

**TOWN OF WESTMINSTER
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
AUGUST 11, 2014**

Members Present: John Medeiros (Chair), John Barnett (Clerk); Matt Conklin, Randy Major

Others Present: Peter Barrett, Brian McAllister, Robert Dufresne, Cynthia Moore, Ruth Grandy, Phil Savoy, Doug DeMarco, Tim Allen, Craig Allen, Dan Mandich, Cole Streeter, Russell Hodgkins (Town Manager)

CALL TO ORDER: Medeiros called this Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:03 PM in the Westminster Town Hall. He noted that regular members Chris Vincent and Kathy Kingston were not present. He advised that meetings are tape recorded therefore asked anyone wishing to speak to identify themselves for the record.

ADJUSTMENTS TO AGENDA: Major expressed an interest in hearing an up-date on the ancient roads in Town as Mrs. Grandy is present. He understands the Selectboard made a decision to look at two-or-three roads per meeting to see what they want to do with them. Medeiros noted that ancient roads will be discussed under Other Business and review of the Minutes will be after Mr. Dufresne 's presentation.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC COMMENT:

Robert Dufresne, Dufresne Group, to Add Additional Information Regarding the Municipal Water / Sewer Feasibility Study: Medeiros introduced Mr. Dufresne who has been an engineer for many years. Both he and Conklin have been working on this project. Dufresne will be providing information on obtaining a feasibility study for municipal water and sewer. The PC members have talked about extending the lines at the Industrial Park, Exit 5 area, Westminster Station, along Route 5 by the former St. Johnsbury Trucking property, and Kissell Hill.

Dufresne explained that this is an exchange of information rather than a presentation. He does a lot of both water and sewer studies in Vermont communities and works with the funding agencies that provide funds for evaluations, final designs, planning specifications and actually the construction plus grants and/or loans that actually build the water and/or sewer improvements. He questioned if the group is more interested in water than sewer or both. Savoy felt sewer is important because they have failed sewer systems in Town especially the non-residential properties. The Town of Walpole serves the Burtco property but is a privately owned line. The aqueduct provides drinking water but there will be no new hook-ups due to capacity. Dufresne advised that the way the federal government and state work is that systems in real need create priority points; it is easier to get money. What does not work very well is the combination of water and sewer as there are different groups of people and regulations. However there is an alternative of doing both.

Conklin explained that the Town has an Industrial Park that was never developed as there is no water and sewer going to the property. Kurn Hattin has a spring system that could handle this area. Dufresne pointed out that geographically this is a huge area; water and sewer lines cost between \$200 and \$400/foot. The State and Federal agencies will look at median household income, they have different levels based on census and have poverty, intermediate and market interest rates they use to determine grant eligibility. For water and wastewater there are three options: 1) fund it locally; 2) State funding programs for both water and sewer; and 3) USDA Rural Development (RD) they fund both water and sewer and offer grant loan packages. There are other funding agencies that come up occasionally – CDBG and STAG plus stimulus money. The Economic Development Agency, EDA in the 1970s, was a 100% grant program; they had two rounds but they faded away. They used to fund Industrial Parks.

Dufresne distributed and explained “Funding Alternatives for Water & Sewer Projects” that the State offers. Funds are typically disbursed through the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Facilities Engineering Division (FED). They disburse funds received from the Federal Government; generally they are a loan. For water it is a negative interest loan. They fund both water and wastewater. The wastewater program is CWSRF and the drinking water program is DWSRF. There is a third program called the State Planning Advance; it funds both water and sewer.

Savoy asked how detailed the Town has to be to apply for a grant for a feasibility study. Dufresne said the needs of the community and objective of the study have to be defined well. Sometimes a Town will set up a study committee to define the planning area, what the needs and objective are. Then an engineer works out the scope, the state reviews it and says they have to look at the historical aspects, archeological issues, etc. Finally a funding agency can approve it. It is a detailed process. Dufresne asked if they want to look at both water and sewer or just sewer. Do they want to look at the Town or just the study area? It can be done in phases. Savoy did research and found out that the Bellows Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant is at about one-third capacity. Dufresne displayed a map that showed the southerly extremities of the Bellows Falls Village Corp for their water and sewer; they service the High School. There was discussion relative to having iron, magnesium and nitrates in some water supplies. Moore advised that Sojourns has an issue with water and has been buying it for years. Dufresne explained that a lot of fire departments feel confident that they can deal with fire suppression without municipal assistance but it would be nice to have a water system that offered sprinkler protection. It is a significant reduction for commercial properties. He felt they should look at both Bellows Falls and Walpole as alternatives.

Dufresne advised that the concept needs to be in the Town Plan and Regional Plan. That means a defined growth center. The State cannot fund growth through the wastewater system. There needs to be community involvement and support, land has to be available. He attached a sample application for the Planning Grant. An important question is what Bellows Falls will charge Westminster to hook-on; that would be a key number.

