

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
WASTEWATER ALTERNATIVES COMMITTEE
MINUTES FOR APRIL 2, 2024 MEETING**

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

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Dave Gauthier, Paul Birnholz, Maureen Wilcox, Maura O'Brien

Meeting Began: 3:00pm

Public Comment/Items Not on Agenda:

Holly Delisle spoke about an access request for Paul Birnholz. He would welcome an access request. Ron Rodjenski added that we haven't discussed "other private properties" yet as a group, but we can talk about this during task assignments.

Ron Rodjenski brought up the topic of public outreach. Ron sent an email to the group concerning potential miscommunication around authorized/unauthorized public outreach. Committee activities are public and get posted on the website. Ron suggested the need to be clear with how information is shared by any WAC member or any elected official. Information is either shared as an individual or it is vetted by the committee. Carol Winfield said that it makes sense to use a disclaimer stating that the shared information is personal opinion. Carol asked if this would also apply to other committees & boards. Ron responded that it is good practice for any committee. Lori Johnson added that all committees should be held to the same standard. George Lamphere feels that the information should be shared to the committee first, not to the public forum. Ron agreed that the preference is to refrain from sharing publicly, run ideas through committee, then disclaim if the need to share persists. Martha Heath would prefer that only the chair speaks for the committee. Bill Hill said that there can be different answers to the same questions, different perspectives on what the truth is and what is important. Carol said that restating things that are on the record with references are more tolerable than emotional, less factual opinions which are often expressed without disclaimers. Martha said that communications that come to the committee should be shared with the committee before agreeing to share them outside the committee. Paul Birnholz asked how to do that when the information is shared within a public meeting and people can repeat it. Ron & Martha clarified that information shouldn't be shared BEFORE a meeting if one person receives that information before the meeting.

Discussion:

Report on Selectboard 3/28/2024 Meeting:

Holly Delisle reported on last week's Selectboard meeting. Bill Hill's presentation was very clear and well done. Bill said that complex messages are difficult to share because everyone hears them differently. Ron stated that the Selectboard decided not to hold a special meeting. A decision will be made at the Selectboard's 4/11/24 meeting.

Bill reflected on the Selectboard meeting. He feels that it confirmed that we are on the right path to getting the truth about the options. Everyone is forming their own picture. We need basic core facts, which may take repeating. The WAC started with a broad range of ideas, which have been narrowed down from 16 to 3. Inside that core, what are 3 or 4 hot points? Do we need fewer attributes? The committee needs to simplify things to communicate clearly. Bill also stated that an alternate Maple Shade idea should be on the list.

1705 Investigation: Tudhope Scope of Work:

Carol Winfield reported that she received an email from Erin Devries at Vermont River Conservancy. Erin's response to Carol was shared to CCRPC. Carol feels that it was premature to share the response, as we don't know if we want the property yet. Martha Heath asked how the public was able to see the letter. Carol replied that she forwarded it to the Selectboard. George Lamphere wondered if this information is useful, or if it gets in the way of committee work? Ron stated that it seems neutral in that there is landowner/town/multi-party interest in the 1705 property. Dan Albrecht of CCRPC has asked for some indication from the town that there is a path forward. Martha said that this would not have happened if the communication had stayed within the committee. She asked why it was sent to the Selectboard. Carol replied that she sent the info to the Selectboard after the committee talked about it. She reported it at the WAC meeting, sent the letter to the committee, and sent it to the Selectboard. She felt it was not necessary to be shared beyond the Selectboard. One Selectboard member sent it to others. Carol feels it was not the place of the Selectboard to share. Ron clarified that if a message represents the WAC, it needs to be okayed by the WAC. George stated that any information sent to the Selectboard is public information. Jeremy Berger said that the Planning Commission approached Geroge Pigeon about 10 years ago about purchasing the property. Scoping work had been done, and it was determined that the purchasing price was above what the Vermont River Conservancy felt was a fair price, which killed the project. Wastewater and the 1705 project could be two separate initiatives for the town to undertake. When talking about private property, we get into a sticky area. Regardless of communication style, this should not be referred to as a done deal. Carol said that the chain of communication with Erin from Vermont River Conservancy began before this committee existed. Bill reminded the committee that what we say in public can affect the value of someone's property.

