

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MINUTES FOR MARCH 16TH, 2026
APPROVED ON MAY 18th, 2026**

Commissioners Present: Max Tyler, George Lamphere, Will Dunkley

Commissioners Absent: None.

Also Present: Harmony Cism (Planning Coordinator & Zoning Administrator), Maria Barden (Minute Clerk), Ben Bornstein, Art Woolf, Bill Cleary, Barb Peck, Lori Johnson, Maureen Wilcox, Kyle Buck (UVM Faculty), Rachel Trokenheim (UVM Student), Carol Winfield, Kirsten Tyler

The meeting began at 6:30pm.

Amendments to the Agenda

An additional applicant will be added to the interviews.

Citizens to be Heard - Items not on agenda.

None.

Approval of Minutes - February 9th, 2026

G. Lamphere motioned to approve of the February 9th, 2026 minutes as presented.

M. Tyler seconded; Motion passed 3-0.

Planning Commission Applicant Interviews

M. Tyler discusses the primary roles of a Planning Commissioner.

All applicants had time to introduce themselves and all will be asked the same questions.

Question #1 - How would you balance private property rights with broader community interest such as affordable housing and environmental impact?

Question #2 - What is your understanding of the main role and responsibilities of the commission?

Question #3 - What do you think are the most important planning related issues facing Westford right now?

Question #4 - What kind of future do you see for Westford in terms of growth, development and land use?

Question #5 - What is your availability and ability to research and get involved outside of the meetings?

- a. **Art Woolf** - Discussed living in Westford since 1982, raised two children in town, was a professor at UVM for about 39 years as an economics professor. He served on the school board in the 80s but hasn't served on any town board since then, he does keep up with what is happening around town. He now has the time and interest to do something for the town and felt being on the Planning Commission would be a beneficial way to volunteer.

Q1: He is concerned about both and feels there are tradeoffs no matter how you look at things, he tries to look at the specifics of each item and feels both property owners have rights and the town also has needs so he would try his best to find a balance there.

Q2: There are certain rules and regulations you must follow, you need to figure out how to make a good decision based on the best interest of the town. Sometimes overriding what a property owner may want is necessary based on selectboard, statutes and laws, etc.

Q3: Most towns in the state are facing similar issues such as the high cost of housing and how to make it as easy as possible to build housing for people who want to live here while still preserving the rural nature of the town. He feels Westford has already done a good job at finding this balance.

Q4: He feels VT is not growing a ton, but Chittenden is a little bit, he thinks we won't be seeing a lot of growth in Westford. Feels people like to be living closer to urban areas than Westford is, most of the growth that will happen he believes will be along the interstate corridor, South Burlington, Essex. He thinks Westford will have growth but not nearly as much as we have in the last 20-30 years.

Q5: He's retired right now so he has much more time than he used to. He's on the board of the East Rise Federal Credit Union which doesn't take up too much time and other than that he travels a little so he may miss a couple meetings, but he won't miss much and understands that there is more work to be done outside of the meetings.

b. Ben Bornstein - His family has had land in Westford for nearly seventy years; he has had the experience and honor of being the town's rep for CCRPC for the last three years with a re-appointment for an additional two years. He is an attorney, has his post JD work from Georgetown University Law Center. He does not practice law in Vermont, as he is not licensed in the State of Vermont. He has a history of volunteering, is very well traveled and languages are his thing. He thinks the approach that is important is about being a team and how they best serve and work with everyone. He highlights the limited staff that are not always recognized for their work. He drafts a lot and has made an effort working with CCRPC in long range planning and subcommittee as well as the unified planning works program. How do we maximize our resources that are out there and find new resources for the town? He led an effort for over a year to get the municipal energy resilience program grant funds, he felt bringing it to the end of the process highlighted several things that were critical to the town. He feels it's important to have a diverse group of volunteers and it is important to listen to everyone. He has extensive knowledge of the town's land use development regulations because of his own properties peculiar situation. He's helped develop contacts with members of Selectboards and other Commissions in the eighteen other municipalities in Chittenden County. He feels it's important to look at how to resolve or streamline some of the processes for controlled development while not pricing ourselves out in respect to taxes. How do we retain young couples who might need to be travelling to get their children to schools, etc. If we want to look at specifics, it's critical to take it on a case-to-case basis but also VLCT is a tremendous resource and archive of information which we can then improve after getting a baseline to then meet our needs in town.

