

**TOWN OF WESTFORD PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES FOR JANUARY 5TH, 2026, MEETING
APPROVED ON JANUARY 19TH, 2026**

Commissioners Present: Max Tyler, George Lamphere, Will Dunkley

Commissioners Absent: Mo Reilly, Ian Gehlbach

Also Present: Harmony Cism (Planning Coordinator & Zoning Administrator), Maria Barden (Minute Clerk), Lori Johnson, Barb Peck, Pat Haller (Selectboard), Carol Winfield, Nick Nichols (Selectboard), Ben Bornstein

The meeting began at 6:30pm.

M. Tyler went over the meeting rules of procedure.

Amendments to the Agenda

- **M. Tyler** would like to remove the CCRPC presentation from the agenda to postpone to the spring.
- **M. Tyler** would like to add an Executive Session to discuss Personnel at the end of the meeting.

Citizens to be Heard - Items not on agenda

None.

Approval of Minutes - December 8th, 2025

G. Lamphere made a motion to approve the minutes from December 8th, 2025 as submitted.

W. Dunkley seconded; Motion passed 3-0.

Continued Discussion: - FY2027 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

M. Tyler gives a brief overview: CCRPC is in their planning process for the year; if Westford wishes to get on CCRPC's project list for July 2026-June 30, 2027, the Town needs to submit applications by January 23rd for any projects they wish to pursue. The two main categories that CCRPC is working on are transportation projects with a 20% match from the town and land use which would cover things such as town plan, 1705 planning and other variations of designations in the town for projected growth areas. CCRPC won't fund these types of projects but will help with the planning and take on a project manager role at a rate of \$70.00 an hour (this would be beneficial if the town does not hire a town planner). By March, the Selectboard would have to agree that they wish to pursue these projects and have staff and funding available to assist with them.

M. Tyler discusses the December 18th Selectboard meeting, they discussed two general approaches to how we might pursue what we want to ask CCRPC or apply for. One being anything we think of, apply for, and see what gets approved. The other approach was to discuss what the town can reasonably manage and then apply for those specific and most important projects.

The Planning Commission wants to discuss and come away with what they should apply for and produce some solid answers since the time frame for the deadline is tight.

G. Lamphere says the projects they've discussed that he can remember are, reviving the pedestrian path from the common to the school (this would fall under transportation), they've discussed stormwater management/treatment for the town center, this would include the library, town office, 1705 and the common. The third item being asking CCRPC to allocate some time and commit to that as a town for help with things such as the town plan, 1705 planning, and growth centers. He wonders if there is anything else they should add or take off from this list?

P. Haller and **N. Nichols** discuss what the Selectboard would like to see prioritized. They feel like the top priorities should be outreach for 1705 and the second being preparing for the modification of the Town Plan, and stormwater management. He thinks the pedestrian path would be a great option but if they were choosing it would not be the Selectboards top choice.

M. Tyler discusses an email he received from Jacob Hemerick which asked why the town did not get the Municipal Planning Grant. Westford had the lowest score out of all applicants in Chittenden County; Max goes over each category, and the reasons the Town's score was low. He feels this scoring could help moving forward for other projects and applications.

M. Tyler wants to get feedback about what people think 1705 public outreach would look like.

P. Haller says they want to inform the public of the conditions of the entire property including the buildings, and what some of the options the town could explore are, they'd also like to ask for additional ideas that the Selectboard has not considered that the public might want the Town to investigate. He goes over the ideas the Selectboard has already discussed such as, using it for office space, adding to the current office building with the addition of wastewater, access to the river, he also says Steve Willard recommended there be a hydrant for fire safety put down at the river. A resident brought up that another idea was to use 1705 for additional parking to supplement the common and another idea was potentially using the garage for storage for the ice rink and other recreation related needs.

They discuss restoration vs. tearing down and building a new building or not having a building there at all. **P. Haller** says the Selectboard had discussed it as a board to ask the architectural firm that did the original design for the potential of the current office building to evaluate the potential to renovate 1705 to become an office building on the first floor but couldn't recall if they reached out for an estimate.

H. Cism stated when they applied for the Municipal Planning Grant the Town had hoped that some of the funds could be used to get some of these estimates and since they didn't receive the grant the conversation was paused.

M. Tyler asks if they were to apply for 1705 outreach should they wind items into the application such as the practicality from a work function point of view of splitting the office into two buildings? The other is cost estimates, would that be something they would be asking in the application for assistance with the various options? He wonders if they have good hard evidence that the current building is inadequate and we must do something soon?

P. Haller says as part of outreach, gaining these estimates is something they would need to provide to the residents in order for the residents to give feedback to the town on what they would like the town to move forward with.

Residents provided input into the steps they feel the Planning Commission should take regarding public outreach. They feel that first the Planning Commission should take into

consideration whether the building should stay or be taken down before moving forward and find out how much money it may cost if people want it to stay. There was discussion about the historical evaluation that was done and that a more in-depth evaluation should be provided regarding the building's potential as an office and not just a house.

N. Nichols feels it makes sense for the application to focus on collecting public outreach, does not feel strongly that we include information on potential cost in the application but bring it to residents as part of the outreach.

P. Haller says for this project we are applying for CCRPC's time at \$70.00 per hour but not applying for them to do outreach to an architect to get cost, that feels more like something the Town can do themselves.

