

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES FOR APRIL 15, 2024 MEETING
APPROVED ON June 17, 2024**

Commissioners Present: Mo Reilly (filling in as chair), George Lamphere via Zoom, Gordon Gebauer, Ian Gehlbach, Mark Letorney.

Commissioners Absent: None

Also Present: Harmony Cism (Planning Assistant), Susan Larson (Minute Clerk), Kaleb Aiken, Deb Jorschick (Selectboard Member), Lori Johnson, Maura O'Brien, Barb Peck, Sue Roediger, Sheila Franz, Dave Gauthier, Erin Panattu, Basil Panattu, Carol Winfield.

The meeting was called to order at **6:30 p.m.** It was held in person and via Zoom.

PUBLIC HEARING FOR PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE WESTFORD LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Mo Reilly read aloud the rules of procedures for the public hearing and the warning of the public hearing,

The proposed amendments are in Part 3, Chapter 320, Section 326, and include:

- Add internally illuminated signage for commercial properties.
- Maximum square footage and quantity.
- Prohibition of movement, flashing, blinking, etc.
- Prohibition of branded product advertisement.
- Illumination limited to business hours.

Mo asked if there were any conflicts of interest. There were none.

Harmony said that Ron Rodjenski, project manager with Stone Shore Municipal Consulting, LLC, suggested adding instructions for how to measure the signs to ensure consistency.

Public comments were invited. Barb Peck and Kaleb Aiken voiced support.

Harmony will edit the draft to 1 - add that the rules are specifically for commercial properties; and 2 - add a "how-to-measure" guide to ensure consistency.

Mark Letorney motioned that the Planning Commission advance the revised draft of Westford's Land Use and Development Regulations for Chapter 320, Section 326 to the Selectboard. Mo seconded. The motion passed 5 - 0.

Mo Reilly closed the meeting by stating it is the final public hearing on the matter.

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA

None.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD (ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA)

None.

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 18, 2024, PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Harmony said that Lori Johnson requested “long-term resident” be removed from her planning commission candidate section in the minutes because she reports not saying that. George Lamphere motioned to accept the minutes as revised. Mo Reilly seconded. The motion carried 5 - 0.

REORGANIZATION

After a brief discussion, Ian Gehlbach motioned that the Planning Commission keep the chair (George Lamphere), vice chair (Mo Reilly), and clerk (Mark Letorney) positions the same for this term. Gordon Gebauer seconded. The motion passed 5 - 0.

MEETING RULES OF PROCEDURE AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

Harmony informed the commissioners that every year the rules of procedure need to be reapproved and signed. Mo Reilly motioned to accept the Planning Commission Meeting Rules of Procedure and Conflict of Interest Policy as written. Gordon Gebauer seconded. The motion passed 5 - 0. The commissioners present signed the document. George will come into the office by May 1 to add his signature.

WASTEWATER UPDATE

Mo Reilly reported that at its last meeting the Selectboard voted to not include Maple Shade as an alternative solution to Westford’s wastewater problem (vote was 3 to 2) and voted to return the grant funds back to the state for the Maple Shade Project (vote was 3 to 2). Mo thanked the commissioners for their hard work on the project. “It’s not the end of the wastewater conversation, but it’s going to be different,” she said.

George Lamphere wondered if the Selectboard knew to notify all the members of the funding stack – the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Community Recovery and Revitalization Program (CRRCP), and the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC).

Selectboard member Deb Jorschick said that it was her understanding that Town Administrator Holly Delisle will notify all grant funders. Deb will double check with Holly for the Planning Commission.

Harmony said there was one other wastewater related item. In an email Ron Rodjenski informed her that there is an annual fee to keep the “Westford’s Future” website up and running. The expiration of services date is July 24, 2024. Harmony asked if the Planning Commission wanted to renew the contract. Mo asked if it was part of the Planning Commission budget. Harmony will ask Ron if it is.

Barb Peck asked who is running the “Westford’s Future” website, who is paying for its hosting, and who is the website hosting company? Mo said the Planning Commission would get back to Barb with this information.

George said the information on the “Westford’s Future” website is now being replaced by what the Wastewater Alternatives Committee (WAC) is doing. He requested that Harmony ask Holly if the information on the “Westford’s Future” website can be archived on the town’s website, to preserve the information without causing confusion with WAC’s new information.

