

**TOWN OF WESTFORD PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES FOR NOVEMBER 17, 2025, MEETING
APPROVED ON DECEMBER 8, 2025**

Commissioners Present: Max Tyler, George Lamphere, Ian Gehlbach, Will Dunkley

Commissioners Absent: Mo Reilly

Also Present: Harmony Cism (Planning Coordinator, Zoning Administrator), Maria Barden (Minute Clerk), Lori Johnson, Carol Winfield

The meeting began at: 6:30pm

M. Tyler discussed the meeting rules of procedure.

Amendments to Agenda

None.

Citizens to be Heard-Items not on agenda

None.

Approval of Minutes – September 22nd & October 20th, 2025

G. Lamphere moved to approve the minutes from September 22nd, 2025 as presented, M. Tyler seconded; Motion passed 3-0.

The Planning Commission decided to hold off on approval of the October 20th, 2025 minutes until certain discussion points were added.

Continued Discussion: Land Use & Development Regulations Updates

- *DRB-Requested Amendments Review Topics: wetland buffers, exposed ledge, steep slopes, agricultural soils, small businesses, irregularly shaped lots, campgrounds:*

Campgrounds:

G. Lamphere would like to think about this from a whole town perspective; He feels all questions are valid and should be thoroughly thought about.

M. Tyler says if someone comes in with more than three campsites they automatically are conditional use and go to the DRB; He wonders why this can't be a permitted use? If it's permitted, it would fall on H. Cism to decide whether they comply and might not have to go straight to the DRB, this wouldn't solve all the problems but could potentially help solve some problems. The State also has regulations surrounding campsites, and the Town should be adhering to those requirements, maybe the State should be enforcing those requirements which would take the Town out of the enforcement aspect of it.

H. Cism says when there were several campsites brought to the DRB there were a lot of neighbors who came and were interested. If there is no DRB hearing it makes it harder for neighbors to give their input and it makes her job more difficult. H. Cism feels with this type of thing there should be a site plan review which is easier for seven members of the DRB rather than just her. She can already approve up to three campsites without DRB approval.

G. Lamphere wonders if the State has regulations and language in place that would be able to address the communities concerns and would they have a place for the community to address their concerns at the State level?

W. Dunkley feels having means of neighbors being able to voice their concerns would be wise. He wonders if we could do permitted use with some addition of engagement on the landowner with written proof of the neighbors being notified.

H. Cism says this is something the DRB already does and isn't sure it's something that landowners would take on themselves.

M. Tyler wonders how this is different from other permitted uses, such as funeral homes, farm stands, etc.

G. Lamphere would like the distinction that it is a permitted issue (up to three campsites). It then becomes more of an enterprise that could be more impactful to the community after the three and then becomes conditional use.

W. Dunkley adds that a campground with four or more sites compared to a funeral home or such is out in the open with people going about their day to day life in a more public setting, oftentimes people have fires and are up later where as a funeral home or daycare that is permitted has operating hours and more of an indoor setting so it's not as impactful on the community in that aspect.

H. Cism looked at some other town regulations and drew heavily from Bolton's regulations when she was making draft changes. H. Cism says it varied quite a bit town to town, some towns had no regulations similarly to Westford, whereas other towns had heavier regulations for campsites.

W. Dunkley and **I. Gehlbach** both feel that the draft changes look great and we should look at the questions from CCRPC and go in that direction.

The Planning Commission continued their discussion on campsites and RV's. They discussed the draft regulations that H. Cism drafted and the questions that CCRPC had after reviewing the draft. The Planning Commission decided to table 308.A to move on to 308.B. They all agree they're talking about R5 & R10 and not within the village center when it comes to campsites.

I. Gehlbach will help H. Cism to tweak some of the language that was discussed and bring it back to the next meeting.

Steep Slopes/Ledges:

W. Dunkley says Bolton was the only other town that had language revolving around outcroppings or ledge and theirs had to do with subdivisions. They're seeking to reduce the chances of houses being situated on prominent, visible areas. He looked at specific towns that had similarities to Westford, all towns had some regulations around steep slopes with most requiring conditional use approval above 15% and all prohibit above 25-30%.

H. Cism says the steep slope regulation is 25%, which does include driveways.

G. Lamphere Westford has steep slopes and ledge, which limits residents to what and where they can place things. There is a reason for that, the Town wants to protect its natural resources and keep the Town rural and unique, it's a balance.

H. Cism can only recall one instance the steep slopes have come up in the last two years and it was a unique instance.

W. Dunkley says the history as to why this is in the regulations is to prohibit someone to site a house where it would be overlooking neighbors or being too visible and the other reason was to prevent people from blowing up ledge to create a driveway. At the time the Planning Commission thought it was important to protect the ledges from being disturbed.

The Planning Commission discussed whether the regulations revolving around steep slopes and ledges should be kept as is or be changed.

Irregularly Shaped Lots:

G. Lamphere discussed going through this process himself, he recalls it being a complicated process at the time without a DRB. He feels some of the big questions that must be asked are if the Planning Commission is happy with the width-to-depth ratios. Should they revise the definition of shapes? Is there anything to consider about additional site-specific features? How does the Planning Commission want to apply this to different districts? G. Lamphere discussed some of the differently shaped lots.

