

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MINUTES FOR SEPTEMBER 21, 2026
APPROVED ON OCTOBER 5, 2026**

Commissioners Present: Will Dunkley, Kirsten Tyler, Max Tyler, Art Woolf

Commissioners Absent: Ben Bornstein

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

The meeting began at 6:30pm

Amendments to the Agenda

None.

Citizens to be heard – Items not on the agenda

None.

Approval of Minutes – August 17th, 2026

W. Dunkley motioned to approve the minutes as written. M. Tyler seconded, motion passed 4-0.

Update: Upcoming Public Hearing for Amendments to Regulations:

Planning Commission Reporting Form for Municipal Bylaw Amendments- The Planning Commission discussed the form that **H. Cism** drew up and sent out for the upcoming public hearing. No members of the Planning Commission that were present had any notes or amendments for the form that was drawn up.

M. Tyler motions that the Planning Commission approves the 2026 Reporting Form as submitted. W. Dunkley seconded, motion passed 4-0.

Public Hearing Procedure - **H. Cism** went over the Planning Commission's Rules of Procedure for public hearings.

Next Steps - **H. Cism** will update the SB at their upcoming meeting about the public hearing.

Update: Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Projects:

1705 Property Community Engagement - K. Tyler, T. O'Connor, H. Cism, B. Bornstein met with Anne Nelson Stoner and Maya Balassa with CCRPC to continue discussing the existing conditions summary and community engagement plan. They discussed approaches to bringing people together from the town. CCRPC and the Planning Commission will present a variety of opportunities and residents would have a chance to rank or weigh the options on the table. Those will then be analyzed through CCRPC to provide the SB with what the Town wants. This will be approached in small community groups rather than a large forum; It will be more one on

one outreach to bring more voices to the table and stay transparent. CCRPC wants to hear from other members of the Planning Commission and SB before finalizing anything.

M. Tyler says in the Existing Conditions document it starts out saying, “the Town acquired the 1705 property to preserve a prominent historic property.” He questions whether the wording is correct. What do they mean by preserving the property? It also says we have a permit for 490 gallons per day, but he wasn’t sure we had an actual permit but rather a design.

H. Cism believes there is a permit in place, but she will double-check on that.

M. Tyler discusses the remaining questions in the document; he asks who is answering them and how? Under the possible directions, benefits, and challenges, he knows one consideration is whether the property can be restored for use as an auxiliary town office. If that is an approach, he wants to understand what that means to the town staff. What will it mean if their work is separated between buildings? What would that mean for a safety point of view and work point of view? What would the practicality of this look like? He would like some research done regarding the practicality of this. M. Tyler wonders if a larger forum/town meeting would still be beneficial.

K. Tyler asked CCRPC if it was purposeful that a forum wasn’t included and Anne Nelson and Maya both said it was purposeful because they’ve found that many people don’t find those beneficial. People oftentimes don’t feel like their voices were heard, there is more anxiety and contention in those bigger forums. They are open to helping with one if it’s something the town wants to move forward with, but it is also much more expensive.

The Planning Commission continues their discussion regarding community engagement. **W.**

Dunkley wonders if they could look through the documents with the criteria that Anne Nelson is asking them to review and see if they have any answers or details. They can get those to **K. Tyler**, and she can pass them along to CCRPC.

B. Peck says 1705 has been purchased for a while now and in her opinion, it has taken too long to decide what to do with it.

H. Cism says these documents are on the SB’s agenda for Thursday’s meeting.

The Planning Commission will try to get their comments to K. Tyler by the end of the week for her to pass along to Anne Nelson Stoner and Maya Balassa with CCRPC.

H. Cism will also let the SB know at their meeting that they’re doing this and if the SB wants to also comment, they can add to it.

Grant Writing Assistance - H. Cism and M. Tyler met with Maya Balassa about grant writing. The Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) doesn’t open until October 1st, and this grant is the priority for this fall. Payments may or may not fall within two budget years. They are signing on to do one more grant writing effort, probably in the Spring. In correspondence there are conservancy related grants for trails, water, etc. This could potentially be something that gets added to the additional grant that is available in the Spring. Maya will be coming to the Planning Commission meeting on October 19th to review the first draft of the Municipal Planning Grant Application. The Planning Commission will have to have a meeting and approve the proposal, then the SB will also have to approve it. The Planning Commission will know more at the meeting on the 19th.