Dufresne talked about the Rural Development Program. They will look at commercial customers, residential, seasonal homes and treat those differently so it will affect the total cost per customer. The USDA Rural Development Program provides low interest loans and grants. If there is a health issue involved they can go up to a 75% grant. He handed out a USDA Rural Development, Water and Environmental Programs, Planning Grant Programs document. They can provide emergency grants.

There are two ways to get to where the Town wants to be: 1) work with an engineer to run liaison between the funding agencies to get to the stage where they have an application in front of them with the scope and fee worked out ready to sign; and 2) go through a selection process to select an engineer based on qualifications or cost. The State has the ultimate review of fees in the scope of services.

In the packets that were distributed the following additional information was included: 1) Planning Advance Application, 2) Wastewater Solutions for Vermont Communities; 3) Check list for CWSRF Projects; and 4) Information from USDA RD. Additional information not included was: Getting your Project to Flow Smoothly Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP).

Conklin asked what prices Dufresne was projecting. He noted that he does not know enough about what the Town’s objective is yet but typically it is \$20,000 to \$30,000 each. Following a discussion, Dufresne noted that the growth issue affects wastewater funding more than water funding. Someone will need to look at the distances, and how to get around the geographical expanse.

Medeiros felt the PC would be ready to have the Public Hearing on the Town Plan around Town Meeting time. They might still make changes after that as the result of comments.

Dufresne left this meeting at 8:21 PM.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Ancient Roads: Mrs. Grandy pointed out that the last time she was here there was discussion about the possibility of investigating five roads but then the discussion established that most of those roads did not meet the definition of an ancient road. It is supposed to be a corridor that cannot be identified. At the last meeting of the Selectboard Hodgkins was asked to choose two-or-three roads per meeting to talk about and offer the homeowner the opportunity to come in to speak about the roads. There were three that the Selectboard had no choice as they will be Class 4 highways because they are going to another township. They cannot be discontinued. He was asked to contact the adjacent towns to see if they are still on the same page. Athens did not do anything but chose to let the State take care of it. Rockingham has gone through the process and the roads he asked about have already been adopted by them as Class 4 highways so Westminster will do the same. Hodgkins is hoping the Selectboard will take these three roads. At the following Selectboard meeting Hodgkins will pull the other two of the original five to try to adopt them. The problem is to distinguish between a Class 4 highway or an ancient road. Westminster has nineteen highways that have been documented so they should be looked at thoroughly and either be adopted or discontinued. If they have more time others will be researched. Some follow a Town road. Grandy pointed out that their committee found 282 surveys in the land records; 160 are solved and are on the map. She said it was two-and-a-half years of interesting work she and thanked DiBernardo and Associates for their work on the map.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES – July 14, 2014: Major / Barnett moved to approve the Minutes of the July 14, 2014, meeting with the minor amendment on page 2. The Minutes were approved by a 4-0-0 vote (approved, abstained, opposed) vote.

DATE OF NEXT REGULAR MEETING: There was a consensus that the next regular meeting date will remain the same – Monday, September 8, 2014.

OCTOBER REGULAR MEETING: The regular Monday meeting on October 13th, Columbus Day, will be moved to Monday, October 20th.

OTHER BUSINESS (Continued):

Bazin Property: The PC members received and reviewed the letter, dated August 7, 2014, from the Bazin family. This is the farm located on Route 5 across from Sojourns. The line that is drawn on the Town's zoning map is right at their north property line; it is the difference between Village and Residential. They have requested taking the zoning district and moving it one lot south so it can be in the Village. Right now it is Residential for two acre lots. This would grant them the ability to have two homesteads for their family members on their own parcels. With the change, to be legal, they could subdivide the 2.4 acres. The farm would be separate. This would be a recommendation from the PC to the Selectboard. Hodgkins will draft a letter to the Bazin family to indicate that the PC has indicated a positive manner.

WINDHAM COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: Barnett brought this to the attention of Hodgkins. Funds for economic development in Windham County have opened up but there is a class they have to attend on Tuesday, August 19th to be eligible. It comes from Entergy; it is a promise of \$10,000,000, \$2,000,000 a year for five years. It is free money so the feasibility study would not cost the Town anything if they do this well. It is a grant. They have to show the need for a study in the Town

Plan (not approved). It is well worth the effort. The PC members preferred to have Hodgkins attend on their behalf. Hodgkins will attend the session in Vernon from 6:00 to 8:00 PM and will RSVP for two seats in the event that another PC member would like to attend. Karen Astley will try to attend the afternoon session from 1:00 to 3:00 PM in Townshend. The application deadline is September 23rd.

ADJOURNMENT: Major / Conklin moved to adjourn this meeting. The motion was approved by a 4-0-0 vote at 9:09 PM.

Signature of Clerk

Date

Prepared by: Regina Borden, Recording Secretary

(Note: These are unapproved Minutes. Corrections, if necessary, will be found in the Minutes of the September 8, 2014, Planning Commission meeting.)