MOBILE FOOD VENDOR ORDINANCE

Harmony provided an update on the proposed changes to the Mobile Food Vendor Ordinance, reporting that the Selectboard made one edit, reducing the fee from \$250 to \$200. The town attorney is reviewing the revised

ordinance and will get back to Harmony by the end of the month. It will then go to the Selectboard for final approval.

FEE SCHEDULE

Harmony said that at the last meeting the Planning Commission asked if the town were to reduce the fee for accessory structures to .30 cents per square-foot, how much would the principal structure fee need to be raised to make up that difference in revenue. She reported it would need to be raised by .10 cents a square foot. The fees would then be .30 cents a square foot for accessory structures and .60 cents a square foot for principal structures.

George Lamphere motioned that the Planning Commission approve the Fee Schedule as amended as Harmony described it, and submit it to the Selectboard with a memo highlighting the changes. Mo Reilly seconded. The motion passed 5 - 0. Harmony will draft the memo and send it to the Planning Commission for their final approval.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dave Gauthier commented on the Maple Shade wastewater project. "If it's over, it's over," he said.

CORRESPONDENCE

1 – Mo Reilly said the questions in a letter from Vicky Ross about the Maple Shade Wastewater Project are a moot point since the Selectboard voted in their April 11 meeting to return the grant money and halt the project.

2 - The Fairfax Planning Commission sent notice of a public hearing on April 22 for proposed amendments to the Fairfax Development Regulations. Harmony has not reviewed the proposed amendments to see if any changes will affect Westford. Harmony asked if any Planning Commission members might want to attend that meeting. Mark Letorney said Westford and Fairfax have very different priorities.

3 - The Vermont Tree Planting Program is accepting applications for tree-planting proposals. The Planning Commission directed Harmony to share the information with the Selectboard, the Recreation Department, the Town Common Committee, and the Conservation Commission.

4 - The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission is seeking municipal representatives to serve on the Winooski River Basin Water Quality Council. Harmony said a small section of Westford is included in the Winooski River Basin. George Lamphere asked Harmony to talk to Town Administrator Holly Delisle about this and let the Selectboard appoint someone if interested.

SELECTBOARD MEETINGS

- March 28 and April 11 Selectboard Meetings (Summary)

Mo Reilly summarized the meetings, telling the other commissioners that the wastewater discussions were the only parts relevant to the committee. "It's pretty clear what their intentions and actions are, and I have nothing else to add at this time," said George Lamphere.

- April 25 and May Selectboard Meetings (Prep)

The Planning Commission has nothing to add to the upcoming Selectboard meeting agendas.

2024 WORK PLAN

Harmony suggested that since the Fee Schedule and Mobile Food Vendor Ordinance revisions are near completion the Planning Commission might begin work on major renovations to the Town Plan and the Land Use and Development Regulations.

George Lamphere suggested the Planning Commission look for grant funding to help support a survey to ascertain “what people are thinking about different aspects of development regulations.” George said the Planning Commission should “figure out how to get public input on the process” before diving into it.

Barb Peck agreed with George, and suggested the survey be compiled by “an outside neutral entity” to help avoid finger pointing in any direction. She also suggested getting public input on what kind of survey to create.

Mark Letorney said that in his experience conversational driven community outreaches are more productive in gathering information than surveys. He said it’s hard to gauge community response from formulated questions which “don’t always bring out what’s foremost on community members’ minds.” Barb Peck disagreed, based on the surveys the town has done before, she said.

Maura O’Brien compared surveys and community outreach from her experience. “A more open-ended format (like community outreach) produces a lot of information,” she said. “Once that information is gathered and there are that sort of choices, then surveys can be appropriate.”

Sheila Franz said that getting a lot of input from the get-go is vital to a successful process.

Lori Johnson urged the Planning Commission to look for different ways to engage people, to meet them where they are most comfortable giving input.

George Lamphere suggested the discussion at the next Planning Commission meeting begin with the Town Plan so that the commissioners would “know better what to focus on in the Land Use and Development Regulations. It seems like the Town Plan might drive the regulations,” he said. He wants to know what parts of the Town Plan are most important to people.

Harmony will add to the next Planning Commission agenda a discussion of the Town Plan, consideration of the role of the Selectboard and other groups in reviewing the town plan, and how to reach out to the community for their input.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - PERSONNEL

Gordon Gebauer motioned that the Planning Commission move into Executive Session to discuss personnel. Mark Letorney seconded. The motion passed 5 - 0.

The Planning Commission exited Executive Session at 8:38 p.m. No decisions were made.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.