Brookside Pathway Scoping Study - W. Dunkley, H. Cism, T. O'Connor, S. Cushing, and CCRPC met with Hoyle Tanner. They discussed the scoping report and had minor comments/changes on the last page with the Scope of Services that was included. Hoyle Tanner has already updated that and made the changes. They discussed having a letter sent out to people who own property or reside alongside Brookside Road and then making a FPF post to let people know what the Planning Commission is doing with the scoping study.

H. Cism has drafted a letter for those residents/landowners, she is planning to send it out later this week unless the Planning Commission has changes.

M. Tyler asks if before sending the letters out and notifying landowners, should they have some sort of outreach to let people know it's something that's about to happen for x reasons?

K. Tyler feels that if it were her personally and she lived on Brookside Rd., she would appreciate a letter before notifying the town. Although they could happen simultaneously.

M. Tyler wonders if instead of, or along with "here's what we're doing" they also include "why this is happening."

W. Dunkley feels adding a little more justification or rationale behind the project would be helpful.

H. Cism will reach out to Hoyle Tanner to see if they have a date for the local concerns meeting and if not, they'll send a second letter to residents/landowners with a date.

B. Peck wants them to make it clear to the public whether it's a gravel or paved path.

This will be part of the scoping study, but **W. Dunkley** thinks that gravel is the way most people would lean.

Update: Town Planner Hiring Process:

M. Tyler gives a quick rundown about the Town Planner Update: The SB approved a part-time Town Planner; they allocated money, posted the job, and got some resumes with which they weren't overly impressed. They formed a committee and were about ready to vet questions for the interview process which was put on hold when there were conversations between T. O'Connor and the Town of Fairfax about sharing a Town Planner. This is something that T. O'Connor and the Town Manager of Fairfax will work through a process on how this will work out. There currently are no updates on this front right now. M. Tyler feels they should let this play out with Fairfax for a bit before discussing other options but wants to know how the rest of the board feels.

K. Tyler feels a timeline or check-ins of some sort should be created but otherwise likes the idea.

A. Woolf also likes the idea, he thinks that maybe T. O'Connor should talk with Fairfax to find out if they have the money and are waiting to have the discussion or if they're waiting until a new fiscal year before they hire someone, this would be helpful to know.

A. Woolf motions that the Planning Commission suspends their search of a part-time Town Planner to allow time for the possibility of a shared full-time position with the Town of Fairfax to be pursued. M. Tyler seconds, motion passed 4-0.

Correspondence

- a. K. Tyler sent along VT Digger Opinion article.

- b. Appreciation Dinner September 28th at RBMH.
- c. CCRPC Chittenden County Regional Housing convening October 29th.
- d. Note from Wendy Doane regarding an idea of a build out plan.

The Planning Commission discussed Wendy's note a bit more in depth. M. Tyler believes she's asking if you take the current regulations, what does that look like in terms of where development can and would happen in the town and what kind of structures they would be. M. Tyler thinks they'd have to talk to Wendy a little bit more about what exactly she's thinking to get a clearer idea.

K. Tyler thinks of it as theoretical capacity given multiple scenarios.

H. Cism says this is in support of hiring a Town Planner.

K. Tyler to set up a time to meet with Wendy Doane to get more details.

H. Cism will add this to the agenda for the October 19th meeting.

- e. Forest Block info regarding new ACT 250 regulations. There is one in Essex on September 29th.
- f. Forest, Parks, and Recreation Grants information.

The Planning Commission discussed this a little more in depth. They discussed potential projects, is this something that could help with 1705? M. Tyler suggested that at the October 19th meeting they create a list of potential projects to bring to the SB.

H. Cism will add this to the October 19th meeting agenda to discuss further.

Work Plan Review

- a. The Public Hearing for amendments to the regulations will be October 5th, 2026.
- b. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be October 19th, 2026.
- c. Regional Housing Meeting – Reviewing CHIP Program – M. Tyler attending.
- d. Act 250 Info Session on September 29th – K. Tyler attending.
- e. Ideas for FPR Grants.
- f. Follow up with Wendy Doane.
- g. Follow up with Tommy about Fairfax/Westford Town Planner status.
- h. Follow up with the SB on 1705 Project through the Planning and Zoning report.
- i. Updating letter to residents on Brookside Rd. to include the reasoning.
- j. Follow up with Hoyle Tanner about date for local concerns meeting.
- k. Follow up with Kirsten on questions/feedback highlighted for CCRPC.
- l. Maya Balassa will be at the October 19th meeting.

M. Tyler made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:29pm. W. Dunkley seconded, motion passed 4-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:29pm.