Q1: Ben feels that tier 1b is a bit of a test case on what the state wants and what property owners want. He feels we have officials and should have confidence in those officials and commissioners. Despite all the efforts made in the past he feels it's trying to really communicate and find ways to better communicate that is important. He feels again that it is case-by-case, for example trails in town, some are on private property and others are not so how do we work with homeowners and still make it work as a vision for the town? Feels we need to work with the Planning Commission, Selectboard and community.

Q2: Ben discussed some of the upcoming projects he foresees the planning commission having to work on with the Selectboard. He specifically brought up 1705, road safety and the town plan. Work on how to be inclusive and work with the Selectboard and others like CCRPC. He gave a nod to all commissioners and board members who have put in the time in the past and done a lot of work in the past for these projects and the town.

Q3: ECOS plan, ACT 181 housing targets, tier3 designations, 1705 property, education and how we support the people working intensively on education related issues, affordability and taxation, revision and updating of the town plan.

Q4: *answered above during introduction*

Q5: He spent three years as the CCRPC representative for Westford and volunteered on other committees in addition, which have served the town's interest, which he feels has been a kind of training for him to put the town first. He's known to add on a lot of different things and never run out of time. He's not worried about being able to have time for the Planning Commission.

- c. **Bill Cleary** – He served on the Westford Selectboard for six years; he's been on the DRB for close to fourteen years. His interest in being on the Planning Commission is seeing first-hand what applicants go through to get a project permitted in town. He sees young couples spending lots of money on lawyer fees and engineering fees, he feels that many people are talking about affordable housing but not what it costs to build a house in town. He thinks there are many things that need to be addressed from his time on the DRB. He would love to see the land use regulations streamlined and easier to navigate for people wanting to build houses and small subdivisions.

Q1: He feels they are not mutually exclusive. If we let the private sector dictate how development occurs, it can create affordable housing but tacking on regulation after regulation and tacking on lawyer and engineering fees is not going to be affordable. He knows there are people who don't want development in the town center and feels we need a robust town survey which needs to be mailed with return postage to every household in town.

Q2: Write to and get the Selectboard to ratify the land use regulations, within the next couple years the town plan will need to be redone, and he knows there are certain statutory requirements adhered to at the state level.

Q3: He feels Art and Ben both went over what he also feels are the most important issues. A town plan that reflects the views of a majority of the town, he thinks maybe a survey was done incorrectly and was flawed in the past, if we get a good idea on what people want in town it will be easier for the boards to move forward and adopt a town plan.

Q4: He feels it would be interesting to ask residents what they would want and how they would feel if a neighbor built something in their yard that they don't like but are offended if you tell

them they can't build something in their own yard. If you build duplexes and triplexes in the center of town, are people really going to want to move there? He feels no, he thinks people would more likely want to move to areas like the R10, keep the town center quaint and loosen up in the R10 to allow development. Feels we could also loosen the point system if the town wants more development and if you want less you can tighten it up again.

Q5: Speaks highly of Ben as an applicant because of all his work and time, he's put in to help the town. He himself has retired recently and his time commitment is open, he generally does not like to zoom in from FL, but he can if needed and if not, that is the only time he'd be absent from a meeting.

- d. Kirsten Tyler** - Cares deeply about the future of the town and loves the rural feel and working landscapes of Westford, wants to explore creative ways for affordable housing while keeping things rural. She believes the town plan should clearly reflect the values of the community. She is part of the Rural School Community Alliance; she wants to make sure the town plan recognizes the importance of the Westford school (explicit existence of the school). Currently serves on the Westford Conservation Commission holds a PHD in natural resources from University of Vermont. Conservation is very important to her and wants to help ensure Westford protects it's forests, waterways, water life habitats and working landscapes. Wants the Conservation Commission and Planning Commission to collaborate more together, she is interested in helping the town get grants and assist with projects like 1705 river access and other projects that will strengthen the community. Feels there are opportunities to foster more agriculture in Westford. She's very organized, a thoughtful team member, doesn't mansplain, and wants to work collectively as a team with other members of the Planning Commission and other boards.

