

**TOWN OF WESTFORD PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES FOR JANUARY 19th, 2026, MEETING
APPROVED ON ***, 2026**

Commissioners Present: Max Tyler, George Lamphere, Will Dunkley

Commissioners Absent: None.

Also Present: Harmony Cism (Planning Coordinator & Zoning Administrator), Maria Barden (Minute Clerk), Barb Peck

The meeting began at 6:32pm.

Amendments to the Agenda

None.

Citizens to be Heard - Items not on agenda

None.

Approval of Minutes - January 5th, 2026

M. Tyler made a motion to approve the minutes from January 5th, 2025 as submitted. **G. Lamphere** seconded; Motion passed 3-0.

Continued Discussion: - Land Use and Development Regulations

A. DRB-Requested Review Topics: Wetland Buffers & Agricultural Soils

• **Wetland Buffers-**

M. Tyler's understanding is that for wetland buffers, rivers, ponds, lakes, etc. there is a 50-foot buffer in the Village Center and in the other districts it's a 100-foot buffer.

M. Tyler read the regulations regarding the wetland buffers. **M. Tyler** talked to CCRPC on this topic and will provide some correspondence for the next meeting. He discussed an executive order from the Governor to reduce the buffer from fifty feet to twenty-five feet. This will only be related to designated growth areas so this would relate to Westford's Village Center. This is to reduce the buffers and make development easier, but it will be a small portion of the State. He will provide a link that shows where it will affect Westford.

B. Peck says her opinion is that Westford in the past increased some buffers for grant money, it's her opinion that they should not require any more of a buffer than FEMA or the State does because it inhibits landowners and puts restrictions on landowners. She has no problem reducing it in the Town Center or designated areas. She would be happy to see these restrictions relaxed.

H. Cism says a few months ago she drew up a timeline on wetland and water resource protections in Westford. There was not a grant that she could find where Westford increased their wetland buffers, however they did reduce it in certain areas overtime since the seventies, she couldn't find any document that showed otherwise.

G. Lamphere says there are moving pieces out there and we won't know what the State's final decision will be. He would like to look at the data that shows how much developable land a reduction in buffers would bring to the Town compared to what it already has. **G. Lamphere** feels wetlands are a treasured asset for our forests, wildlife, water quality in Lake Champlain

and once those are gone, they're gone. He says there are a lot of natural things that occur that are wiping out wetlands across the State and Country and doesn't want to contribute to that.

B. Peck thinks in Westford there were increased wetland buffers tied to grant money. She thinks this was prior to **H. Cism's** time with the Town. She thinks we should go with the States Statute on Wetland Buffers for the future.

W. Dunkley feels he would be in favor of bringing the regulations in line with what the State says, knowing there will be some changing policy with the flood mitigation layer. If there is a route, they can take to get a better understanding on what development this will bring to the Town that would be helpful in terms of how he would feel about moving forward.

H. Cism can provide a map of the mapped wetlands in Westford. Some are not mapped but she can provide the ones that are and they can also take into consideration where the hydric soils are.

M. Tyler says it gets confusing with river corridors and wetland flood plains and wetlands but doesn't feel he would be in favor of reducing anything relating to flood hazards, this would be different in terms of development. He is personally looking into the statute of limitations for developing wetlands, to his knowledge there is no statute of limitations. That means a lot of developments might require a wetland delineation, as a property owner you might be taking a risk not having one done because the state could determine it is a wetland. He believes if the state feels fifty feet is sufficient why would we need more than that to protect the wetlands? The Governor's executive order says the buffer is to be changed even for non-delineated wetlands. If they find out later there is one somewhere you can't make it bigger, if something happened and it was not delineated, if there is development, it's still ok because it is not currently mapped today.

B. Peck asks if the Planning Commission isn't ready during this meeting to make a decision, do they know when they'll be ready to make the decision on whether they want to be more conservative or go along with the State.

M. Tyler says they'll look at the information at the next meeting and see if they can conclude at that time but can't guarantee that.

- **Agricultural Soils:**

H. Cism says Ian sent a document for their packets, this is mainly related to ACT 250, which the DRB doesn't have any say over. The regulations say that if you're doing a subdivision, you should be conscious of where ag land might be, cluster development away from it so it can still be used in the future for farmland. This doesn't have anything to do with ACT 250 and is a separate permitting process.