What he learned about bowling alley shaped lots specifically is it creates a lot of unusable land that is hard to get to. However, they want to be in a position where they can protect and conserve some of the natural resources, so to do this they might need to adjust the degree of angle or the shape.

H. Cism says the DRB can approve irregular lots.

The Planning Commission discussed irregular lots a little further and decided they should keep this the way it is written for the time being.

M. Tyler goes over what was discussed at last meeting in regard to Emergency Vehicle Turn Outs and the Movement of Earth and Material.

M. Tyler would like to make a motion that after review and consideration the Westford Planning Commission recommends no change to section 321.D(12), emergency vehicle turnouts; G. Lamphere seconded, motion passed 4-0.

M. Tyler motioned that after review and consideration the Westford Planning Commission recommends no change to section 306.B(3), movement of earthen material. I. Gehlbach seconded, motion passed 4-0.

M. Tyler motioned that after review and consideration the Westford Planning Commission recommends no change to section 311.D, irregular lots. I. Gehlbach seconded, motion passed 4-0.

M. Tyler motioned that after review and consideration the Westford Planning Commission recommends no change to section 3210, steep slopes. W. Dunkley seconded, motion passed 4-0.

Next meeting they will discuss small businesses, wetland buffers, and agricultural soils.

- **Subdivision Review Procedure:**

H. Cism gives a brief update on the subdivision review process. A lot of towns will allow the zoning administrator to give approval on minor subdivisions, up to three lots if it meets all the regulations. It was recommended to H. Cism by the DRB, residents and planning consultant, that this be in the regulations.

H. Cism will write something up for the next meeting and send it to the Planning Commission for review. G. Lamphere notes that it should not be a back-and-forth email exchange per open meeting law.

Discussion: 2026 ECOS Plan Comments to Land Use Review Board

H. Cism says this is CCRPC's regional plan; they're sending it to the land use review board. Right now, it is open for comments from members of the public and municipalities. They're hoping municipalities will discuss and give them comments before the due date. It is due by Monday the first of December, which is prior to the next planning commission meeting and SB meeting, which makes it difficult to coordinate with other boards.

M. Tyler wonders if this is something that should be announced to FPF for members of the public to make comments themselves.

H. Cism will make a FPF post so the public can make comments if they would like.

Discussion: FY2027 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

H. Cism says this is CCRPC's work plan for FY'27, the applications are due January 16th. Does the Town want to be on their work plan? This is mainly for transportation-related projects however, H. Cism talked with Taylor Newton last week, he said for non-transportation projects the Town can apply to have CCRPC be a stand in for grant writing assistance, engagement, etc. which would be helpful without a town planner. For transportation-related projects, CCRPC would manage it at no cost if we provided a

20% match. The town can apply for multiple projects, if the town decides to hire a town planner we can withdraw the application.

The Planning Commission is interested in public outreach being one possibility of projects and the pedestrian footpath on Brookside Road.

M. Tyler will write something up for the Selectboard about the UPWP being underway and that the Planning Commission has a couple projects they're interested in.

Update: Municipal Planning Grant

H. Cism says the Town has submitted the application, and they will hear sometime in mid-December whether they have received the grant.

H. Cism will make the application a printable document for the Planning Commission to look at.

Public Comment

None.

Correspondence

- **M. Tyler** sent correspondence regarding CCRPC providing training on the essentials of land use planning and when it would be a suitable time for them to set this up.

The Planning Commission is interested in pursuing the training and would like a better idea on dates and whether it will be a separate meeting from their regularly scheduled meetings, M. Tyler will follow up.

- **M. Reilly** sent a proposed message to be delivered to the Selectboard.
G. Lamphere feels this is well timed and it should be noted in the paragraph for budget season.
M. Tyler wanted to change the words "reinstating the town planner" to "reinstate the position of town planner on either a full or part time basis"
H. Cism has been advocating this to the SB so it's not going to be blindsiding them.

M. Tyler moves to present to the SB the sentiment: "The Westford Planning Commission requests that the Selectboard reinstate the position of Town Planner on a part-time basis. The absence of this role has created significant challenges in managing development proposals, updating zoning regulations, and ensuring that our community grows in a thoughtful and sustainable manner. A Town Planner provides critical expertise in land use planning, grant opportunities, and long-term visioning — functions that are essential for maintaining Westford's character while supporting responsible growth. Without this position, the burden on volunteer boards has increased substantially, and we risk fragmented decision-making and missed opportunities for state and regional funding. We strongly believe that restoring this position will help Westford remain proactive and well-prepared for the future. We also think this is an especially appropriate time to make this request, as it coincides with the town's budget cycle."
I. Gehlbach seconded, motion passed 4-0.

Work Plan Review & Prioritization

- Continued discussion on small businesses, wetland buffers, and agricultural soils next meeting.
- H. Cism will write something up for the administrative subdivision review.
- H. Cism and I. Gehlbach will work on Campgrounds.
- Next meeting will be December 8th rather than December 15th.

M. Tyler moved to adjourn the meeting, G. Lamphere seconded; Motion passed 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:44pm