

TOWN OF WAITSFIELD, VERMONT
Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 4, 2024

Members Present: Beth Cook, Bob Cook, Emma Hanson, AnnMarie Harmon, Jonathan Ursprung

Members Absent: Alice Peal

Staff Present: JB Weir, Planning and Zoning Administrator

Others Present: Alex Belenz (SE Group), Sean Lawson, Robin Morris (Water Commission), Becca Newhall, Sam Robinson (MRVPD), Mac Rood

II. Regular Business.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm by Jonathan Ursprung. The meeting was held in person at the Town Offices and remotely via Zoom.

2. Review agenda for addition, removal, or adjustment of any items.

It was noted that the Minutes would not be reviewed until the next PC meeting.

3. Public Forum.

Nobody requested time to address the PC.

4. Groundwater Protection Overlay

Robin Morris presented a map of the Water Supply aquifer, and reminded the group that current Source Water Protection measures are discretionary for landowners in the aquifer region. Options moving forward are to keep things as they stand, draft an Ordinance, purchase the aquifer land, or adopt a Source Protection Overlay District as part of the Town's Land Use Regulations. The Water Commission (WC) is proposing the Overlay District be adopted, as a strategy for being thoughtful about any development taking place in the area of the aquifer. Robin noted that the main concern is PFAS contamination; the most recent testing did not detect any of these substances.

The three zones included in the Overlay were reviewed, including the allowances and prohibitions for different types of development/land use in each. Robin explained that State level information was used in developing the document, and that it has undergone Town legal review as well as WC review. The WC is suggesting that the current draft be amended to only allow for a hydrologist to review the two year time of travel for septic discharge; currently there is also an allowance for a certified engineer to do this review. JB noted that he will review this change with the Town's attorney, that motorized vehicle use in the Overlay also needs to be clarified, and that stormwater retention measures also need to be incorporated for development in the Overlay. He indicated that he will have a final draft available for PC review at an upcoming meeting.

Robin explained that the WC has been reaching out to landowners impacted by the Source Protection Plan update, providing a chance for comments, and indicated that once the draft Overlay language is finalized, a public hearing will be set up and noticed.

5. Wastewater Planning Project Update

The vote for approval of the system is coming up, the Selectboard has held their informational meeting and there have been coffee hours on Fridays. The Committee recently visited the Sugarbush facility, which is a similar design to what is planned for Town, and is working on connection policies and guidelines, as well as connection letters for residents/businesses.

6. Village Master Planning

It was explained that the Steering Committee had expressed concern regarding the ability to determine existing conditions and constraints related to wetland impacts, as it has been decided to move the wetland focus areas primarily to a second phase of the overall Master Planning project. However, it had been confirmed at the recent SC meeting that there will be wetland analysis work as part of this initial phase, and that it is generally the enhancement or development of wetland areas that will not be addressed until the second phase.

Update on Meeting with Shannon Morrison

Points brought forward by Shannon included the need to pay attention to downstream impacts of any development plans, as these will affect the Bridge Street area and the river corridor moving north from there. Shannon also explained in more detail the 'in lieu' fee for encroachment, noting that Ducks Unlimited is the recipient of those funds, to be used for wetland enhancement. It was discussed that, while there is also potential for housing outside of Irasville, and within the scope of the wastewater project, the MPG was awarded for a focus on the Irasville area.

Alex Belenz mentioned that the area's high-water table, past development, and other factors would all be taken into consideration, and that his understanding from meeting with Shannon is that the wetlands create a big constraint on development opportunities between Irasville and Bridge Street. He confirmed that this does not significantly impact the project deliverables outlined, as this has been understood all along, and that he found the information from Shannon to be educational, but not discouraging.

The revised scope/deliverables/timeline document was discussed; Alex noted that wetlands and other environmental constraints will be rolled into the other aspects of the project. He also explained that PC/SC/public engagement is needed to understand what is trying to be achieved; this will be a continuation of the Bylaw Modernization outreach, and will serve both educational and feedback solicitation purposes.

Alex further noted that a web site will be developed, and that the design phase will begin with some conceptual presentation for public engagement. Once more concrete designs are available, they will also be presented to the public, and the strategic steps necessary to implement plans will be defined. He emphasized that wetlands implications will be part of the entire process, with a clear set of expectations to be outlined regarding future impacts. He explained that the initial design would include features such as layouts of new roads, greenway connections, locations for placement/grouping of structures, etc. and that this will be an iterative process.

The details of the work plan were discussed further, and some minor adjustments made. Alex noted that there will be some overlap of phases, and that the Design Phase encompassed many aspects of the project.

PC/VMPSC meeting schedule

Alex reviewed the proposed timeline for the project, broken down into five phases, indicating that this is likely a year-long project. He explained that a charette will be helpful for presenting information and receiving feedback from residents, likely to be scheduled at about midpoint in the project if it is decided that this will be a beneficial format. It was discussed that SE Group representatives will likely meet with the full SC monthly or a little less frequently, but that a smaller group (AnnMarie, Mac, JB) would likely meet with them more often for some of the more detailed work.

Sean Lawson raised some questions related to the change in the project scope regarding wetlands, explaining that he would like to see where in Irasville there is infill potential and where there is opportunity to enhance the existing wetlands. Alex confirmed that this will be done using existing information and that the scope of work might include such language, but that there will not be on-the-ground verification of delineations, etc. at this time.

JB confirmed that he will send MPG contract language to Alex for review by SE Group. Once a contract is prepared outlining the scope and schedule, it will be presented to the Selectboard for approval.

Jonathan asked that it be kept in mind that commercial development opportunities, as well as residential, are to be considered in this project's work.

7. Approval of Minutes

Approval of the Minutes was postponed.

8. Other Business

PC Vacancy – Becca introduced herself and provided some background information, PC members explained the time commitment involved and outlined upcoming focus areas for the Commission.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Chamberlin, Recording Secretary