

**TOWN OF WESTFORD PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES FOR OCTOBER 20, 2025, MEETING
APPROVED ON ***, 2025**

Commissioners Present: Ian Gehlbach, Max Tyler, Will Dunkley, Mo Reilly

Commissioners Absent: George Lamphere

Also Present: Harmony Cism (Planning Assistant, Zoning Administrator), Maria Barden (Minute Clerk), Darren Schibler (CCRPC), Rose Watts (VT DEC Floodplain Manager), Alison Spasyk (Lake Champlain Sea Grant), Barb Peck, Lori Johnson, Mark Letorney, Shayne Jaquith (Nature Conservancy)

The meeting began at: 6:30pm

M. Tyler went over the meeting rules of procedure.

Amendments to Agenda

None.

Citizens to be Heard-Items not on agenda

None.

Approval of Minutes – September 22nd, 2025

M. Tyler would like to double check that page 3 where it says, “Harmony Cism says in the history of her being at this job no one has asked for over 2400 sq ft.” Should it say 1200 sq ft. instead?

Minutes won’t be approved at this meeting until G. Lamphere is present and there is a quorum of commissioners who were present at the September 22nd meeting.

Continued Discussion – Land Use & Development Regulations

• Water Resource Regulations:

a. River Corridor Protection: Presentation from Lake Champlain Sea Grant

A. Spasyk and her colleague **S. Jaquith** were present; they also invited **R. Watts** to come and introduce herself as a resource for providing support to the town in terms of flood hazard or river corridor regulations.

A. Spasyk and **S. Jaquith** provided a short presentation/slide show to give information about the recently passed flood safety act (ACT 121). This was passed in 2024 after the significant flooding that occurred in 2023. The flood safety act aims to mitigate flooding in multiple ways. The flooding we’re seeing in Vermont is costing the State and taxpayers thousands of dollars. Some key points they discussed were inundation vs. erosion, history of flooding in Vermont, how we’ve historically tried to control rivers and mitigate fluvial erosion hazards, and development protection by controlling rivers. They also discussed the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program).

Residents had questions on how the government shutdown will affect the programs in discussion.

A. Spasyk says in terms of NFIP they can't issue or renew new policies right now but can still put a claim on an existing policy.

D. Schibler confirms that no new policies or renewal of policies that are expiring but any policies in place and not expiring are effective and claims can still go through for flood insurance.

R. Watts says in terms of the NFIP it's not concerning unless your insurance is lapsing or you're purchasing a new home.

D. Schibler notes what Alison and Shayne were talking about in terms of river corridors are state only and have nothing to do with FEMA or NFIP and will all still be moving through unaffected by federal funding.

M. Reilly asks what the Government shutdown might do to the reimbursements or incentives that were discussed.

Currently there are unknowns, and they don't have a great answer for that, only time will tell.

There was a question about whether someone can confirm or refute that Governor Scott issued an executive order saying he was changing the distance from the river that can be built from 50ft to 25ft?

S. Jaquith says that order pertained to wetlands and not rivers, and it will reduce the width of wetland buffers, his understanding is where those wetlands would impact development where there is already infrastructure is where that will come into play.

S. Schibler clarifies the executive order is specific to designated growth areas in the regional future land use mapping process that CCRPC went through with all the municipalities including Westford. It's specific to designated areas including downtowns, village centers, new town centers, growth centers, neighborhood development areas and opportunity zones. This is talking about the old designation program and the areas receiving tier 1a or tier 1b designation under the new program for act 250 program.

There is continued discussion regarding buffers and river corridors.

R. Watts adds that the State has model bylaws that were published in 2022 which include river corridors and flood hazard area protection. It might be helpful to review and will most likely be similar for when things roll out in the coming years.

b. Updated FEMA Flood Maps & Discussion of Floodplain/Water Resource

• **Regulations: CCRPC**

FEMA is updating its flood maps; Westford is one of the towns in Chittenden County that is seeing some significant changes to those maps in terms of what they look like and in terms of what you have to regulate. **D. Schibler** shares the current FEMA maps and then the new maps which have similar features. These maps can be viewed at

<https://ccrpc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=0ffbcbf0f5bb466eae4515693fadd94>.

• **DRB – Requested Review:**

Commissioners will each take one or two of these on and do more research on each topic.

- Wetland Buffer: **M. Tyler**
- Ledges: **W. Dunkley**
- Steep Slopes: **W. Dunkley**
- Agricultural Soil Restrictions: **I. Gehlbach & M. Reilly**
- Emergency Vehicle Turnouts: *The fire dept feels it should be left as is, this could be taken off the list.*
- Small Businesses: **M. Tyler**
- Campgrounds: *Outstanding issue.*
- Irregularly Shaped Lots: **G. Lamphere**

• **Subdivision Review Procedure:**

Push to next meeting.

Municipal Planning Grant – Due November 3rd.

M. Tyler and H. Cism went to the SB meeting and told them they wanted to apply for this grant. They discussed possibly using it for public outreach directed at the town plan or moving the 1705 project along. The Selectboard voted to have it go towards the 1705 project. CCRPC will help with the application process, **H. Cism** says it is being worked on this week so it can be brought to the Selectboard this Thursday, 10/23 for their meeting.

Town Report – Due November 12th.

The Planning Commission discussed some minor edits.

M. Reilly motioned to approve the Town Report as drafted with the changes discussed, I. Gehlbach seconded; Motion passed 4-0.

Public Comment

None.

Correspondence

Regional Housing Convening: October 29th

Reimagining Rural Capacity Summit: November 13 in Randolph

Public forums on tier 3 rule making for ACT181

FYI's about a couple grants

Work Plan Review & Prioritization

Each Commissioner will bring their research to the next meeting.

Executive Session

W. Dunkley motioned to enter executive session to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee; M. Reilly seconded, motion carried 4-0.

M. Reilly motioned to exit executive session at 8:59pm, W. Dunkley seconded; Motion carried 4-0.

M. Reilly moved that the Planning Commission recommend that the Selectboard rehire a Town Planner for Westford, M. Tyler seconded; Motion carried 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:01pm