

TOWN OF WAITSFIELD, VERMONT
Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 20, 2024

Members Present: Beth Cook, Bob Cook, Emma Hanson, AnnMarie Harmon, Becca Newhall, Alice Peal, Jonathan Ursprung

Staff Present: JB Weir, Planning and Zoning Administrator

Others Present: None

II. Regular Business.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 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.

The order of items to be addressed was rearranged.

3. Public Forum.

Nobody was present requested time to address the PC.

4. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of July 16, 2024 were amended and approved.

4. Alice Update

LHMP – Alice reported that the Selectboard has adopted the updated Plan, after making an amendment to reinstate taking a look at the Shepard Brook area due to North Fayston Road homeowners’ requesting that something be done to address the repeated impacts to their properties due to flooding. She noted that the document has been sent to Vermont Emergency Management for review and comment; this ensures that Waitsfield’s ERAF reimbursement rate will raise to 17.5%. VEM will send it to FEMA for final approval.

JB also explained that a letter has been submitted on behalf of the North Fayston Road properties, to be evaluated by the Emergency Watershed Protection Program for potential funding of remediation/mitigation measures along the stream. Alice also indicated that she has located prior studies of the area, and is working to have appropriate parties provide some education for residents regarding options for their homes.

Climate Action Plan – Alice explained that a major focus of the Public Health Chapter she is working on will be communication and education, providing information for individuals about the tools and assistance available to them. She also indicated there will be work on increasing the availability of cooling centers and focus on topics such as heat related illness, smoke and air quality, the increase in water borne and vector borne illnesses due to the increase in wet weather, and the increasing number of ER visits related to these health impacts.

CVRPC – Work continues on the Regional Plan, with the initial review of the Natural Resources, Transportation, and Economy chapters completed. Alice noted that the Energy chapter will require some effort, that she may be seeking some feedback regarding the Community Resources chapter

being tied into the one for Infrastructure, that the Army Corps of Engineers will be deployed to states with frequent flooding to complete on-the-ground hydrologic studies, and that floodplain development restrictions will likely be a focus of much conversation.

6. Village Master Planning

JB had recorded the recent Steering Committee (SC) meeting, and will provide a link to PC members.

AnnMarie reported on the meeting, which was the SC's first working session with SE Group. She explained that a full hour had been devoted to a focus on wetlands, with the group learning that the Irasville wetlands are able to absorb as much as 5.8 million gallons of water, which is why that area does not flood. If any further wetlands are impacted by development, the area would be susceptible to flooding. Tucker (SE Group) also explained to the SC that there is potential for creation/enhancement of wetlands at the Couples' Field, something that would be part of Phase 2 of the project if it was decided to pursue this avenue, which would mean finding other locations for the various uses of that field. AnnMarie noted that there would need to be community conversation regarding this change.

For this phase of the work, the SC will be focusing on what is possible with the areas of Irasville that are developable, AnnMarie noted that the Arrowwood information has been very helpful and that those reports include assessments of even those properties for which access was not provided. Tucker has been communicating with ANR regarding these considerations, and ANR has been adamant that no more wetland encroachment will be allowed in Irasville. Tucker has provided a series of maps in overlays that presents the relevant information in a very digestible manner. JB noted that potential opportunities will be identified that may need to have some minimal mitigation measures associated with any development.

AnnMarie also pointed to a VR piece by Ira Shadis (Friends of the Mad River), recognizing that the most effective and affordable approach to solutions is in working with nature, and expressed that she believes this is reflected in the SC's overview.

The SC has been provided with examples of multiple Irasville master planning projects which have been produced in the past. AnnMarie noted that many of these call for a redirection of Route 100 in order to create a more 'Main Street' atmosphere.

Becca spoke of the community value of seeing children playing in public spaces such as the Couples' Club fields; Jonathan spoke of the Wellness Survey comments regarding the need for a community center and the importance of spaces for recreation and socialization; there was a discussion of the lack of local swimming lessons; it was agreed that upcoming community engagement should include questions related to these topics.

There was a discussion of engaging in future work focusing on a watershed approach, in conjunction with Fayston and to a degree Warren.

The SC meeting schedule was outlined, and AnnMarie indicated that the Existing Conditions Analysis will be provided to the SC on September 24, and likely presented to the full PC at their first October meeting.

Finally, she noted that an initial sketch of the website related to this project was presented to the SC at the meeting, demonstrating the content and interactive features that are being developed by SE Group.

7. Groundwater Protection Overlay District

JB offered a reminder of the Water Commission's goal to have this Overlay adopted by the end of the year; and the group reviewed the schedule of hearings needed, notification times required, etc. that will be suitable for having everything in place prior to the holiday season. Jonathan requested that PC members take the time to review the document and provide feedback for review at the next PC meeting. Commissioners will target a public hearing date of October 15, 2024.

8. Wastewater Planning Project Update

JB reported that the various teams are still meeting regularly; an ESA amendment was recently approved, setting things up for final design funding of \$1M; and highlighted other items from the report he had attached to the meeting packet. He also noted that he and Robin continue to receive agreements from landowners, the group is waiting to hear from Senator Sanders regarding the appropriation bill, and that the project has moved up in ranking on the Pollution Control list – cautioning that the funds distributed through that program can take up to several years to be disbursed. An environmental assessment will be conducted soon, and Bob noted that work related to the more technical aspects of the project are becoming more actively part of the conversations with Dubois and King, with pits for testing discharge rates of effluent planned for the fall.

9. Other Business

Jonathan reported that Sam Robinson of the PD is finalizing the results of the recent Community Wellness survey and provided some background on the survey and an overview of the responses which indicated larger changes in the attitudes of respondents. Sam will be presenting a full overview of the data to all the local Planning Commissions and Selectboards over the coming weeks. Jonathan explained that the information gleaned from the survey is useful in informing the work taken on by the PC.

Annmarie asked about progress on finding a new Town Administrator, and Jonathan and JB provided an update on the interviews taking place for both that position and the Treasurer vacancy.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Chamberlin, Recording Secretary