Q1: This is a difficult question, but she feels that we follow the laws of the state and regulations and bylaws that Westford currently has and when we want to think about change, we engage the town and try and get as much feedback as possible.

Q2: Long term planning for the town that considers what the people of the town want, she disagrees that the town plan doesn't reflect what people want but agrees that we will need to revise eventually and we need to reach people in many ways since there are different people who communicate in many ways.

Q3: Feels everyone already touched on them but housing and climate change feel important to her. She discusses climate related disasters such as flooding and other risks, she thinks we should have a climate change preparedness plan in future iterations of the town plan. 1705 is also a big one, she doesn't think it's an issue but believes it's a great opportunity for the town. It could bring together a community vision and be a great educational resource for natural resources and understanding of the river.

Q4: Personally, she is passionate about the town, the school, fair housing and natural resources and is quick to learn so she'll develop more visions as time goes on.

Q5: She is chair of the Conservation and director of the Westford farmers market, she has a job at UVM part time (mostly work from home), she also farms. Her days are very flexible; she is working from home most of the time and can commit time during the day and evening to focus on researching and coming up with ideas. She says if there are specific tasks she is up for the

challenge. One example of managing time is when the EWSD announced the consolidation, she hadn't been involved in school politics before then and had no idea what was going on but as soon as it was threatened, she felt very passionate and jumped on board immediately to try and help and develop the Westford School advocacy group with around thirty members. She researched and understood the details of the history of the school district, and the history of the board, etc. She went from zero to now, being able to talk about it in her sleep. She is a very passionate person when something is on her plate.

G. Lamphere and **M. Tyler** give their appreciation to all applicants for their time.

H. Cism asked if anyone has a preference to what seat they are appointed to. There are 3 open seats, all for 5-year terms. There is one full 5-year term available, one seat with 2 years remaining, and one seat with 3 years remaining.

B. Bornstein says he is willing to take the two-year seat if no one else has a preference, no one else has a preference to which seat they would take.

Discussion

- a. UVM Capstone Project-1705 Property – **R. Trokenheim** studies environmental sciences at UVM. Currently taking a capstone class, the project they're doing now is working with the Westford Conservation Commission on a project that would benefit Westford. The first component is developing an resilience index, and this is to support the flood resilience act. Developing grant resources for the town and hope to provide various resources. The town can use their materials for various aged students and adults; they're working on developing plans for 1705. Among the grants they're focusing on some to be used potentially for 1705. Vermont arts council grant which would help add vibrancy to the communities and increase community involvement. Potential picnic benches and a mural to 1705, playground, community engagement structures are a few of their ideas. By Wednesday they'll have a finished draft and can have drafts available to the Planning Commission to look at.

M. Tyler says **P. Haller** is coordinating with them. Right now, this project is being run by the Selectboard and not the Planning Commission, at some point the Selectboard will probably ask the Planning Commission to help with it. How can the Planning Commission help the UVM students right now?

R. Trokenheim says the idea of the engagement is to help the town and community make use of the property and increase community resilience whether its river access or others, as well as provide help with future projects and grant writing. The planning commission could help provide information with what the community wants if possible.

M. Tyler asks if **R. Trokenheim** has experience with community outreach.

R. Trokenheim says some members of the class do have some experience with community outreach.

K. Buck says the goal of the class is that it's one class operating as separate teams. Some teams have more experience with community outreach and are more engaged with that and some are more involved in the GIS piece. The overarching long term plan is he will be teaching year after year and has partnered with Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District which has a lot of resources they pool in, a lot of the planning and

plants would be provided for free from Winooski, they can help pull that in and once we find out more what the community wants they would look at grants.

M. Tyler says 1705 is a near-term project that could take years and was wondering if they would help Westford through the process or if it's a one-year thing.

K. Buck says it would be long term to follow through.

R. Trokenheim says they have a lot of ideas and lots of avenues in ways they can support the town such as wetland and stream resilience, and infrastructure around water.

