

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MINUTES FOR JUNE 1, 2026
APPROVED ON JUNE 15, 2026**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Max Tyler, Kirsten Tyler, Ben Bornstein, Will Dunkley

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Art Woolf

ALSO PRESENT: Harmony Cism (Zoning Administrator & Planning Coordinator), Callie Hamdy (Minute Clerk), Lori Johnson, Barb Peck, Maureen Wilcox, Sarah Yeager

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA

There were no amendments to the agenda.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

There were no citizens to be heard.

MINUTES

Ben moved to approve the May 18, 2026 minutes as amended. Will seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION: UPDATES TO LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

a. Campgrounds

An updated proposal for campground regulations was in front of the commission. Harmony went over the changes since the last version. The changes were to do with campground density. They are now not to exceed 18 campsites per acre based on a recommendation Will had gotten.

Max discussed the land use development figures in relation to campgrounds. Max wanted to ask the other members of the Planning Commission (PC) if they were giving enough guidance to the Developmental Review Board (DRB). Max wondered if each of the sections needs to be revisited to see if we should say something specific about campgrounds. Max initially had wanted to approve the campground document tonight but wanted to address these questions.

Barb Peck was present. There is language in many sections that is ambiguous and she's not sure if it was purposely written that way. She doesn't feel this is appropriate and in any new plan should be struck out. She thinks we should go to state statute and move on. Kirstin asked if she was talking about land use regulations or the town plan.

Max understands there is some sentiment in town that we shouldn't have zoning regulations but he's not there. Max asked how they should move forward on this. He thinks the action plan is to review all the associated sections and see if there are any appropriate changes to those sections. Max was in favor of putting the campground document in as is for now.

The PC had given the DRB the draft document and they had thought it was moving in the right direction. The PC agreed that a campground was compliant with the type of uses they felt were appropriate. Max felt like the regulations have enough interpretive value that the DRB could find a

way to make it work. He felt this could all be done by the next meeting. Kirsten proposed that a couple members take these sections, go over them, and bring it up next time. Will thought that because he'd worked with Harmony on this previously he'd be happy to continue doing so.

b. WRO Buffers

Will had written language up last night for section 202 B that created a 50 foot buffer except for a 100 foot buffer for areas around the Brown's River. Max felt we were more restrictive than the state and any other community he is aware of when it comes to wetland buffers. The commission discussed shrinking the WRO to 50 foot with the exception of Class 1 wetlands of which there were none in town and keeping it from the Brown's River due to potential flooding.

Kirsten commented that she agreed with the river and streams. She wondered if we get a lot of questions for development within the 100 foot wetland buffer and does the 100 foot buffer cause enormous problems with development? The amphibians that live in wetlands have a habitat area that is much wider than 50 feet or even 100 feet. She's coming from conservation side of why would we reduce the buffer around wetlands that are sensitive ecosystems. Unless there is a big push from the town that the town wants this, she doesn't see a reason to change the wetland buffer. Will thinks there's been considerable feedback, such as from the DRB, that finds that people want to site the edge of a building lot or a driveway within the WRO. Harmony noted this would be a conditional use review for the DRB. Max agrees with everything Will had said. He had an opposing view to Kirsten. He believes it is the wetlands constraining development plans. He's more amenable to 100 foot buffers for everything but wetlands due to flooding, but that was his opinion. Will discussed the differences between vernal pools and wetlands. There are many hydric soils that are classified as wetlands. He's also heard from people that the 100 foot buffer is too restrictive.

Max questioned the purpose of the 100 foot wetland buffer. Was it to save the planet or was it to keep development out? Will had spoken to previous planning commissioners: environmental and partially to keep out development. Many developers think that Westford has too many regulations. Max asked if we could verify if any of the 100 foot restrictions other than Class 2 wetlands is enforced? Kirsten suggested reaching out to the district wetland ecologist.

DISCUSSION: TOWN PLAN UPDATE

a. Municipal Planning Grant Application

The Selectboard had met last Thursday where Max had explained the PC was moving forward with a project to update the Town Plan.

They had a UPWP project approved for 1705's next stage of development. Last year they had applied for a Municipal Planning Grant for that same purpose but had not been granted that. This year Max wants the PC to recommend a Municipal Planning Grant again, but for the grant to focus on the Town Plan update and not on 1705. He proposed to the SB that 1705 should be covered through the UPWP project unless they can find further grant money and that the Municipal Planning Grant focus should be on the town plan update.