H. Cism mentions that one thing you can apply for with the UPWP is for CCRPC to provide grant writing assistance, they may know of some grants that would cover cost estimates for the Town.

M. Tyler motions that the Planning Commission put together a UPWP application to pursue public outreach related to the potential of the 1705 property and submit that to the Selectboard for their consideration. **G. Lamphere** seconds; Motion passed 3-0.

The Planning Commission discussed grant writing help.

CCRPC recommended 80-100 hours of help for grant writing.

The Town has at least one identified use for grant writing right now which would be in the context of public outreach. There could be potential for grant writing for transportation uses such as the pedestrian path.

B. Bornstein wonders if the Planning commission already discussed the pedestrian pathway from the school to the center of town. He thinks they should move forward with this and apply for assistance from CCRPC for that.

W. Dunkley feels grant writing would support the outreach of 1705 and feels they should move forward with filling out an application.

G. Lamphere feels they need to think about what is achievable for the Planning Commission and Town staff moving forward. He also feels that anything to do with Land Use Regulations, the Town Plan, and Stormwater Management needs to wait until they know what is happening with 1705 because there will be decisions and potential changes that come with that.

M. Tyler moves that the Planning Commission recommend that we complete the application process for 80-100 hours of grant writing expertise from CCRPC.

W. Dunkley seconds; Motion passed 3-0.

The Planning Commission discussed the pedestrian walking path from the Town Center to the Westford School and consider whether it is something they want to investigate from a transportation viewpoint.

Some residents had concerns about the timeline of steps and would rather the Planning Commission get input from the landowners before looking into it. There was also some confusion on whether the Planning Commission is talking about a trail through the woods or a pedestrian path along the road.

H. Cism clarifies that the path would be within the Town right-of-way. Brookside Road has a 4-rod ROW, which is sixty-six feet wide or thirty-three feet from the center of the road. Depending on the property, some rights-of-way may be close to someone's house/yard.

M. Tyler discusses this being part of the scope of study.

Another resident talked about doing public outreach on whether people want a path or not.

P. Haller says the Town Plan, which has been publicly vetted states that developing trail connections is one of the priorities. A scoping study had been applied for in the past; the town did not get the grant for that at the time. He feels there should be another scoping study done so that residents know where the scoping study determines where the best path for a trail may go.

M. Tyler believes there was outreach done at one point; the idea has been around for around 30 years. This project could be funded but the Town would be required to do the matching funds. He feels its minimal risk because doing the study does not mean they have to follow through with the project once they collect more information.

W. Dunkley asks what the scoping study would show.

It would show the potential pathways, suggested best pathway including where it might cross, etc.

M. Tyler made a motion that the Planning Commission create a UPWP application to update the scoping study relative to a pedestrian path along brookside road between the Town center and the Westford Elementary School. **W. Dunkley** seconded; Motion passed 3-0.

There was discussion about Stormwater and the Town Plan and whether they should fill out an application for either of these projects.

W. Dunkley made a motion that the Planning Commission recommend to the Selectboard that they apply to the UPWP for assistance in public outreach; in creating the next town plan, the town plan outreach would follow the outreach for 1705.

M. Tyler seconded; motion passed 3-0.

P. Haller mentions that the Selectboard is in budgeting season and is contemplating a Town Planner position. Therefore, they might rescind the application for CCRPC's help if they budget for and hire a Town Planner.

Public Comment

None.

Correspondence

- Email from Harmony about the municipal planning grant being denied.
- Email from Barb to Callie about ACT 181 and the newsletter. (See below)

"Act 181's mission is a Land Use review focusing on housing and development, amending and expanding ACT 250 while protecting natural resources by designating a statewide Tier 3 future Land Use Map. Every large Landowner of Forest Land should familiarize themselves with the program and tier 3 draft map.

The map is at this link:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/6ec0a9c1daa84f2893859d94403b0a1b>

(click on "I accept" bottom left, then hit continue to bring up the map).

While these tier 3 areas are still in draft form, these areas will be finalized by Jan 30th 2026. If your property is designated as tier 3, any development within it (including roads or long driveways) will trigger ACT 250 permitting.

Tier definitions can be found at this link:

<https://act250.vermont.gov/new-land-use-review-framework-act-181>

Tier 3 designation "runs with the land" so future land sales or participation (or not) in the state "Current Use" program (AKA Land Use Appraisal Program) will not affect Tier 3 designation. Additionally, Tier 3 designation will not affect the dollar amount value set by the state for forest land under Current Use.

Alex Weinhagen 802-480-1885 (ACT 250 Bld. 111 West St. Essex Jct) is available to any Chittenden County Landowner with input about the program or questions about their property.

Here is a link for the other board members:

<https://act250.vermont.gov/land-use-review-board-members>

Barb Peck

Rte 128"

Work Plan Review & Prioritization:

- Continued from last meeting.

Executive Session - Personnel

M. Tyler made a motion to enter executive session at 8:44pm to discuss personnel,

G. Lamphere seconded; Motion passed 3-0.

M. Tyler motioned to exit executive session at 9:02pm,

G. Lamphere seconded; Motion passed 3-0.

The Planning Commission made the decision to send correspondence to the Selectboard pertaining to Planning Commissioners' terms of service.

The meeting adjourned at 9:03pm.