M. Tyler says the ACT 250 in all this mitigation only applies if you've fallen into the ACT 250 process. Our regulations seem broad, not necessarily restrictive but apply broadly to all zoning districts. He feels the DRB's request was around Westford there is not as much farming as there used to be and therefore, should we restrict what property owners can do to preserve ag soils to the extent that we do.

B. Peck says she was at the DRB meeting in person when these concerns came up. She thinks since they were granting waivers one after the other this is why they kicked it back to the Planning Commission. She feels we need to realize what we want for Westford, but she feels

we don't need to police for the State of Vermont, and we shouldn't be more stringent than what the State requires. She feels we should take what the DRB is saying seriously.

G. Lamphere says he could be wrong but he's looking at the October 2025 meeting packet and item 4 that discussed this specific topic requires that subdivision design facilitate future use of agriculture land. Goes on to say "a" (singular) DRB member, he would like to get clarification on whether it is the DRB as a body or a single member. It's the Planning commissions job to look at this broadly as a town and look at the good of the whole town, look at different districts and areas, and not take individual requests.

H. Cism clarifies that the DRB doesn't give waivers for that, but they do ask that applicants try to cluster away from and avoid development on potential farmland. Sometimes it does get put there and the DRB can approve that.

M. Tyler asks if we have a map of ag land in Town. **H. Cism** says it's a layer you can view on the Westford interactive map viewer or agency of natural resources map. **M. Tyler** asks what the process is when someone comes to ask for a zoning ruling if there are ag soils identified does it automatically go to the DRB? **H. Cism** says no, if it's a regular zoning permit, it can go on ag land. It only comes up if there is a subdivision and the regulations suggest they try to avoid breaking up or being right in the middle of ag land and that is not always possible so sometimes its approved on ag land.

W. Dunkley feels it's not necessarily hindering anything, and he doesn't think there is a real issue that needs to be discussed in this case.

B. Peck agrees with W. Dunkley. Most of the ag land is designated in land use and if you want to develop on any land that's in land use, you need to go through the tax penalties, she says it's a complicated process that involves the State and the Town and the programs that the State has allowed ag land to be enrolled in. She feels the farms are dying and will be developed at some point.

M. Tyler says the DRB gets the requests and they routinely accept them, why are they going to the DRB to begin with?

G. Lamphere says a subdivision must go to the DRB anyways, it's not because of the ag land that it's being sent to the DRB.

M. Tyler feels this isn't a problem for the DRB, they're already there so it shouldn't cause any more problems. He asks **H. Cism** if this can be put on the agenda for the DRB so that they can ask why this is an issue for them.

H. Cism has the original list the DRB gave them in front of her. The entire DRB produced a list of five things, and this was not one of the items on the list, this was thrown out by one DRB member along with a few other items at a DRB meeting.

M. Tyler feels this should be tabled for now and feels they should ask Matt (DRB Chair) if this is something they are all really concerned about and if so, the Planning Commission can circle back later.

B. Subdivision Review Procedure:

This was previously discussed in December, **H. Cism** made a few edits based on the Planning Commissions feedback. The Planning Commission had recommended it be up to three lots, not just two lots, so that language was added to allow administrative approval for up to three lots.

G. Lamphere thinks this is great, helps streamline it for applicants and empowers H. Cism to do the job she was hired to do. His one question regarding A.2 is how we define a road. We have public and private roads, which are different, how would this translate to each person reading it if it's not clearly defined?

H. Cism says we do have a definition of road which covers all that.

All Planning Commissioners are in favor of these changes.

H. Cism will add the updates to the regulations, once there is a complete document there will be multiple public hearings by the Planning Commission and Selectboard before it gets approved.

Update: FY2027 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

H. Cism finished the three draft UPWP applications: public outreach for 1705, general grant writing, rescoping of school to common pedestrian path on Brookside Road. The draft applications have been sent to CCRPC and got very good feedback with one small edit to the pedestrian pathway application which was updated. Unless any of the Planning Commission has anything to add or subtract this will be submitted on Friday the 23rd.

M. Tyler thanks H. Cism for the work she did on these and he doesn't have specific changes unless CCRPC says there is something that should change.