G. Lamphere says from what he understands is that in the case of 1705 the deliverable is a conceptual plan that's been through some level of community outreach and intake process but is not a finished design by certified or licensed engineers and won't be a final plan for the town to act on.

R. Trokenheim and **K. Buck** confirm this is an accurate assessment.

G. Lamphere feels this is what the community needs, some outside help that can present some ideas to the community but not finalized plans/design.

K. Buck talks about being a geographer and the work he did with the EPA, for example if you turn an empty property into a park, they do the work to show what the money and cost will be and how it can benefit the property values or recreational amenity access.

M. Tyler says one thing that always comes up in town when resources are offered is, what does it take to manage this effort from staff or volunteers in the town?

K. Buck says the plan right now is to draft a slate of options and not give anything that will add work onto the town's plate. **K. Buck** is on Fletcher's Planning Commission and understands the small-town demands. He wants to minimize the work and hit once with a full slate rather than come back repeatedly.

B. Bornstein says from a CCRPC standpoint, they've put in an application for a feasibility study for 1705 and maybe once they assign someone it would be a great contact for the class and potentially help dovetail and provide real time information gathering with the CCRPC contact.

M. Tyler says this is great, knowing what they're looking for and that he can check in with the Conservation Commission and work with them to find out more information at a later date.

R. Trokenheim says there were plans that were made by a firm a couple years ago with affordable housing included, do you know why those plans have not moved forward?

M. Tyler discussed Wastewater being shot down being one reason.

G. Lamphere says the Planning Commission worked with CCRPC to come up with some renderings, there were some components such as curbing, proximity of buildings to the roadside, etc. that some community members had a problem with. It caused a lot of anxiety and uncertainty by many people in the town and slowed down any concepts there. Some community feedback was they didn't want the common to turn into Essex Junction. **G. Lamphere** doesn't think anyone wants that and feels there is no infrastructure for that. People were worried about thirty-to-fifty-unit housing and again there is no infrastructure for that. He feels that time heals and now that the town owns the property there are people in the community that are much more open to a dialogue about what the community wants.

L. Johnson says she would like to suggest that a future project could be the issues with stormwater on the common.

K. Buck asks if it is mapped.

M. Tyler says there's a lot of information on it and it was discussed with the Selectboard for UPWP planning assistance and it wasn't chosen as a priority at the time, which doesn't mean that if resources were available, it couldn't be moved and reconsidered.

G. Lamphere says there was considerable work done on stormwater as part of 1705 and there are drawings available. To highlight one important item is the culvert that runs under Route 15 and the common. The Planning Commission worked very hard to have the State take ownership over the culvert so it's not a culvert the town has to take care of over a state highway.

R. Trokenheim says they have looked at some stormwater grants, and she'll look further into the information some other students have collected.

- b.** Emerald Ash Borer in Westford - The state found emerald ash borer in Westford, they contacted the Conservation Commission and had a very long conversation about what should be done. What it means for the town is that this is a terrible invasive insect that bores into the bark of the tree and the larva eats the tree from inside out which causes the tree to become very brittle, and any storm or winds would knock the tree over. Any of these trees that are on roadsides or by houses would be risky. The steps that need to be taken are developing a management plan first. There are lots of resources for these types of things. **K. Tyler** feels that the Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, road crew, and Selectboard should all be on board with this and if everyone plays a part it shouldn't be a huge time commitment. They will provide public education so people are aware of why the town is cutting down these trees, they would recruit volunteers for roadside assessment (people who know what the damage looks like and know trees well) who would flag the high priority trees in the right-of-way and road. There is someone who does the volunteer training who would come to Westford, and there is documentation that would be provided to the town. If we don't act on it and make a plan eventually, they will be so brittle that it will cost five times more to take them down and that could potentially be in an emergency such as these trees falling on a house or utility line.

A. Woolf asks if the co-ops could also help identify those trees so that those trees don't fall on their utility lines.

M. Tyler thinks some may have already been taken down because the utility companies are always trimming, sounds like we need the assessment first.

The Conservation Commission has an April 9th meeting with the Selectboard for this topic.