Martha Heath asked if we have decided on the scope of work for Tudhope. Holly replied that she drafted a scope, and there were some concerns. Lori Johnson made some changes, which Holly presented to the committee. Lori wanted to make another change to #1 under tasks to specify current and future. Ron said that the number predetermined by engineering is 710 GPD, why do it again? We are seeking maximum soil capacity on 1705. Lori stated that Tudhope will already be on site preparing a permit for 490 GPD, and that we should calculate maximum capacity with and without the well. Paul Birnholz added that there is additional capacity if the well is removed. Ron reminded the group that our question is what is the maximum capacity of the site? Are there other constraints if the well is abandoned? There may still be an isolation distance for the natural spring buffer. Tudhope is restricted in what he can design – his license only allows him to design to a certain capacity.

The committee adjusted the wording of the scope of services for the consultant.

Jeremy Berger inquired about a conflict of interest if the engineer is friends with landowner. Ron replied that the consultant is required by the State of Vermont to invite a State of VT engineer to oversee the testing of the soil due to potential conflict of interest. Holly will write a new draft scope and share it with the committee. If there are no objections, she will send it to Tudhope.

WCH Update: Martha Heath reported that she met with the Westford Common Hall board last week. They expressed interest, but they won't go beyond soil testing without further discussion. At this point we don't know if they wish to proceed. George Lamphere added that the scope they are considering would be like the scope for the 1705 property – a soil capacity assessment. The WCH board said they will take the discussion to deliberation, but we haven't heard back yet. Martha has made it clear to them that we want to know asap. Holly has a permission form ready to provide to the WCH if/when they agree. They haven't signed anything at this point.

Matrix Work:

The committee discussed the "other properties" category.

Bill Hill brought up 3 things: 1) what other properties do we consider? 2) Do we add a scaled-down Maple Shade option? 3) Do we add the idea of moving the library to the school building? Ron and Holly suggested that the school idea could be added, but to the far-right area of the matrix, as moving one of the town buildings is out of the committee's scope.

For the scaled-down Maple Shade alternative: The Selectboard voted 2 to 1 to add this option. Holly stated that motions are carried by members present and voting. Paul clarified that there were two votes concerning wastewater. One vote was to continue with 100% funding. The second vote led to an argument over Roberts Rules. Scaled-down system on Maple Shade property will be added to the matrix. Bill will revise the chart.

Ron stated that the current Selectboard has not confirmed the WAC's mission statement. The committee needs direction on Maple Shade.

The group discussed how to delineate and declutter certain things on the matrix.

Jeremy Berger spoke about the scaled-down Maple Shade project – Barb Peck had spoken with an engineer about scaling down – who did she talk to? George Lamphere suggested sending a formal request to Barb to come present her information to the committee. Jeremy will contact her and report back next week.

Martha Heath wondered if the committee should suggest that the Selectboard finish engineering on Maple Shade so that we don't close off grant opportunities. We don't know if any alternatives will work. The timing is terrible. We are trying to extend our timeline without closing anything off. Ron asked if the committee's work will get anywhere near a conclusion before 4/20/24. On 4/11/24, the SB will decide to allow or not allow the Town to use grant money to 100% design. The state is committed to spend money on wastewater in town. This committee doesn't have time to recommend that we move to construction. The WAC can report that we want to preserve funding to 100% design. We are not given the option to go to construction. Construction money goes away on 4/20/24. Design money can stay if the Selectboard votes to keep it. Lori feels that this is not the WAC's task. The WAC will give feedback on alternatives, it is up to the Selectboard to decide what to do with the information. Ron stated that the Selectboard voted to add Maple Shade to the list. This will make sure the Town can preserve funding while the WAC works. The next step would be a 100% design to shelve. Whatever the board does will be reviewed by the state.

Martha wondered how individual opinions should be sent to the Selectboard? The committee responded that an individual would need to start the communication with a statement that is personal opinion.

WAC Homework: a short list of 5 attributes from each member

Task Assignments:

Holly will amend and resend the scope of work. If there are no edits, she will send it to Tudhope. Holly and Bill will add new ideas and graphics to the list and matrix. Holly will also draft a request for access for Paul Birnholz and the WCH. The documents will be ready if the parties say yes.

Bill suggested adding headlines/brief bullet points in the committee's minutes.

Holly requested that if something comes in to be added to the website, to please let her know.

Next meeting: April 9, 2024

Adjourn: 4:41pm