

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
WASTEWATER ALTERNATIVES COMMITTEE
MINUTES FOR APRIL 30, 2024, MEETING**

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

Members Absent:

Also Present: Dave Gauthier, Maura O'Brien

Meeting Began: 3:00pm

Public Comment/Items Not on Agenda:

Holly Delisle reported that George Lamphere submitted his resignation from this committee yesterday. The committee accepted his resignation. The original committee charter included a representative from the Planning Commission. Now that George has resigned, Holly will send a message to the PC.

Discuss meeting minute review/approval procedure:

Ron Rodjenski reported that Open Meeting Law requires minutes to be published. The WAC has been publishing agendas and minutes, but we should formalize the minutes review and approval process. Currently, Harmony submits draft minutes and then Holly reviews & posts them. The WAC will begin reviewing minutes at the next meeting.

Discussion:

Update from 4/25 Selectboard Meeting:

Holly Delisle reported that the Selectboard had a good conversation about the 1705 property. They collectively seem happy that it is back on the market. It is viewed as a strategic property regardless of its wastewater capabilities. The Selectboard reauthorized \$5,000 for David Tudhope's investigative work. Holly asked permission to work with the Town Attorney, but the Selectboard did not give permission for this. They have directed the WAC to focus on the 1705 property. All other potential alternatives are on hold.

The group discussed the Vermont River Conservancy (VRC). Bill Clearly has mentioned that he wanted someone from the WAC to work with the VRC. It would be beneficial for a representative from the VRC to make a presentation at a WAC or SB meeting. Ron said it would be most beneficial for them to present to the Selectboard. Martha Heath suggested that the Selectboard could invite members of WAC to one of their meetings or hold a joint meeting. This way all parties receive the same information, and all get to ask questions. Carol Winfield would like to contact Erin Devries of the VRC about giving a presentation. Martha wondered if it is more helpful to know septic capacity on the 1705 property first. That way there is a better idea of what we want/what we can do on the property. Lori Johnson said that knowing septic capacity is very important in terms of purchase. At least one Selectboard member thinks the property is valuable even without capacity. Lori suggested that we don't need to wait to find out capacity, we should start the conversation with the VRC and find out possibilities. Ron noted some past hesitancy and objection from the community regarding the original 1705 project. The VRC was involved due to housing, river access, stormwater management, etc. Bill Hill mentioned that the Selectboard said to "go for it," which he interprets to mean that we should get as much information as possible. There is no specific end goal, just the need for more information and facts, and to report back to the Selectboard. Carol said that we would need to hold a public meeting as soon as we have something to share. We can work on getting facts over the next couple of weeks. People will have a lot of questions

such as what the VRC can offer, what they need from us, and what we have so far that we can give to them. Lori noted that Ron has alluded to bringing the public along with us, but that's where things have fallen apart in the past. In dealing with other towns/projects, what are good ways to bring the public along when we can't answer many questions right now? Ron responded that within a community there are projects defined as community goals. These are put into the town plan and approved. Westford has goals in the Town Plan, and we should look back at this. There is mention of enhancing the Village Center. We are on good footing based on current documents. Westford has strong zoning and a strong town plan. There is lots of information about the 1705 project. The whole project was almost ready to go. We need to look back at 1705 information, talk to the VRC, and obtain information from Tudhope. We are way ahead of where the community needs to be brought along, as we already have these documents. The new information for 2024 will be a refresher. What's new/what's changed/what's the same. Lori said that it is quite a different project now. It had been about housing but now we are not talking about housing, we are talking about septic capacity, possibly for the existing house. It is unlikely we will have the ability to do a housing project. Holly and Carol will work toward a Selectboard presentation by the VRC. Carol will reach out to Erin Devries and cc Holly.

Parcel Investigations Update:

Holly Delisle reported that she heard back from David Tudhope. He was hesitant, saying that he doesn't expect to find much more capacity than what he has already found. He will bring in his associate Peter Mazurak (engineer). They will walk around the site and explore other locations for a possible additional mound system. 1,200gpd was given as maximum capacity demand for the Town Office and Library. The biggest concern is that if he finds that much capacity, there is no way the existing structure can remain residential if the Town Office and Library use the available capacity. Pretreatment is probably the best option. Tudhope has said that he can find 650gpd for a traditional system. He can work to get permits if the capacity is reasonable. Holly will send Tudhope the Town Office plans and any other information/reference documents. Jeremy Berger asked if the Town buys the property, could the house still be available as a house? Holly replied that it all depends on capacity. It is possible that the residential structure could be renovated for another use. Wastewater could cover all 3 structures or just the 2. Martha asked what's involved with pretreatment? Ron responded that pretreatment is the in-between stage where you have various engineering mechanisms (filters, UV treatment, a second tank, etc.) to further clear the wastewater before it reaches the disposal field. These are typically costly systems that increase disposal capacity. We can't do a best-fix on this property. That would only qualify for something to maintain the existing residential structure. A best-fix keeps a certain amount of capacity, but can't expand. Usually, a much less capacity system allows a best-fix. Carol mentioned that it was once suggested that the house could be renovated into offices. There could be the potential to keep the house. It also has the potential to be on the list of registered historic places.

Summaries on other parcels are paused due to lack of funding.

Martha Heath thought that maybe we should do another Front Porch Forum post to say that the 1705 property is back on the table and that the Selectboard has not approved moving forward with any other properties at this time. We should keep the community up to speed. Should we mention the Vermont River Conservancy at this time? If we wait too long, too much will happen.

Lori Johnson observed that there is information on the website that is now dated. For example, there is information from the old 1705 project (2021). The community might think it is current. How long do we keep information up? Should it be archived? What if a certain committee is no longer active? Holly Delisle said it is possible to label prior documents vs. current documents. Some items are eventually archived. Lori will send a list of outdated information to Holly.

Discuss Future Meeting Schedule:

The WAC now has a different information flow, which is a little slower. There is no longer the pressure of grant timelines. Should weekly meetings continue? Carol wants to schedule next week's meeting in case Erin Devries or Tudhope has information for us. 5/7/24 will be a continuation of weekly meetings or the beginning of 1st/3rd Tuesday of the month schedule.

Task Assignments:

Holly Delisle will post Bruce Douglas' letter on the website, contact the PC to see if they have another representative to replace George Lamphere, send draft minutes to everyone, work with Carol to contact the VRC, start a draft FPF post, and add the review of the WAC mission statement to the next SB agenda.

Bill Hill will update the matrix and post it to the website.

Ron Rodjenski noted that we are getting into a mission statement change as we are no longer exploring alternatives.

Holly agreed that it could be a good time to review the mission statement at the next SB meeting, so we have better guidance.

Jeremy Berger wondered if a SB member will join the WAC. Holly will remind them again.

Next meeting: May 7, 2024

Adjourn: 3:52pm