

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
WASTEWATER ALTERNATIVES COMMITTEE
MINUTES FOR May 7, 2024 MEETING**

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

Members Absent: Bill Hill

Also Present: Mark Letorney (Planning Commission), Maura O'Brien, Maureen Wilcox

Meeting Began: 3:00pm

Public Comment/Items Not on Agenda: None

Review and approve minutes of 4/30/24:

Martha Heath motioned to approve all meeting minutes up to and including April 22, 2024.

Carol Winfield seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion:

Parcel Investigations Update:

Holly Delisle reported that she spoke with David Tudhope yesterday. He told her that he hasn't coordinated with a second engineer yet. He asked about the timeline and was told ASAP. Tudhope had nothing new to report, except the fact that he's working to nail down a date to meet with another engineer. Ron Rodjenski restated that no other parcels are being investigated.

River Conservancy Update:

Carol Winfield reported that she and Holly will be meeting with Erin Devries from the Vermont River Conservancy (VRC) tomorrow. They hope to discuss what the VRC can offer to the Town and what they need from us. The VRC will be invited to an upcoming Selectboard meeting and/or WAC meeting. An update will be given at the upcoming Selectboard meeting on Thursday. Carol said that we will need to know the next step that the Selectboard would like to take, and that we need a public hearing ASAP. We need enough information to be able to answer questions at public meeting. Ron reiterated that clarification from the Selectboard is needed. A Selectboard agenda item for Thursday is to review the current mission statement. The Selectboard may choose to make a change to the WAC mission.

Mark Letorney was present and had some more details about the contamination on the 1705 property. He recently met with engineers from LE Engineering. Contamination is limited to where the tanks were located. There doesn't seem to be a spread of contamination as the soils are too heavy. A corrective action plan (CAP) is directly dependent on the site plan. It is recommended that soil does not leave the site, that it be used against a retaining wall or buried under top soil. Surface prep will be needed, the surface is currently about 3 feet below grade.

Review and approve FPF Post Draft:

Holly read the draft post aloud. A few minor edits were suggested by the committee. Holly will post it for the next issue of FPF.

Task Assignments:

Holly Delisle will post to Front Porch Forum.

No other tasks currently. The WAC is waiting for direction from the Selectboard.

Lori Johnson wanted to discuss the mission statement. This is a Selectboard agenda item, as there are currently no more alternatives to explore.

Martha Heath said that it is her opinion that it is a Selectboard responsibility now, if the needed capacity is there.

Carol Winfield thinks that the Selectboard has multiple other issues and will likely want a committee to work on this project. They may redesign the mission, but Carol feels we are not at the point of dissolving the committee yet. The Selectboard may want to redesignate a committee to work on 1705.

Ron Rodjenski stated that the Selectboard needs to decide to revise the mission statement. It is possible they will assign a whole new committee. They may dissolve or pause this committee's work.

Martha commented that the Selectboard expanded to 5 members specifically to have time to take on more work.

Holly and Ron will decide on Friday whether to schedule a meeting for 5/14/24.

Maura O'Brien asked where the Planning Commission comes into this work. If the WAC mission changes, a logical committee to take this work on is the Planning Commission. Maura agrees that with the expansion of the Selectboard, those members should also be working on it. She would like clarification about why the PC is sitting on the sidelines when this seems to be a PC task.

Holly said that the Selectboard can't tell the Planning Commission what projects to take on. The Planning Commission working with the Selectboard could take on a project if the Selectboard wants help and the Planning Commission decides to work on it.

Ron restated that we will be getting clarification on Thursday. The Selectboard originally made the decision to form this committee to report to the Planning Commission and Selectboard. Sometimes the PC brings forward projects from the Town Plan, and at some point, passes it off for implementation. The PC did bring forward the 1705 Project and the VRC almost through conclusion. The Selectboard signs agreements and has control over money. The transfer of process is not clear in Westford. We are more at implementation rather than planning.

Maura O'Brien asked, if we are at the implementation phase, whose job is it to do that? Ron answered that implementation is ultimately a Selectboard task to complete. As far as project management goes, sometimes the PC comes back in because the project includes public input. It has not yet been determined who will take on certain tasks. It makes sense for the Town Administrator to work with an engineer. If we start over completely, that is a Planning Commission job. What does the town as a whole want to do about 1705? The Westford Planning Commission likes to create and complete projects. At the end of a project, it should switch to the Selectboard level. It was unusual that the Selectboard did not take a position in November. The Selectboard must make decisions and assign tasks.

It is Maura O'Brien's opinion that the WAC has done their job. Ron agreed that the mission statement is no longer correct.

Martha Heath asked how far should this go before we know whether the capacity exists at 1705 to meet the needs of the Town Office & library? This is a question for the Selectboard. Are we moving too fast by bringing in the VRC if we don't know the answer? Is this an important property for the town regardless of wastewater capacity? What are the other possibilities? Who does the work?

Ron said that Planning Commission duties under state law are very broad. He asked Mark Letorney what does the Planning Commission normally do, or what do they envision for 1705? Mark replied that the PC serves at the Selectboard's request. The first step would be an engineering service agreement and to put the project out for quotation for a firm to be the general contractor for constructing the CAP or other aspects. This is a multi-phased project with several layers of complexity. Several issues are important to the town, including stormwater management, brownfields mitigation, what to do with the existing residential structure on the property, whether to expand or relocate the Town Office, etc. The Planning Commission has tremendous experience working with engineers and funding mechanisms for all

agencies involved. Because this site is in the Flood Hazard Overlay and Water Resource Overlay, every agency possible will be involved. Capacity investigation has already been done by the Planning Commission.

Ron noted that the PC has followed a linear path, doing 100% of the work. This could be partially since the Selectboard had only 3 members, and things may change with the 5-member board. Mark stated that the PC always requested that a Selectboard member be present, but it didn't often happen.

Carol Winfield wanted to confirm that the PC knows the current septic capacity. Mark said yes, according to the engineers. Carol remembered that the report said there is no capacity. Mark clarified that the PC is bound by the implementation section of the Town Plan, which has for a long time called for community wastewater. Engineers have consistently noted the high water tables (approx. 18" below the yard) and the location within the Water Resource Overlay. The best action is to completely take wastewater out of the low-lying common area with unsuitable soils to mitigate surface waters. To look at 1705 in a constructive manner in terms of an immediate wastewater solution for public buildings is not suitable. The soils are marginal at best. The only suitable soils are located on the slope of the area planned for river access. Ron said that Tudhope's evaluation will clear this up. The Selectboard needs to ensure that there is a partnering for the implementation phase.

Next meeting: TBD

Adjourn: 3:53pm