

**TOWN OF WESTFORD**  
**DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD MINUTES**  
**Minutes for August 11, 2025**  
**Approved on September 8, 2025**

**Board Members Present:** Matt Wamsganz (Chair), Francois Ross (Vice-Chair), Bill Cleary, Peter Armata, Andrew Collier, Jesse Labreque

**Board Members Absent:** Dennis Angiono

**Also Present:** Harmony Cism (DRB Coordinator, Zoning Administrator), Callie Hamdy (Minute Clerk), Kirsten Tyler, Barb Peck, Joel Fay, Max Tyler, Will Dunkley, Ian Gehlbach, Casey Mathieu, Ben Bornstein, Kim Guidry, Lori Johnson

The meeting began at 7:00 pm

**Amendments to the Agenda**

There were no amendments to the agenda.

**Site Plan/Conditional Use Public Hearing** - Applicant: Westford Conservation Commission. Property Location: Misty Meadows Trails & Forest – Brookside Road (approx. 83.4 acres). Zoning Districts: Village, Rural 10, Water Resource Overlay, Flood Hazard Overlay. The proposal is a request for Conditional Use approval to construct a bridge on the Riverside North Trail within the Water Resource Overlay.

**Matt** asked any interested parties to affirm the oath and then read the oath out loud for the meeting. **Kirsten Tyler** and **Joel Fay** were present from the Conservation Commission (CC). **Joel** explained that they are proposing to use a partial grant which would re-route the existing Riverside North Trail away from a wet area. They have looked at multiple options for re-routing and decided to go further towards the river where there is a higher ridge. They are proposing a 22 ft x 3.5 ft bridge which will span the ridge and keep the structure away from the gully, so they are not causing any degradation. The CC had presented the board with plans and diagrams showing the bridge and the area. The river does back into the gully some, but most is for drainage for the wet spot. It would take an extreme flood to take out the bridge, but the area has not flooded to the CC's knowledge.

**Matt** went over the staff report. The applicant should explain if they are going to be cutting any vegetation. The CC explained there will be minimal cutting, saplings, and underbrush. No major trees will be touched. It is a 3.5 ft wide trail, and they are trying to minimize impact.

Regarding the state asking about Hydraulic Principals, **Francois** guessed they would want proof the bridge would not float away and thought perhaps the CC would have to be pouring concrete to keep the bridge in place in case of flooding. There was debate over whether the email from the state specified concrete or if it simply must be anchored. To Francois that meant concrete, although the specific language in the email was "anchor." **Joel** suggested it could be chained to some trees. **Peter** noted that the hydraulic principles were not about the anchoring, it is about water flowing through. They want to make sure the water is not restricted in the area. Bill noted they are not altering the channel, so he was fine with the current design and did not feel it impacted the hydraulic principals. Above Ground Development in Floodway was prohibited unless hydraulic analysis was made and has shown to not

increase flood level or risk to surrounding properties. They were not changing the ground at all so the board was not concerned, and ultimately the bridge would not be over the river so they did not feel it would restrict flow.

That was the end of the staff report presentation. The board determined that there was no need for a registered engineer, and they have state stuff to deal with. **Bill** thought it was ironic for the DRB to question the CC, as it is their purpose to do things correctly in regard to ecosystems, but they must treat the CC the same as a private applicant. After this is approved they will need to apply for a zoning permit and Harmony will send it to the state for final approval. The board asked the CC if the grant involved in a timeline. The CC would like to get started on the bridge this fall, but the grant is good until the middle of next summer.

**Barb Peck** thinks the idea of floating the bridge was a good idea. The river is changing course, and it is undermining the very little topsoil and gouging out a lot of sand. **Kirsten** noted that the bridge is currently sitting on solid ground in the plans. **Matt** noted as long as the state is happy with the chain idea that would work.

**Francois** motioned to close the hearing. **Andrew** seconded. Motion passed 6-0.

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

This was a conversation with the Planning Commission (PC) regarding the next round updates of the Land Use & Development Regulations. **Ian Gehlback**, **Max Tyler**, and **Will Dunkley** from the PC were present. This subject had begun when the various campgrounds in town were being added. **Max** would like the PC to better understand what the DRB's concerns regarding the existing regulations or lack thereof with campgrounds. They have done some research into this and there is confusion on the state level on the definition of a campground, when wastewater permits come into play, etc. If you allow camping on your property and have more than 3 sites, then you are by definition a campground at the state level which means you need a wastewater permit. **Harmony** had reached out to the state for clarification, we do not have a straight answer. **Max's** understanding is that this is a rule, but when it comes to the town, this seems like the kind of activity we would like to not obsessively restrict and seems like a good use of property for those who have the land to make it available. Is it better that we are vague and can take a situation as it comes? How might we change the regulations so that it is not a difficult process?

