

**Special Selectboard &
Planning Commission Meeting
June 24, 2024
Draft Minutes**

Present: Holly Delisle (Town Administrator), Maria Barden (Minute Taker), Bill Cleary (Selectboard Chair), Deb Jorschick (Selectboard), Casey Mathieu (Selectboard), Pat Haller (Selectboard), George Lamphere (Planning Commission Chair), Mark Letorney (Planning Commission), Mo Reilly (Planning Commission), Ian Gehlbach (Planning Commission), Gordon Gebauer (Planning Commission)

Guests: Harmony Cism Ron Rodjenski, Carol Winfield, Lori Johnson, Vicky Ross, Barb Peck, Maureen Wilcox, Sheila Franz, Joe Franz, Rebecca Devanon, Kim Guidry, Ira Allen, Andrea Letorney

Meeting Began at-Meeting was called to order at 6:15pm. The meeting was held in person and via zoom.

Changes to Agenda

No changes to the agenda.

Public Comment

No Public Comment.

Joint Working Meeting:

- **Discussion:** B. Cleary discusses the reason the meeting was called tonight; this is a joint working meeting between the SB and PC. The SB would like to mend the relationship with the PC and move forward while working together.
- **1705 Information:**
- **H. Delisle** discusses 1705, she sent some relevant studies that apply to 1705. This meeting is for the SB and PC to discuss what they are thinking about doing with 1705.
- **B. Cleary** is worried that the information done previously by the PC may be a little dated and might not be relevant anymore.
- **M. Letorney** is glad the SB is showing interest in this project, he thinks it would be beneficial for the Town to explore this property. He discusses some of the outreach they've done for this property in the past: One issue a lot of residents had was the post office moving away from the town center. Mark says one of their priorities was to keep the town office in the town center. Mark discusses the housing component to advance the project with grants. They approached VRC, who facilitates river conservation and preservation, but they are not a funding source. It was a challenge working with Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity since Westford's scale is much smaller, and the focus is on revitalization on the common. They want owners on the common to use their property the same way people in the rest of town can do. The revitalization project was scaled down for Westford, but the funding fell through, and the project stalled. What they learned was that wastewater was the foundation of any revitalization of the common. The challenge he sees now is for the Town to make 1705 work with limited wastewater. He sees it as an asset to the town with the potential of having more value in the future, he doesn't want it to be something the town regrets purchasing and thinks it's critical to figure out something for the town office with the limited capacity.

- **P. Haller** has some questions regarding the contaminated soil on site when Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity was looking at the property. He is curious what they had to say regarding digging in that space as far as construction?
- **G. Lamphere** clarifies CAP standing for corrective action plan, he discusses that each use for the property has a different CAP; The PC hadn't gotten that far.
- **M. Letorney** says some of the things we are dealing with at 1705 are VOC's (volatile organic compounds), some POH's (A polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon), but most of the pollution had to do with old storage tanks that were on the property. Angela (engineer) and her team drilled through the foundation of the garage and home into the soils and saw there was no real contamination there. They were told the site was very suitable for housing and no further soil removal was necessary. He feels there would be no issue putting a town office building there for these reasons. They would need a civil engineering team to do a site plan, the CAP is integrated with the site plan and to approve the CAP they need to know what is being done with the property.
- **B. Cleary** hopes moving forward, if the property is purchased, that the PC will be willing to take the SB's lead on projects for that property such as the archaeological component. His question is, will the PC be willing to work on projects like that?
- **G. Lamphere's** opinion is that there needs to be a master plan. He thinks the SB would be lead on the project and would hire an engineering firm and develop the master plan, they would then reach out to whatever organization (PC included) for tasks they have on the project. George asks if with the purchase of the property will there be a bond vote as a contingency?
- **B. Cleary** says a bond vote is not a contingency. He says most of these negotiations are in executive session. Because some of it is being done behind closed doors, they can't talk about it 100%. He doesn't think there will need to be a bond vote on it, that they might be able to accomplish this as a public hearing with funds the town already has at its disposal.
- **G. Lamphere** discusses taking on a property that has contamination, there is a lot of potential for the town, river access, etc. There is a stormwater and drainage issue on the common and contaminated wells around the common. He thinks the town needs to be careful about how compartmentalized we get on these individual issues.
- **M. Reilly** adds to George's point and states there are many parts and complexities to this project. Mo feels there is not enough community support to successfully lead this. Mo thinks a working subcommittee or more working meetings with the SB would be beneficial so that it can be a more collaborative effort. She feels there is not enough trust in the PC and would like a more active engagement with the community and SB.
- **B. Cleary** would like to clarify that they won't delegate tasks to the PC without supporting and their efforts. He feels there are a lot of people in town that do support the PC and thinks these types of meetings are beneficial to bring the committees and town together.
- **M. Letorney** discusses being a volunteer for town for many years and has served a lot of different SBs. He feels the last SB didn't take leadership for the community revitalization project and it became the PC's issue. He felt the issue got out of hand amongst residents and boards and felt having the SB stay neutral made it difficult for the project to succeed.
- **D. Jorschick** agrees that for tasks to be delegated properly we need some sort of plan and direction towards which they are working. Deb discusses wanting to see the PC continue being a part of the SB meetings moving forward so they can continue working together in a friendly manner.