H. Cism says the SB is in their budgeting workshop season right now and they recommend reducing the requested hours for the fee for service at \$70.00 an hour application. They're working on where that money may be pulled from if we do need to use it in the case that they don't hire a Town Planner. The transportation related application which is the pedestrian path is a true grant and the Town is responsible for 20% of the cost, which is estimated at \$35,000. The Town would be responsible for about \$7000. The Planning Commission has a special project fund every year and if it isn't used it rolls over into the special projects reserve. **H. Cism** wonders if they want to move to use some of those funds for the pedestrian path project 20% match, so the SB won't have to figure out from where to pull those funds.

This was created to fund planning projects, and she feels this project would fit.

H. Cism says there is a total of \$30,797 in the reserve fund.

G. Lamphere thinks we're not looking at allocating those funds at this time because they don't know if the application is approved but if it does get approved, they will reassess the project if they want to move forward.

The SB will vote on final approval of UPWP applications and funding sources in March. CCRPC wants to know if the town has the funds and if we move forward where the money will come from.

G. Lamphere says we can vote that if it moves forward, we can vote to allocate those funds but that it might not necessarily happen.

M. Tyler says these are the three most important things for the upcoming year so what a better use of the money, he is in favor of releasing them for this project.

W. Dunkley thinks the grants look awesome, he commends H. Cism for her work on them and is also in favor of releasing the funds if the applications get approved.

G. Lamphere makes a motion that the Planning Commission let the Selectboard know that they intend to draw on the special projects reserve to cover matching requirements for the UPWP Brookside pathway grant. **M. Tyler** seconds, motion passes 3-0.

The Planning Commission thanks H. Cism for all her hard work on these applications.

Reorganization:

Two commissioners resigned for personal reasons. This leaves the present Planning Commission without a Vice Chair and Clerk.

G. Lamphere is happy to serve in either capacity, if **W. Dunkley** is up for Vice Chair it could be a good opportunity to build knowledge among administrative duties of being Vice Chair. If any one of them cannot make a meeting, they must cancel because there won't be a quorum so there will currently be no takeovers for Chair by the Vice Chair.

W. Dunkley would be happy to do Vice Chair but wonders what the roles of Vice Chair and Clerk are.

H. Cism says Vice Chair would chair the meeting if the Chair can't make it but until someone is appointed that isn't likely since they need three commissioners for a quorum. **G. Lamphere** says sometimes it might be that if the Chair is on vacation prior to a meeting the Vice Chair may help H. Cism with the meeting prior.

G. Lamphere says the Clerk shall assume duties if Chair and Vice Chair are absent or at their request. Sometimes if the Chair is remote, they designate an in-person Chair so in case the remote person's connection is lost the meeting can continue.

W. Dunkley is fine to be Vice Chair.

B. Peck asks if they can verify for the record that it is Mo and Ian that are no longer commissioners.

Yes, it is, they have resigned.

M. Tyler moves to nominate **W. Dunkley** as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission. **G. Lamphere** seconds, motion passed 3-0.

M. Tyler moves to nominate **G. Lamphere** as Clerk of the Planning Commission. **W. Dunkley** seconds, motion passes 3-0.

M. Tyler thanks both **G. Lamphere** and **W. Dunkley** for taking on these roles.

Public Comment

None.

Correspondence

- Notice of public hearing in Colchester for regulation updates. Nothing that affects Westford.
- Explanation for our Municipal Planning Grant Denial.
- Westford Conservation Commission Comments on the wetlands executive order that was sent to the DEC.
- Commissioners' resignation letters.
- Notice of public hearing about the Milton town plan update.

M. Tyler will send a memo back to the WCC to thank them for their notice on this.

M. Tyler will draft something for the newsletter to acknowledge the contributions Mo and Ian have made to the PC and the Town and that they will be missed.

Work Plan Review & Prioritization:

- H. Cism will submit the UPWP applications on or before Friday. She's hoping to show to the SB on Thursday before submitting.
- H. Cism will bring more info on the wetland buffers and maps for the next meeting.
- Talk to the DRB next week about the requested updates to the regulations.
- M. Tyler will provide the email with information on what is going on at the CCRPC level.
- At this time, the next meeting will be February 16th.

The meeting adjourned at 7:48pm.

DRAFT