W. Dunkley says once sugaring is wrapped up, he's happy to help and has some employees that could probably also help and can identify ash trees.

B. Peck says there is also a tree warden for Westford, and why not treat with pesticides rather than cutting them down?

K. Tyler says the tree warden is in the email chain, and it is a very expensive and complicated method to use a pesticide, cutting down trees is what was recommended to them by the State. She is just here to bring the information to the town.

B. Peck doesn't want the tree warden to be left out.

K. Tyler says he is on the email chain and will not be left out of the discussion.

M. Tyler says now that the information is being brought to the town, the Selectboard can determine what course of action they want to take.

Continued Discussion - Updates to WLUDR

- a. **Campgrounds**- This will go in the DRB's packet for their next meeting.

M. Tyler says item three Campground Density is what was added. Campground density should not exceed five campsites per acre.

G. Lamphere thinks it's time to reach out to the DRB for feedback.

Should there be a lot minimum size for campgrounds? What if there is a PUD in an R10 and nothing says they can't?

W. Dunkley has some concerns about the five campsites per acre, wonders if the density will be restricted and wants to investigate the economics of it a little more.

- b. **Agricultural Soils**- Suggestion that this wasn't desired by the DRB as a board but perhaps one or two members. **M. Tyler** brought it to the DRB and in his opinion there was universal sentiment that ag soil restrictions are not relevant to their work. Ag soils are brought up in the zoning regulations 313b. **M. Tyler** thinks the DRB would like the Planning Commission to reconsider as appropriate or not. **H. Cism** says the regulations currently don't force anything on homeowners but ask that they take it into consideration. The DRB can choose to accept applications on ag soils. **M. Tyler** says the DRB feels if we're going to approve it anyways, why do we have the regulations?
G. Lamphere feels this should go to the community at large, it's to preserve open space.

- c. **WRO Buffers**- Feels it might be beneficial to wait until there is a new iteration of the board. **W. Dunkley** feels strongly on this topic but is happy to take it up with the new board.

Update: Tier 1B Opt-In Status

The Selectboard chose to keep at the smaller designation area and ask the Planning Commission to explain to CCRPC why this was their choice and why it will not lead to the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. **B. Bornstein** provided a draft with several paragraphs and could potentially dwindle it down to the one paragraph that CCRPC is looking for. This would then be brought to the next Selectboard meeting for approval. There will not be another Planning Commission meeting between the CCRPC deadline and the Select Board meeting.

M. Tyler says the Planning Commission's recommendation is to opt-in fully and the Select Board is now asking the Planning Commission to argue in the favor of the selection they made, which was not the Planning Commission's recommendation.

G. Lamphere says in the spirit of collaboration and moving things forward, the Planning Commission was asked their opinion which was provided. The Select Board came to a similar

conclusion but with a different area and they're asking the Planning Commission to support that and help the argument of why it should be allowed. He is fine with supporting the Select Board on this and thinks **B. Bornstein's** write-up is well written. **M. Tyler** is asking if the Planning Commission want's to reconsider their position but has no qualms with supporting the Select Board's choice.

M. Tyler will work with B. Bornstein to write something up in time for the next SB meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Correspondence

- Julia Andrews emailed with information about another town's outreach for town plan updates.
- Letter from Seth Jensen about Tier 1b.

Work Plan Review

- Table WRO and Ag Soils until new board is formed.
- W. Dunkley will be the liaison to the Conservation Commission relating to the emerald ash borer.
- M. Tyler will work with B. Bornstein on Tier 1b paragraph.
- W. Dunkley will look at the economics behind five campsites per acre.
- Next meeting will be April 20th.
- May's meeting will be the reorganizational meeting and reapproval of the rules of procedure.

Executive session

G. Lamphere motioned to enter executive session at 8:46pm to discuss personnel,

M. Tyler seconded; Motion carried 3-0.

G. Lamphere motioned to exit executive session at 9:20pm, **M. Tyler** seconded; Motion carried 3-0.

G. Lamphere made a motion that **M. Tyler** draft a letter to the Selectboard with the Planning Commission's recommendation for open planning commissioners seats. **W. Dunkley** seconded; Motion carried 3-0.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:21pm.