- **M. Letorney** would like to propose the SB form a special committee with members of the SB and PC along with qualified professionals in town so they can create a vision of the big picture and then break down the steps on how to get there. He is worried that doing this in a linear fashion will cost the town a lot more money. He really believes this project needs to be SB driven to move forward.
- **P. Haller** states that it is SB driven. A 5-0 vote of the SB agreed this property was important to the town.
- **G. Lamphere** discusses the need to have a site plan before archeology. He thinks assigning tasks needs to be looked at in a master plan. He would like to know what the SB's view is for objectives that they want to achieve including creating a master plan so they can move forward with tasks.
- **B. Cleary** discusses the River Conservancy and having a site plan already for river access. **M. Letorney** says that river access needs to be handicap accessible, he thinks they should invite VRC and speak to them to see how realistic funding would be for that project. **G. Lamphere** adds that they were told by the VRC that they don't have funding, they need to get money elsewhere which is where the VT Housing and Conservation Board comes in.
- **M. Reilly** would like to know what the capacity needed is, did this number come from an engineer? These are questions we need to figure to be able to move forward.
- **B. Cleary** wants to get the public engagement rolling and believes that purchasing the property doesn't necessarily mean we need to have a plan from the get-go, once purchased by the town that is when we make decisions.

Public Questions/Comments

- **V. Ross** discusses Bill's previous comments about not needing a bond vote, she is concerned about not having a referendum vote so the public can be involved. **B. Cleary** says he's just one member of the SB, so they need to discuss it but would like to at least have a public hearing about the matter. He does not know the next steps and will defer to other SB members. **P. Haller** says they've discussed this, they want to be in a strong position to purchase this property, this is why they would use current funds rather than go to a bond vote to hopefully reduce the number of contingencies upon their offer.
- **B. Peck** feels the PC is lamenting about Maple Shade being voted down. She discusses a comment made about the Spiller property and feels there is a re-write of history happening.
- **R. DaVanon** discusses Bill asking the PC for specifics while Deb asking for persuasion. She feels like these are two very different things that are being asked for and wants some clarity on what the SB is looking for from the PC. **D. Jorschick** discusses looking for a vision that is collaborative from the two groups, she says when there is a difference of opinion, she'd like it to be discussed so she can listen and understand what the PC is presenting and possibly be persuaded or come up with a different option. **B. Cleary** says they inherited the wastewater project, and he didn't want to restrict the PC, but didn't feel he was an advocate for the project himself.
- **P. Haller** feels this is a very healthy conversation, he wants them to move on and work together, he feels it's important to discuss the previous issues so they can learn from the past.
- **L. Johnson** thinks that it may not always be beneficial to have a master plan for a project like this because it might not allow for the flexibility and change that the town goes through.
- **C. Winfield** seconds what Barb said and feels fingers are being pointed. She believes that at the end of the day someone will win, and someone will lose. **D. Jorschick** would rather discuss collaborating instead of saying "win and lose" so we can come to an agreement together.

