

TOWN OF WAITSFIELD, VERMONT
Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 17, 2024

Members Present: Bob Cook, Emma Hanson, AnnMarie Harmon, Jonathan Ursprung
Members Absent: Beth Cook, Becca Newhall, Alice Peal
Staff Present: JB Weir, Planning and Zoning Administrator
Others Present: Sam Robinson, MRVPD

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.

Jonathan noted that Alice would not be available to provide any updates.

3. Public Forum.

No members of the public were present.

4. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of September 3, 2024 were amended and approved.

5. MRVPD Wellbeing Survey Presentation

Sam Robinson presented information on the recently completed Wellbeing Survey, first providing some background and purpose information, including a definition of wellbeing and the factors that were evaluated. He outlined the various indicators included in the annual data report – community connections, the built environment, economic opportunity, social infrastructure, and natural systems, and then covered some of the more specific results seen in each of the different domains covered by the more qualitative Wellbeing Survey. One item noted in several responses was the desire for a community center.

Due to poor ratings for governance, Jonathan asked if any of the governance domains have been analyzed on a town-by-town basis; Sam indicated that he would look into creating such a report. A suggestion for gathering more input from high school students was discussed, and there was also some commentary regarding whether to time the next (2026) survey for a different time of year or to keep it consistent.

Sam confirmed that he will make his presentation slides available to PC members.

6. Alice Update

This item was removed from the agenda due to Alice's not being present.

7. Village Master Planning

AnnMarie summarized that on August 20 the first group meeting with SE Group had taken place, with the conversation focused on a wetland avoidance approach based upon input received from ANR. This was followed by an August 24 email from Sean Lawson, with multiple talking points raised.

A meeting took place on August 27 (attended by the core team and JB), where it was decided to meet again following the next PC meeting to incorporate both Sean's concerns and PC input going forward. The PC met on September 3 and the Steering Committee (SC) on September 4. The next meeting of the SC will be on September 24, with SE Group present, and the SC will meet on a monthly basis going forward.

AnnMarie explained that a report related to Task 1A will be reviewed by the SC at the September 24 meeting, and presented to the PC at their October 1 meeting; she was not certain that information related to Task 1B will be available at the same time.

She then summed up the changes which have been made, noting that SE Group has a new plan which will differentiate the various levels of certainty regarding potential development in specific wetland areas. Jonathan noted that SE Group concurred with PC opinion that if ANR input was taken absolutely literally, no development at all would be possible, and that the levels of certainty analysis will help move things forward with outlining what IS possible.

JB reported that he has had discussion with Skatium representatives, who are exploring what can be done at that site, and have been in contact with Shannon Morrison regarding the property. They plan to attend the upcoming SC meeting.

AnnMarie then commented on the wetland and floodplain restoration work which has been undertaken in the Middlebury/Otter Creek area, noting that there are over 500 buildings in Middlebury's floodplain area, which is about ten times what exists in Waitsfield. She also indicated that the town worked on master planning and wetland creation and floodplain work in tandem, but that the wetland work did not drive the master planning as is the case for Waitsfield. Finally, she noted that wetland enhancement projects are possible, mentioning that she located 15 such projects in the State of Vermont that had taken place between 2013 and 2022. AnnMarie mentioned a Middlebury study that examines the economic impact of wetlands.

8. Wastewater Planning Project Update

JB reported that the Engineering Services Agreement (ESA) has been accepted by the State, and that final design should be complete at some point next summer. Many of the catchment agreements are in, and Robin Morris is working on model easement language for those properties proposed for hosting pumping stations.

Regarding funding, JB noted that no Congressional Discretionary Spending (CDS) funding had been awarded, but that the State had increased what was anticipated to be a \$1M grant to \$2.5M, after other projects had lost funding due to not being far enough along in the process to continue qualifying. These funds are anticipated to get the project through final design and permitting, likely leaving \$1.5M to be put toward construction of the disposal site. A meeting with Senator Sanders' office took place to discuss other possible funding sources, and the Town was encouraged to apply for CDS funding again next year. Bob reported that surveying work is currently ongoing.

Emma asked about those houses behind the Post Office who current are connected to the Mad River Green Shopping Center septic system; JB will look into how those properties will be addressed.

JB and Jonathan confirmed that there is likely no need for another vote, as there are various funding sources to be explored for the upcoming work.

9. Other Business

Jonathan reported that the draft Groundwater Protection Overlay standards are still under legal review.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:31 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Chamberlin, Recording Secretary