

**TOWN OF WESTFORD PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES FOR SEPTEMBER 22, 2025
APPROVED ON ***, 2025**

Commissioners Present: Max Tyler, George Lamphere, Will Dunkley

Commissioners Absent: Ian Gehlbach, Mo Reilly

Also Present: Harmony Cism (Planning Assistant/Zoning Admin.), Maria Barden (Minute Clerk), Carol Winfield, Barb Peck, Lori Johnson

The meeting began at 6:30 p.m.

M. Tyler reviews the rules of procedure.

Amendments to the Agenda

M. Tyler would like to add under item 4: Land Use and Development Regulations, review what the process is or outline in general what it takes to amend bylaws or zoning regulations.

Citizens to be Heard - Items not on agenda

None.

Approval of Minutes - July 21, 2025

M. Tyler motioned to approve the July 21, 2025 minutes as drafted.

G. Lamphere seconded; Motion passed 3-0.

Discussion:

a. Land Use & Development Regulations Updates:

H. Cism outlines what it takes to amend regulations:

- Planning Commission drafts all the updates to the regulations
- Planning Commission holds a public hearing
- Gets forwarded to the Selectboard
- Selectboard has a public hearing
- Selectboard would approve and it would be enacted.

H. Cism notes that there may be a few other smaller steps but that is the general overview of the process.

M. Tyler notes that there are time frames for the process as well.

G. Lamphere notes that the regulations are different from the Town Plan. He thinks it's worthwhile to think about building in some sort of opportunity to get a draft of their proposed language to the Selectboard before approving and advancing to the Selectboard.

b. Recap of 8/11 DRB Meeting:

W. Dunkley, I. Gehlbach, and M. Tyler went to the DRB meeting on the 11th.

W. Dunkley feels all the DRB members are all in favor of acting sooner rather than later on the items that had been discussed at the meeting. (WRO, accessory structure size, ledge disturbance, etc.)

M. Tyler says the discussion started out primarily about campgrounds. The DRB would like a clear definition of what a campground is. Some members are concerned about discretion and

equity and why some people can do things and others cannot. Some people are concerned that Westford regulations force residents into conditional review and is there a way to avoid this?

H. Cism says someone mentioned Westford has the thickest regulation book, which isn't true, and someone mentioned PUDs are irrelevant and no longer a thing anymore, which is not true, a lot of towns still do PUDs.

M. Tyler says one thing discussed was what is wrong with the process we have now. How might we best represent what people want to do?

G. Lamphere says the Town has no control over the number of sites that would constitute a campground because that falls on the State.

H. Cism says she can permit up to three campsites but after that it becomes a campground and that goes through DRB and needs a wastewater permit.

G. Lamphere says we need to think about all the landowners and not just the ones applying to have a campground, because the responsibility is to all landowners in Town. We need language that helps everyone understand the guardrails.

M. Tyler says one DRB member said they find it difficult to apply residential development regulations to a campground because it isn't always clear how they will go about doing it.

H. Cism created draft campground standards, does the Planning Commission want to review and adopt these and craft a draft to share with the DRB, Selectboard, and residents?

G. Lamphere feels this has been a recurring topic of conversation and something the DRB is looking for, he feels they should approve the draft for the time being and continue research on the topics of conversation before revisiting.

c. WRO Buffers/River Corridor:

H. Cism was contacted by the Flood Resilience Educator with Lake Champlain Sea Grant, they have offered to come speak to any boards or committees. This would be discussing River Corridor Regulations, which is something CCRPC recommended we incorporate into our regulations.

M. Tyler says the WRO 100-foot buffer is one of the items the DRB wanted us to look at.

H. Cism says there was recently an executive order passed that changed some wetland regulations, she spoke to our district wetland ecologist and CCRPC and no one fully understands how it will affect municipalities regulatorily. The Planning Commission might want to wait on clarification from the State before changing anything.

M. Tyler feels like we need to do information gathering and clarification from the State before changing the buffer.

G. Lamphere says they should look to find out when and why the changes to the WRO buffer happened.

The Planning Commission would like to have CCRPC and Lake Champlain Sea Grant come to the next meeting in October to discuss the WRO Buffers and River Corridors.

d. Accessory Structures:

H. Cism can currently give administrative approval for an accessory structure up to 1000 sq feet, but after that the DRB must give site plan review. The DRB feels the 1000 sq feet is too restrictive because they get a lot of large accessory structures like barns and garages.