- **S. Franz** would like to remind people that the SB is elected, and the PC works at the direction of the SB. She thinks it's great that they are trying to reestablish the relationship between boards and move forward but thinks the SB should be the ones setting the directions.
- **R. DaVanon** would like to make sure that wastewater stays at the forefront of everyone's minds. She discusses the failed system at her home and says she knows of one other landowner whose system is failing. **B. Cleary** says understands the town will have restraints as well. He also discusses authorizing Holly and the Town attorney to look at other properties for capacity and the option to reactivate WAC in the fall.
- **G. Lamphere** discusses a plan being in motion to purchase the property and thinks if the boards can all get behind that linear task and make themselves available to answer questions it would be beneficial to the town. He thinks we should set aside all questions for now because although they must be answered, answering them now will complicate the position in purchasing the property.
- **G. Gebauer** states that although people think the PC has not let go of the "no" vote regarding Maple Shade, he has let that go and is instead upset about people claiming the PC was lying, and the vicious comments that were made about them.
- **C. Mathieu** thinks a master plan or community engagement would be beneficial to this project; He thinks the PC is knowledgeable, and as a new SB member he wants to work with the PC and hopes they can all move forward together.
- **B. Cleary** acknowledges the PC feelings of resident's distrust in them. He thinks there is a large part of the community who does trust the PC and thinks a town-wide survey would be beneficial to regain the trust amongst the community and help them move forward with the 1705 project.
- **G. Lamphere** discusses revision of the town plan and how it's a very transparent process. He discusses the implementation plan being reviewed by all parties and the importance of the SB understanding that.
- **M. Letorney** believes the two boards should have a next step meeting to help reveal the scope of work and what they can take on.
- **G. Lamphere** thinks a survey is a great idea and might be something we need outside help with. Once we see the results of a survey, we need to take those answers and use them as a guide.
- **R. DaVanon** asks if we can get a consultant for the survey that has no skin in the game so that all the questions remain unbiased.
- **B. Cleary** asks **R. Rodjenski** if there is an independent organization that provides that service. Ron discusses there being a few nonprofits that specifically help with such things. He thinks it's very much a skill that you spend hours crafting and phrasing the questions. Do you offer choices or write-ins? He believes it's not a small project and to get the results you want you have a lot of work to do beforehand.
- **B. Peck** would like to know what the pleasure of the SB and PC is regarding pursuing the purchase of 1705.
- **B. Cleary** recalls the SB being on board with purchasing the property, **D. Jorschick** thinks it sounds like the PC is on board. **G. Lamphere** wants to stay neutral and not say anything that will help or hurt the town's chances of purchasing the property.
- **S. Franz** thinks bringing some interested parties (residents) into the vetting process of survey questions would be helpful. She thinks that Westford might have some unique ideas on what works for the town that an independent party might not take into consideration.

Planning and Priority Alignment:

- **P. Haler** personally thinks a survey could be helpful for moving forward. He agrees with George that if we want to purchase 1705, we might not get the survey out before then but we could look

at a survey down the line to see what is important to the community. He thinks that it would be important for the SB to look at the implementation plan per the PCs suggestion.

- **G. Lamphere** is happy to have the two boards sit down together and discuss the implementation plan. Maybe a simple 5 question survey about the town plan, land use and development regulations along with the implementation plan would be beneficial to guide a discussion on where the focus should be.
- **B. Cleary** doesn't think they are at a point where they have directions to give the PC yet. **G. Lamphere** is wondering if this is a new operating procedure that the SB is implementing. He says the PC has responsibility for certain things in town and those go through the SB but state statute says the PC is responsible for those things. In the past the PC has not been tasked with specific things the way the SB is doing now. **D. Jorschick** doesn't think they'll be giving the PC weedy tasks but would like their help and would like to understand the town plan and complexities better with the help of the PC. **B. Cleary** feels the more meetings they have the better the relationship between the two boards will be. **Pat** and **Bill** would like to support each other rather than rule and tell the PC what to do.
- **H. Delisle** discusses possibly doing a quarterly check-in amongst the boards.
- **B. Cleary** thinks this meeting was important regardless of the work they got done, he thinks it is a positive step forward for the boards.
- **P. Haller** offers to read the implementation plan and bring a summary back to the rest of the SB.
- **G. Gebauer** thanks the SB for having the meeting to get started on the process or moving forward.

Meeting Adjourned at-8:23pm

Respectfully submitted,

Maria Barden, Minute Clerk

Bill Cleary, Selectboard Chair

ADOPTED THIS _____ TH DAY OF JULY 2024.

WESTFORD SELECTBOARD

William Cleary, Chair

Patrick Haller

Casey Mathieu

Deb Sawyer Jorschick

Wendy Doane

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