**Andrew** knows part of the DRB's trouble is that a campground is not clearly defined. They are trying to apply development regulations for regular residences etc. on to people trying to utilize the farmland, they are having trouble making that conditional use. The DRB was nervous about loosening restrictions for the campgrounds and have, say, a 7 house subdivision applicant argue that the same leniency should apply to their use of the land. One of the solutions the board had already done is put in a condition that the town would not be responsible if the property has a fire. **Bill** liked the vagueness, but the biggest obstacle with granting permission for the campgrounds is that our regulations are mandating that all state and local permits need to be in place, so if there are more than 3 campsites that means a wastewater permit, and the state is not allowing portlets to count. He feels the DRB's hands are tied at the state level.

**Harmony** clarified that we do have a definition of campground and campsite in the regulations. Section 300 is standards for specific uses and includes things like motor vehicle sales. The draft campground

standards she had written she was hoping would be added to this section. It is also noted that the DRB can waive the requirements for roads in this proposed section. We cannot waive the wastewater requirement however as that is a state permit. **Bill** asked if we could make not requiring all state and local permits a condition of getting a permit? **Max** noted the town attorney should be talked to about this. **Will** asked if Harmony is required to make sure anything she signs follows state laws? That was true, she needs to see the wastewater permit before she can give a zoning permit. **Will** believed Harmony said in the last PC meeting that portalet can be part of a wastewater permit, is that true? The state does give permits for portalet, for instance if there is a structure or use that uses a portalet for more than 27 days it must have a wastewater permit to allow it to be there. She is not sure if this applies for campgrounds.

**Max** thinks part of this becomes a definitional problem, but other things are clear. If you build road access in, if you have a fire pit, you are not a primitive campground. If they have any infrastructure at all it is no longer primitive by state definition. Neither of the campgrounds in town are primitive. Do we have to have road access to every site? He thinks centralized parking and hiking to the site is part of what people are looking for. He is not sure it is in Westford's best interest to make more specific regulations other than is it generally suited to the ambiance of Westford and the kind of usage of the property we would like to encourage, which is in his opinion a DRB conditional use. **Andrew** agreed but thinks the easiest proposed section is 308.C that notes the DRB can waive parts of section 308.B. Currently we do not have the language that allows this for campgrounds.

**Francois** noted that there were concerns about treating people equally. We did not want to have regulations for one and not for another, the board wanted consistency in how campgrounds were treated. **Matt** wanted to talk about vehicle camping vs campsites because the two campgrounds they have seen have dealt with places where they had little tent platforms etc. We have not dealt with anybody wanting to park 10 RVs on their property. **Max** noted that we already restrict RV parks, and the definitions are different at the state level. He did not think Westford was considering RVs as part of this. A person could bring an RV trailer and that discussion should be part of the DRB decision making process. **Peter** had concerns, mostly regarding what the definition of a camper is, if the road can sustain a camper, if the portalets are okay etc. People want to have a few campsites that they are charging money for. **Max** noted that this sounds like we need to guard against the RV park and have restrictions on different camping trailers, but no matter what rule we write, it will be wrong. We cannot write a rule for every condition and **Max** does not want to write that rule. He did think it was reasonable to restrict campgrounds to the R5 and R10 zoning districts, however.

**Will** guessed that most people in Westford would be on board with primitive camping as being allowed. What cannot happen right now based on our regulations is any primitive camping with 4 or more campsites without a wastewater permit. That renders it financially impossible. He thinks we should talk about that more before adding more regulations to the campground standards. **Ian** noted the state is putting a lot of landowners through rigorous standards, do we want ours to be as high? **Max** thought we would likely approve these sites if they got a wastewater permit. To him, the town should not get involved in that discussion, that is between the applicant and the state. If we do not think it is right we need to lobby our state representatives to change the law. He thinks it is fair to say that if they do not get the state wastewater permit they will not get a zoning permit.

