineer is working on getting a state permit for 490 gpd. The Town would need a permit amendment for additional capacity. More calculations and measurements are needed. The Town would need to hire this engineer, who reported to L. Johnson that it would cost less than \$5K including additional permitting. L. Johnson encourages the committee to ask the Selectboard to move forward with this as a step in the process. No other properties that have been suggested are ready to be investigated right now.

Ron Rodjenski and Paul Birnholz expressed hesitancy to jump into engineering on one property without identifying other possible sites or the development of a matrix for all the ideas. Carol Winfield wants to get going on investigating this site. There was never a guarantee that engineering would be done on every site. Bill Hill said that we are getting ahead of matrix, but the 1705 property is on the list until the property is sold. The committee has due diligence to each item on the list and could start getting more information on the 1705 property investigation. George Lamphere reminded the committee that while there is due diligence to complete a matrix, the Selectboard must decide whether to fund investigations.

There was a question of if the well is abandoned, does the existing house go away? Lori Johnson answered yes. George Lamphere asked if the community would be okay with this. Housing is tight, and there would need to be a good trade off to remove housing from the Common area. Lori Johnson responded that there has always been talk about possibilities for the 1705 property. She reported that there are several possible options if the town purchases the property. It could provide parking, an opportunity to mitigate stormwater issues, possible storage for the Rec Dep, etc. There is an opportunity to solve different problems with the property. The house is not in good condition. Carol Winfield would love to see the house preserved if it is feasible.

Lori Johnson stated that we could find out if the needed capacity is there. There is a risk of the property being sold before the Town decides on a wastewater solution. Ron Rodjenski wanted to clarify whether the Selectboard authorized the scope of work or the development of a scope. What is the maximum capacity of the 1705 property? Ownership of work includes permissions for control of new information.

Carol Winfield wants to ask the Selectboard to authorize an agreement with George Pigeon so that the engineer can do what he needs to and give us a rough design and scope of maximum wastewater capacity. She thinks that the next step would be making an offer on property. Paul Birnholz said that we are getting ahead of ourselves. George Lamphere brought up the feasibility study – it will be complicated to expand the Town Office. Purchase of this property may provide septic capacity, but how does it help fitting the building into the space?

Bill Hill and Holly Delisle worked on building a matrix of options and attributes. The end objective is filling in the blanks in the matrix. 1705 is one option, but the committee needs to fill in all the blanks in the matrix. Paul Birnholz stated that the committee needs to present options to the SB, and it is not the committee's place to make an offer on the property. Pat Haller asked when talking about capacity of the 1705 property, what is the context of capacity? An empty lot has different capacity possibility than a lot with existing structures, and also would be different than the lot with the Town Office. There are a couple of steps to explore. Pat recommends as much capacity as possible so that other buildings can have the opportunity to connect. The more capacity available from the site, the better. Lori Johnson added that the capacity of the soil is the same regardless of what is built. It is a question of how much it can support. Ron Rodjenski stated that this applies to any property that becomes available as a possibility. No other property owners have come forward offering capacity. The Selectboard did agree that there may be a need for funds to cover expenses. George Lamphere reminded the committee that we still need to fill in the matrix. Carol Winfield stated that the committee needs to pursue ideas as they come up.

#### **Discussion:**

#### **Funding Update:**

A representative of the Community Recovery and Revitalization Program (CRRP), through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), sent a message to the Town stating that they are withdrawing funds due to no progress on the Maple Shade project. Other towns are interested in receiving funds, so the \$750,000 will be reallocated. There is no opening for an appeal. Other funding agencies are still waiting.

Bill Hill asked when is the next funding checkpoint? Ron Rodjenski responded that the only deadline was for CRRP. There are currently no other hard deadlines. The State's Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and Northern Borders Regional Commission (NBRC) need to see progress to keep funding – this is written into the grant agreement. They may or may not approve a new scope of work and can pull funding at any time. The scope of work will need to be amended/approved if it is not the original Maple Shade project. George Lamphere reported that the CRRP award was tied to economic development and NBRC also has an economic component. The reason for the withdrawal of CRRP funds is that the ACCD reviewed Selectboard minutes and Town information and decided that there is no longer a need for economic development in the Town Center. Carol Winfield replied that NBRC is not tied to economic growth or housing, and the funding could possibly be reallocated for just the Town Office & Library, or Town Office/Library/Civic buildings.

#### **Matrix Review:**

Holly Delisle introduced 3 working documents, which will all be uploaded to the Wastewater tab on the Town website.

The *List of Alternative Ideas* is an unmanipulated list. Some ideas were submitted by more than one person or were similar enough to be combined.

The *Ideas Matrix* graphs out the ideas and options, along with attributes and facts. The matrix contains information about users and the scale of use, whether it is just the Town Office & Library and/or inclusion of civic buildings, and/or inclusion of private properties. The Map of Ideas matches up to the list.

The *Matrix Process*, which was explained by Bill Hill, describes how the matrix works.

Wendy Doane stated that she would like to see the Maple Shade project added to the matrix. George Lamphere agreed that he would like to see Maple Shade as a reference point.

Ron Rodjenski reminded the committee that there is an underlying assumption of facts that this is for existing buildings. Moving the Town Office is beyond the scope of the committee.

Lori Johnson expressed confusion of the usage of term “common” vs Common District. Harmony Cism explained that in the Town Plan and the Zoning Regulations, the green area is referred to as the Town Common, which is separate from the Common Zoning District. The Common Zoning District encompasses all the properties surrounding the Town Common.

George Lamphere stated that he is happy with the matrix and moving forward. The committee can study/discuss attributes. We will be able to move forward and adjust as needed. The baseline is to follow the matrix that has been developed.

Bill Hill reported that there has been good progress on ideas, we now need to make progress on the attributes list.

There was discussion of how to get items on the Selectboard agenda. The earliest that this could be a warned item would be for the 3/28/24 meeting. It could be brought up as an *item not on the agenda*. The committee needs to report to the Selectboard in the end. What is the interim process? There is a regular slot on the Selectboard agenda for Wastewater Updates as a standing agenda item. What is the committee’s message to the board? Is it necessary to warn action items ahead of time? Holly Delisle replied yes. Will the Selectboard engage with George Pigeon and his engineer? The WAC makes a recommendation to pursue this option. Carol Winfield said that we are here to do the investigating. Ron Rodjenski reminded the committee that when money is involved, it is up to the Selectboard. We need to get feedback on how this new Selectboard will work on wastewater.

Pat Haller suggested that when asking the Selectboard about funding, the WAC should talk about the matrix and state the desire to accelerate one idea’s investigation. We may be stepping ahead of ourselves when jumping to investigate only one idea.

Carol Winfield said that when this committee was appointed, they decided to make a matrix. This did not preclude starting to investigate things to fill in the matrix.

**Task Assignments:**

Holly will send documents to the committee and upload them to the website as draft work in progress. Committee members should read the drafts and express ideas. Blanks will be filled in as information becomes known.

**Next meeting:** March 19<sup>th</sup> at 3pm

**Adjourn:** 4:16pm