Generally, people want to build with a total of 1200-1500 sq feet, which might include two stories.

M. Tyler wonders if we pick a larger number, are people then going to complain about that number and want a larger number?

H. Cism says in the history of her being at this job no one has asked for over 2400 sq feet, so it seems like a reasonable change.

The Planning Commission discussed keeping the footprint the same but allowing more sq footage for going upwards into a second floor or downwards into a basement. If it meets all the other requirements, maybe make the footprint should be somewhere around 1500 instead of 1000.

The Planning Commission will keep this as a draft to review again later with the other potential changes.

1705 Property-Update

H. Cism gives an update on 1705: A couple reports have come through: a report from the Preservation Trust of Vermont, LE Environmental's Ground Water Monitoring Report and the state-approved Wetland Delineation came in. There is nothing to do currently until the Selectboard has a question or task for the Planning Commission.

Municipal Planning Grant

M. Tyler reached out to CCRPC about assistance with this and other items. He has not heard back from them currently.

The grant is open now until November 3rd.

The Planning Commission would like to be in coordination with the Selectboard, it might be something they want to include in their budget proposal. If they get the grant and the budget is approved, then the Planning Commission would have the authority to move forward.

If the Planning Commission would like to set up a time to meet with CCRPC and the Selectboard.

Public Comment

There was public comment regarding the DRB meeting on the 11th and what the DRB was asking for of the Planning Commission, there was public comment about ADUs, there was positive public feedback about expanding the accessory structure footprint.

W. Dunkley asks H. Cism to clarify the difference between ADUs and Accessory Structures and how they're permitted differently.

H. Cism says the town has less restrictive regulations for ADUs than the state, the footprint can be bigger, but the living space can only be 1000 sq ft; The fees are also different.

FY '27 Budget Proposal due 10/16/25

The Planning Commission has been under budget for the past two years. Last year they requested a level funded budget, the Selectboard decreased the minute clerk line item.

The Planning Commission discusses whether they should stay level funded or add a little to the budget for things such as employee raises in case they end up adding more meetings each month or need to put in more time/work for upcoming projects.

G. Lamphere makes motion to approve the Planning Commission budget draft as presented with two changes of increasing the minute clerk to \$1800 and the special projects to \$5000.

M. Tyler seconds: motion passed 3-0.

Town Report due 11/12/25

The Planning Commission will look into this more before the next meeting and share their thoughts.

Municipal Code of Ethics Training deadline 9/25/25

M. Barden says the deadline is now extended to September 30th.

Public Comment

None.

Correspondence

- Ethics email.
- Chittenden County Regional Housing Meeting-**H. Cism** will share the official invite when it comes.
- Maeve Fairfax-**H. Cism** will respond and let her know we're not interested.

Work Plan:

- Outline: Sit down at the next meeting, 5 or 6 topics that the DRB wants them to discuss.

DRB List:

- a. Accessory unit size and limitations
 - b. Ledges to be disturbed
 - c. Amount of fill to be disturbed
 - d. Restrictions on small businesses
 - e. Irregular lots
 - f. Campsites/Campgrounds
 - g. WRO 100 ft buffer
 - h. Administrative approval of small subdivisions
- There is also the list the Planning Commission has been working on all year about regulation changes; some things might be more urgent than others.
Note that this will be a lot of volunteer time to do research on these lists because the Town does not have a Town Planner.
 - October meeting-**H. Cism** will invite the two speakers about the river corridors to come.
 - Will have an outline of the process for updating regulations
 - Municipal Planning Grant discussion next meeting
 - **M. Tyler** will try and get on the next Selectboard meeting for the municipal planning grant
 - The Planning Commissioners will take time to go through the campground regulation changes that **H. Cism** has put together so they can discuss more at the next meeting.

*Kudos to **W. Dunkley** on visiting the Stowbridge's and providing information from his septic engineer for them.*

Meeting Adjourned at 8:26 p.m.