**Matt** asked if the Pettingill Road and Whitsunday Road campgrounds each had their wastewater permits, both being both over 4 sites. Harmony noted the Pettingill one has 6 sites and the Whitsunday one has 3, so for the Whitsunday Lane one of the conditions of approval was when they are ready to build their 4<sup>th</sup> campsite they will need the wastewater permit before proceeding. **Matt** asked what Dan Strobridge of the Pettingill Road campground is doing? They were issued a warning of violation and have not met any of the conditions of their DRB approval. **Matt** does not see a way around the state regulations but would love to be able to grant these uses. **Max** would like us to deal with as issues arise. He would hate to imagine what might happen and draw up a bunch of regulations based on that. Reactive instead of proactive in this situation is preferable. What is the problem with waiting and seeing how it evolves? **Ian** felt more examples would be helpful, so we can only wait and see. Ultimately it is a state issue. **Will** was curious what if we did not regulate? What if we said people did not need a permit for that? He feels like we have enough other regulation that would prohibit a lot of the type of development people do not want to see. **Max** thought the town attorney would need to be talked to about that and felt the safest thing for the town to do is to ask the applicant to check with the state.

**Ben Bornstein was present** and wondered if there was anything the CCRPC had addressed regards to this? The board did not know. **Barb Peck** was present. She believes that the state wants regional control of regulations. Jamie Fidel had told her the towns are going to have to work this out and said there will have to be lawsuits to define phrases and words that are not defined in Act 181. They are not going to define it for anybody that asks. **Max** met with CCRPC on Act 181. He told them he did not want to have to be the one to explain Act 181. CCRPC is also learning themselves, they do not know exactly what things mean. He feels Barb's opinion about regional control is accurate.

**Andrew** asked if there were other suggestions the DRB had for the PC that were able to be implemented. The board discussed the restrictiveness of ledge outcropping regulations in town. Meanwhile, prime AG soils were controlled at the state level. The board discussed the Wetland Buffer, Westford is 50ft more restrictive than the state and with many lots are already so tight on where they can develop. It is almost impossible to build or do anything regarding. **Casey Mathieu** was present and noted that the extra 50ft was required years ago to get a certain type of federal grant, but he does not believe that is an issue anymore, so that could be reverted to the state restriction.

**Will** wanted to hear about the DRB's opinion on the ADU square footage restrictions. The board had thought maybe increasing it to 1500 square feet. It is one of the most frequent things that the DRB sees. **Bill** suggested 2000 square feet. **Max** asked what the sizes the DRB was seeing? It is usually 1200, 1500. It is not the dimensions of the structure itself that pushes it to the DRB, it is the added loft that makes it go over the 1000 sq ft. **Casey** noted when you hit that 1500 mark you hit that subordinate to the dwelling situation. He thinks restricting it to be subordinate to the primary dwelling would be better but that presents its own issues. **Max** did not feel a bigger than primary dwelling barn conflicted with the historical development patterns in VT. **Bill** asked what the staff time was for an accessory structure vs preparing a DRB packet. It is many more hours for a DRB staff report, so it would also streamline for town staff.

The board discussed the fire turn arounds. The most recent house fire, which burned down, was not helped by the long driveway with no turnouts. The board discussed the regulations regarding moving fill to and from property.

The board requested that the PC make the development regulations slimmer and more equitable. They felt our system needed an overhaul and was outdated. We have the thickest book of regulations in Chittenden County.

The board thanked the PC for listening. They do not expect the regulation book to be completely deconstructed but hoped they had provided a starting point.

#### **Recommendation to Selectboard for Appointment of Board Member/Alternate**

**Harmony** and **Matt** had discussed that Dennis has not been able to attend for quite some time and decided to make the call to talk to him about it. There is a rule that if a member misses a certain % of meetings they may be removed. Dennis did not want to resign, but he asked them to take him off the board so they could have the 7<sup>th</sup> member. They wanted to present **Max**, currently the DRB alternate, as the opportunity to be the full board member and have Dennis be the alternate. Max was okay with this. **Bill** motioned to recommend to the Selectboard that Max Tyler be appointed as DRB Member, and Dennis Angiono be appointed as DRB Alternate. **Andrew** seconded. Motion passed 6-0.

#### **Citizens to Be Heard, Announcements & Other Business**

None.

#### **Minutes**

**Jesse** motion to approve the minutes from July 14, 2025. **Francois** seconded. Motion passed 6-0.

Adjourned 9:01 p.m.

Submitted by,  
Harmony Cism, DRB Coordinator

Callie Hamdy, Minute Clerk