

Waitsfield Wastewater Planning Project

Update #8

To: Waitsfield Selectboard
From: Joshua Schwartz, MRV Planning District
CC: Waitsfield Wastewater Planning Project Team Members
Annie Decker-Dell'Isola, Waitsfield Town Admin.
JB Weir, Waitsfield Planning & Zoning Admin.
Randy Brittingham, Waitsfield Town Treasurer/Grant Admin.
Bob Cook, Waitsfield Planning Commissioner
Chach Curtis, Waitsfield Selectboard Member
Robin Morris, Waitsfield Water Commissioner
Jon Ashley, DuBois & King
Date: January 19, 2024
Re: Waitsfield Wastewater Planning Project Update #8

This serves as the eight update on the Waitsfield Wastewater Planning Project, a task I'm carrying out in my role as Planning Coordination Team Lead (as articulated in the *Memorandum of Understanding between the Town of Waitsfield and the Mad River Valley Planning District for the Waitsfield Wastewater Planning Project*, 3.30.23). The purpose of these updates is to ensure the Waitsfield Selectboard and Waitsfield Wastewater Planning Project Team Members are abreast of project status and developments, summarizing activities over the preceding weeks. Other updates in this series consist of Update #1 (4.14.23), Update #2 (5.5.23), Update #3 (5.26.23), Update #4 (7.5.23), Update #5 (8.11.23), Update #6 (9.8.23), and Update #7 (12.18.23).

Recent Activities

Project Coordination Team (PCT)

- Meetings: 1.2, 1.5, 1.12, 1.18, & 1.19
- Activities
 - Meeting weekly to coordinate various project tasks and team activities.
 - Waitsfield's SFY25 Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) Project Priority List (PPL) final application was submitted on 1.12. It is anticipated that the draft SFY25 CWSRF PPL will be posted in March 2024 as part of the draft Intended Use Plan (IUP). More info on the PPL process:
 - <https://dec.vermont.gov/water-investment/water-financing/srf/priority-lists-state-revolving-funds>
 - The Town of Waitsfield's STEP 2 30% ESA, approved by the Selectboard on 1.8, was fully processed at the Agency of Natural Resources on 1.12 and subsequently forwarded to the Vermont Bond Bank (VBB) for underwriting. This ESA includes a \$153,674 subsidy in the form of loan principal forgiveness. The VBB has the completed funding authorization packet in process, which can take anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks. However, the work outlined in the STEP 2 30% ESA was able to commence on the date of ANR's signature (1.12).
 - On 12.20 the town was notified that the Waitsfield WW Infrastructure Project was not selected for the Central Vermont 2024 Regional Project Priority List.
 - Joshua led a presentation and project update to the Waitsfield Planning Commission at its meeting of 1.16, attended by all members of the ETT. This was an opportunity to directly share project progress, engage in a dialogue about where things are headed, share the initial outreach

approach, and receive input from the Planning Commission. Planning Commission members provided valuable feedback and identified options for collaboration and coordination.

- Also at the 1.16 PC meeting, Joshua shared maps and other info for Waitsfield's draft Neighborhood Development Area application.

Engineering/Technical Team (ETT)