Max asked what is a VT Town Plan and what guidelines does the state put out for us. Max read the statutes regarding Town Plan requirements out loud. It is explicit about maintaining Vermont's compact historical development patterns. When the town plan is written there are objectives it needs

to promote via the statewide goals. They can adopt a town plan that the CCRPC does not approve of but there are consequences for the town if CCRPC does not approve.

They discussed a town plan project charter. Kirsten had noticed in the guiding principals' project objectives consistently talk about the rural and agricultural aspects of town. Is there a reason why we're focusing on that? She understands that some folks have said they might not think that Westford is agricultural anymore or Westford doesn't want to be rural anymore. She doesn't know what people are saying and those are not her views, but she thinks we're really honing in on those words. Max clarified that it's saying Westford is ag/rural because that's the language used in the current town plan. He also wonders if that's true and if there is a better way to phrase the document.

Kirstin was concerned about the amount of projects that the PC is taking on and thought we should timeline it out a bit more. Max clarified the only item with a hard deadline is the Town Plan. 1705 is an underutilized resource for the town. Kirstin agreed we need to do all these things, but that all at once was a lot and she wanted to do things well. Harmony suggested that because the DRB was requesting specific things it might be an idea not to do a full review of all the regulations but do the more important asks and have them approved so they can work on the town plan and 1705.

Will felt the guiding principles had an inflammatory binary being created in the language. Max explained if we want to stay rural we need to think about what that means and what regulations and ordinances we want to put in place to enforce it, otherwise a developer will come in and develop, or we'll have suburbanization take place where everybody subdivides and builds housing to the limit of our capacity. The State wants compact development which we cannot do without infrastructure. It's not that we can't have infrastructure, we just have to decide to do it again. The other question is where is the compact development going to be. The state wanted it to be our entire village area, but the SB only went forward with 7 small lots for Tier 1B designation. What is the alternative to that? The argument that compact development is how we stay rural. The alternative is what Westford has been doing, which is people are subdividing, as is their right, and building lots on their property. To Max, personally, the logical conclusion of that is suburbanization. Single family homes that require on-site septic on average cost \$500,000 to build which is very expensive. He would love Westford to stay with some ag charm/character to it. The state pushes compact development for this reason, and it allows more reasonably priced housing. This requires infrastructure, however. To him the Town Plan update is to find where the town stands on this along with other issues.

Will proposed avoiding the use of "not" in the guiding principles document. We can wish for a lot, but he doesn't think we need to state things to be avoided. Instead, we can say rural planning as an active planning goal. Or if we wanted to address rural character, we can say something about that in a more positive verbiage with constructive language. Max thinks the next step is applying for municipal planning grant at CCRPC which Ben will assist with. In the meantime, the next step for the Town Plan update is to produce a skeleton of a schedule with steps forward.

Lori Johnson commented that she's encouraged by the discussion and input from the commission members.

DISCUSSION : 1705 PROPERTY

a. UPWP Approvals

We've had three projects approved by CCRPC in our UPWP application. One has previously been discussed at length, which is 1705 property planning. The SB has already stated they would rather the PC spearhead the 1705 project. The town has specific items they've identified for CCRPC they want to make sure are addressed in the study: wastewater, river access, town office options. The other UPWP approval was a pedestrian path study update from a study done in 2003 for a path from the school to the town common. That is a transportation project that CCRPC will run. The third is the one that Max is hopeful we can leverage which is grant writing assistance. The obvious question is what do we want grants for, such as a new town office, stormwater remediation, etc. What do we want to apply for? Kirsten noted that public outreach is really expensive and we should start grant writing for 1705. Ben wanted to explore grants to get solar apparatuses for the town garage/fire department building as that would be huge savings for the town.

UPDATE: TOWN PLANNER

The Town had tentatively begun looking for a town planner and have posted the job description. The commission talked more about an interview process which Harmony will clarify with Tommy.

Lori Johnson was present. She had been surprised that Ron Rodjenski still has a contract with the town and hasn't had further involvement. She thought he'd be a good resource for the process.

COMMISSIONER ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

There is a stipend paid out annually and the checks will be cut at the next pay period. Prior to that period the commissioners need to submit the I9 and W4 or the stipend declining waiver.

CORRESPONDENCE

They had received an email which Harmony and Max felt was a SB matter which had been discussed at the last SB meeting.

WORK PLAN REVIEW

M. Tyler went over the Work Plan Review. Max continues to receive feedback from his Front Porch Forum posts educating the public on the contents of the Town Plan. Those responses should be anonymized before being put in a future packet.

ADJOURN

8:57 p.m.