

**TOWN OF WESTFORD  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES FOR July 15, 2024, MEETING  
APPROVED ON \*\*\*\*\*, 2024.**

**Commissioners Present:** George Lamphere (chair) Gordon Gebauer, Ian Gehlbach, Mo Reilly

**Commissioners Absent:** None

**Also Present:** Harmony Cism (Planning Assistant), Callie Hamdy (Minutes Clerk), Lori Johnson, Maureen Wilcox, Kim Guidry, Paul Birnholz, Carol Winfield, Barb Peck, Ira Allen, Max Tyler

**Meeting began at 6:30pm**

**Amendments to Agenda** - *No amendments to the agenda.*

**Citizens to be Heard – Items not on agenda** - *No citizens to be heard.*

**Minutes of the June 17, 2024 Meeting**

**G. Gebauer** made a motion to approve the June 17<sup>th</sup> Minutes.

**I. Gehlbach** seconded; motion passed 4-0.

**DRB Interim Bylaw**

The Planning Commission wanted to look at how to improve the DRB Interim Bylaws for Figure 2-3 of the Regulations. They can draft the new language and the Selectboard would have to have a public hearing. If everything goes well the new point system will go into effect and be extended. The Commission discussed Number 3, Access. Number 5 was also discussed. Regarding buildings and the point system this was an issue because a lot of new subdivisions do not have their building plans ready when they are doing the subdivision. They could reduce the number of points house plans are worth or the total number of points necessary or include sample or example house plans. There is no way of saying that is the house that would be built five years down the road. The last section was parking which could be fixed by adding “licensed civil engineer” to that section.

**G. Lamphere** asked what the scenario looked like if we took out Number 5?

**H. Cism** explained that we would have to reduce the number of points to be met if that was removed. The current Number 5 deals with making sure buildings look a certain way and preserves Westford’s rural character. The issue with the Swansong development is they do not have house plans yet.

**G. Lamphere** thought we could say if they have no house plans they get a certain number of points etc., but it would have to be house plans that are not firm. It would have to be renditions or preliminary.

**G. Gebauer** suspects the other option is to reduce the number of points needed by 1 or 2 points. Some developments are right on the cusp, so we either add points or delete points. It is hard to change Number 5 other than giving a bonus point. One of the other options is to give another category for when there are no house plans and how they can gain points through the process when there are no house plans.

**I. Gehlbach** thinks if we are looking at the interim bylaw reducing the points makes sense, but for the long term adjusting the language would be the way to go.

**G. Gebauer** thought of getting **Matt Wamsganz**, DRB Chair’s, perspective on the matter.

**G. Lamphere** asked if it was just points what would be scale it to? Would we reduce that and go 24-40 points needed?

**G. Gebauer** got the sense that, based on his conversation with **M. Wamsganz**, 1 or 2 points is all that is needed to help a lot of developments get across that threshold. He agrees with Ian that we maybe adjust the language

because he thinks there's good value in trying to encourage how houses are situated from a planning perspective. If people can meet that they should get those points. Perhaps we should figure out an option for when they do not have any house plans.

**H. Cism** thinks the new subdivision had 25 points out of the minimum 27 at their preliminary so reducing the total number of points would make that much easier. This was also the case for conditional use hearing recently. A reduction in minimum points would help both. She thinks the addition of a new category is an entirely different situation.

**I. Gehlbach** thinks if the issue is the designs than we have to trust they are working in good faith, the category for house design should be a bonus not a hinderance.

**G. Gebauer** thinks if we move forward making more permanent changes, we should be cautious. If we reduce the minimum number of points it would be hard to raise it again. Changes should give the DRB the ability to assist those projects right on the cusp while discussing broader change.

**G. Lamphere** believes the longer term solution needs to be discussed and considered. In summary, the PC should go to **M. Wamsganz** with 25 being the minimum number of points. Where would we gain the two additional needed points?

**G. Gebauer** thinks with the top tier we need to lower that threshold. He thinks we could raise the points for some sections but raising the points for Number 5 does not cure the problem.

**G. Lamphere** felt this was enough to go to **M. Wamsganz** with.

**G. Gebauer** thinks the DRB sees the point system in practice while the PC only sees it in theory.

**H. Cism** will talk with **M. Wamsganz** and see if he approves, and have some new language drafted for the next meeting before the SB public hearing.

**B. Peck** is wondering if this is just for developments or is this point change for private property on Route 128 also?

**H. Cism** explained the points system is for everybody in the R5 District which is everybody along Route 128 and Route 15. It is for any conditional use and subdivisions occurring in that area.

**B. Peck** asked if it would apply to her if she wants to subdivide and build one additional house or is it only for PUDs?

**G. Gebauer** explained if you are subject to the regulations for now for one lot that does not change. If you are not subject to the regulations for one lot that will not change either. It is just the threshold for the point system for where those zoning regulations currently apply.

**H. Cism** explained that if one's project requires DRB review than this change would apply. If the interim bylaw is passed the reduced threshold to build a house will apply.

**B. Peck** understands this. Three years ago, she tried to get a permit in and could not make the point system. She could make the new minimum. She thought there were differences between developments and people subdividing their property to build a single house. If she subdivides and she wants to build one house, will the 25 points apply to her? They would.

**G. Lamphere** stated there is no question in his mind about there being another section in the regulations that applies to other zoning districts, and do we need to look at those points as well?