- Meetings: 1.3, 1.10, & 1.17
- Activities
 - On 1.10 the PCT, ETT, and Jon Ashley met with DEC staff (Hugo Martinez Cazon, Emily Hacket, Tom Brown, and Achouak Arfaoui) to discuss the Waitsfield Wastewater Project's current status, priorities, and sequencing through Final Design. Takeaways:
 - Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) hearing, originally included in the PER scope, to take place after 90% Design due to Historic Preservation review procedures
 - All design work, whether CWSRF funded or not, requires DEC review and approval.
 - The Waitsfield project's future CWSRF subsidy eligibility consists of 50% funding up to \$100k/fiscal year. There exists \$72k of CWSRF subsidy for the current fiscal year.
 - Municipal eligibility for state ARPA Wastewater construction funds will likely require a municipal bond vote by September 2024.
 - DEC review and approval to move from 30% Design to 60% Design likely to take 60 days.
 - In an effort to expedite transition from 30% to 60% Design, it's possible to develop a 60% Design scope and ESA amendment draft for DEC review in the spring, to be implemented at the conclusion of 30% Design.
 - On 1.12 Joshua developed finalized a Waitsfield Wastewater Project PER Summary Document that provides context and highlights its findings. It has been uploaded to the [town's website](https://waitsfieldvt.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Waitsfield-PER-Summary-1.12.24.pdf).
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 - The project's Environmental Information Document (EID) has been finalized, anticipating submission to DEC on 1.22. Individual elements of the EID have been submitted previously. Submission of both the PER and EID marks the completion of the Waitsfield Wastewater Project's Step 1: Planning stage. Along with ESA approval, the project has now officially entered Step 2: Final Design stage.
 - Comments have been received from Jon Harries, USDA RD State Engineer, on the Final Draft PER. A meeting is being scheduled to address all comments.
 - ETT members have begun property owner outreach activities.
 - At the 1.17 ETT meeting, members discussed bond vote timing in light of recent news from DEC that ARPA wastewater construction funding eligibility is contingent on a positive bond vote by September 2024. Follow-up has included engaging with DEC staff to clarify eligibility timing and guidelines.

Funding Team (FT)

- Meetings: 1.12
- Activities
 - Joshua updated the [Town of Waitsfield Village Water & Wastewater Project 2024 Funding Landscape](#) document, dated 1.19.24.
 - Step 2 Funding: CWSRF – 30% Final Design
 - Waitsfield's revised Engineering Services Agreement ESA to undertake 30% of the design phase (Step 2) was fully processed by DEC on 1.12. This includes \$153,674 in CWSRF subsidy.
 - VT Pollution Control Grant
 - Feedback from a 9.28 meeting with DEC staff was incorporated into the SFY25 CWSRF Project Priority List application submitted on 1.12, which increases the town's eligibility for upcoming Pollution Control Grant opportunities.
 - Neighborhood Development Area

- MRVDP staff have been coordinating with the Waitsfield ZA in developing a draft application for Neighborhood Development Area (NDA) Designation for Irasville, which includes extensive mapping. The draft was reviewed by the Planning Commission at its meeting of 1.16.
 - The intent is to submit the NDA application in March. Amongst other benefits, an NDA designation would make Irasville eligible for CWSRF subsidy to undertake Step 2 60% Design (anticipated to commence in July 2024) as well as other funding opportunities for the construction phase.
- USDA Rural Development
 - Joshua has been in communication with Misty Sinsigalli, NH/VT Area Director, clarifying MHI eligibility, timelines, and funding eligibility. Based on the project's MHI and other criteria, the project meets the eligibility criteria for 75% Water & Waste Disposal Grants and Direct Loans at the current rate of 2.25% @ 30 years. The town may be eligible to apply as early as April 12, 2024. Additional details and discussions are ongoing.
 - On 1.4 Jon Harries, USDA RD State Engineer, provided comments on the Final Draft PER that had been sent to him on 12.6. Jon Ashley is setting up a meeting, with representation from the ETT, to address USDA RD's comments.

Public Outreach Team (POT)

- Meetings: 12.11, 12.15
- Activity
 - <https://www.waitsfieldvt.us/waitsfield-wastewater-planning-project/>
 - Substantial overhaul of the page is anticipated later this month.
 - Developing a strategy to gauge project interest and collect relevant data from property owners within the proposed Wastewater Service Area. Initial property owner outreach commencing this month.
 - On 1.12 Joshua developed finalized a Waitsfield Wastewater Project PER Summary Document that provides context and highlights its findings. It has been uploaded on the [town's website](#). A draft was shared with the Waitsfield PC in advance of their meeting of 1.16, which included a discussion of public outreach.
 - On 1.12 submitted an application to the Small Grants for Smart Growth competitive round being offered by the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont to fund local initiatives for flood-resilient community development. \$5k was requested to support the town's efforts to effectively communicate the tenets of the Waitsfield Community Wastewater Project and educate the public about the importance of municipal wastewater and how it can positively influence the public & environmental health of the community.

Near-Term Activities

- Property Owner Outreach
- Public Engagement Strategy
- Waitsfield Wastewater Planning Project Webpage Overhaul
- Define ARPA funding eligibility guidelines