**H. Cism** explained that the R5 district is the only one that has a point system.

### **Planning Commission Resignation/Vacancy**

**G. Lamphere** expressed and extended his heartfelt gratitude and thanks to **M. Letorney** to his commitment and dedication for many years. **M. Letorney** has done a lot of things for the town, both on the PC and other boards. The PC will miss him. A lot of knowledge is lost with his resignation.

The PC has a note from the Town Administrator and there are three interested candidates for the open position. They will follow the process they did last time where the candidates will be invited to introduce themselves, ask questions to the PC, and tell the commission about themselves. The SB will be provided with those minutes and then make an appointment.

**G. Lamphere** does not know if there will be more candidates between now and the August meeting, but he suggests inviting all candidates to the August meeting. For those that are present who have applied, the next meeting is August 19, 2024.

### **Updates to Westford Land Use & Development Regulations**

We have a document that was started some time ago and been added to periodically. There are 21 items that they have thought they should look at based on feedback or questions or neighboring communities.

**G. Lamphere** does not know where we want to go with the list for now nor does he think the list is comprehensive at the moment.

**H. Cism** wanted to go over what sort of process the PC wanted to follow.

**G. Lamphere** explained the last one he was involved with was his first one. There was a lot of collaborative and collective effort that went into it during meetings, but in addition to that, Commission members would take ownership of a section and say they are going to do research to come back to the group with. He is not sure that is the most efficient way. As an example, they have investigated creating forest districts and that is a huge undertaking. He thinks it would involve reaching out to the Conservation Commission and other groups in town as well as the County Forester.

**G. Gebauer** wondered if there was a way to take the list and put in a corresponding version of the regulations that way it would give the commissioners a way to look at it on their own and wrap their heads around it again.

**I. Gelbach** thinks they should evaluate the list in front of them to see what the higher and lower priorities are and the work involved. They can pick easier ones off and then dig their heels in for longer items.

**G. Lamphere** thinks something like discussing cannabis retail has not been fully addressed and is a bit of a hot topic for some. He would not know if the community wants that or not. Unlike an airstrip, the responsible thing is to address it and put some sort of language that has some boundaries on it. He does not know where cannabis falls into that.

**G. Gebauer** asked if there is a way that **H. Cism** would be able to tell the PC which of these areas are more pressing to the DRB or landowners opposed to “investigate forest district” which would involve a huge change for parts of the town. He does not see that as important as a lot of others.

**H. Cism** can dig through some files and see if there is a citizen request for certain items to be on the list etc.

**G. Lamphere** thinks the forest district is significant and he thinks anybody that does not live in town but owns property in the rural forested areas would need to be contacted to get feedback from.

**G. Gebauer** explains it has been on the list of things to consider for a long time. The difficult thing is it encompasses most of the land in town. The practical thing is it would increase density, but most of the land in that area doesn't meet the zoning now.

**G. Lamphere** explained one of the questions might be: are there advantages to a landowner to have land in a forest district? That is something to explore. Gordon does not have a present recollection of how it has gotten on the list. He explained it is one of the categories that has been recommended as part of the town plan and we do not have understanding of the inventory of what we have. The town plan talks about natural resources and protecting them, recognizing them etc. To do that do we have to have a district?

**G. Gebauer** questioned if a Forest District was needed. He thinks it may involve setting up a side committee while the PC addresses more of the pressing issues.

**G. Lamphere** does not know what the commissioners think about from a task perspective, but he thinks maybe they can come back to the next meeting with their top five and top 10 of what they had been wanting to work on. Some are going to take more effort than others.

**H. Cism** will provide the commissioners with a list of the corresponding regulations.

**M. Reilly** thinks the forest district sounds like a very big undertaking so a committee that would think further about it seems like a good idea.

**B. Peck** explained the state this year has a new program that has to do with what a landowner can do with their property. There are some subsidies a landowner can have, but it will provide more work for the foresters. She

thinks a committee would be needed, but she thinks we should involve the state of Vermont, so we understand the new regulations surrounding forest land.

**Public Comment** - *No Public Comment*

**Correspondence**

**B. Peck, L. Johnson** both sent emails.

Cambridge Public Hearing Notice, they are updating part of their town plan.

**H. Cism** does not think anything will affect Westford.

CCRPC: They are planning to update their regional plan. This was mostly dealing with housing and how they are estimating what sort of development they are looking for.

**G. Lamphere** asked if we have a role in this to help educate our residents and property owners that CCRPC is doing this, and do they have a process and plan they are following?

**G. Gebauer** thought we could ask our CCRPC rep, Ben Bornstein, about this. He thinks we should notify the public, but how does it affect folks in Westford?

**I. Gehlbach** pointed out that the packet does have an engagement plan.

**G. Lamphere** thinks some of the regional planning documents and context gets fed to the towns and the county and we look to that for guidance and ideas. So, is there adequate amount of involvement from residents of Westford in this process? Or is that not the time or place?

**H. Cism** thought it was early for feedback. They have just barely changed the module. She thinks they are still figuring things out, but she can keep the Planning Commission updated.

**G. Lamphere** will have a conversation with Ben about this and bring the information to the next meeting.

**2024 Work Plan**

DRB Point system language changes.

Land Use Regulations list.

Planning Commission candidate introductions

Timeline for deeper dive on regulations

Next meetings – August 19<sup>th</sup>, September 16<sup>th</sup>

**Adjourn – Meeting Adjourned at 7:30pm**