Town of Grafton Water/Wastewater Study Commission

Minutes

DATE: June 16, 2021. Meeting called to order at 6:42 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT Meg Gonzalez, Diana Lawrence, Matt Siano

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT: Paul Hallock, Chris Wallace

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT: None

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS NOT PRESENT: Heather Gregory, Stan Mack

PUBLIC PRESENT: Cathy Siano (Selectboard), Suzanne Welch (Selectboard), Bob Donald (Windham Foundation), Sue Allen (Selectboard), Al Sands (Village Park Committee)

GUEST SPEAKER (S) PRESENT: Mark Johnson

6-16-21 AGENDA APPROVED

Motion: Meg Gonzalez

Seconded Diana Lawrence

Vote: Unanimous to approve

5-19-21 MINUTES APPROVED

Motion: Diana Lawrence

Seconded: Matt Siano

Discussion: Meg Gonzalez clarified that she was going to reach out to Kim Record for use of the town hall for a regular commission meeting.

ACTION ITEM REVIEW: June *Grafton News* article

The article was placed by Chris Wallace. A letter to the editor was submitted by resident Sally Warren in response to the June *Grafton News* article highlighting concerns about the possible use of the town park as a project site.

REPORT FROM ENGINEERING SUBCOMMITTEE

Matt Siano reported that he met with the engineering subcommittee and they decided to use Tighe & Bond (T&B) for the engineering study. He spoke with Erin Moore at T&B and she forwarded a proposal/agreement for the project that needs to be signed for the preliminary engineering study. This agreement will need to be signed by the town to get funding in process by July 1. Bill Kearns, Grafton town manager, will sign the document. Once it’s signed it will be submitted to Lynnette Claudon at the state Department of Environmental Conservation so she can submit the funding request. The engineering study is estimated to cost $43,600. If no project comes about, the town would not need to pay any of those funds; if a construction project were to proceed, the overall cost of the study would be rolled into the construction project. Mark Johnson commented that such studies range from approximately $15,000 to $80,000 depending upon what they entail.

Bob Donald asked how many properties were included in the “town.” Suzanne Welch said that the category includes 70 high-risk properties in the center of town with shallow drinking wells, old septic systems, and overlapping leach fields. Mark Johnson said that there are several documents that explain the situation, process, and status of the commission’s work and its efforts to understand the issues at hand and those that might arise in the future. He

explained his role as a consultant from the nonprofit organization RCAP Solutions of Worcester, MA, which works with communities and systems to promote public, environmental, and economic health.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

There was no community education report.

Bob Donald said that a citizen asked him about the project and was concerned that there has not been a lot of public education about it. Diana Lawrence mentioned that the minutes of the commission meetings are posted online. Meg Gonzalez commented that in this phase, the commission is gathering information before it begins to fill in additional gaps for the general public. She said she will work to post additional information on the town Facebook page and website. Matt Siano said it should be emphasized that this is an engineering study and not an actual project.

Cathy Siano asked what the commission meant by “community education.” Meg Gonzalez said that in addition to the *Grafton News* updates, there is a plan coming together for outreach to the community that will highlight the activities of the commission to date. Cathy Siano said the more information that can be provided by the commission, the better informed everyone will be. Meg Gonzalez said she will pull together a brief history for public dissemination.

Suzanne Welch asked if the last presentation on the water study could be distributed publicly.

Matt Siano mentioned that T&B will help with public education and outreach. They will join the commission at its monthly meetings. Bob Donald asked how long it would take for T&B to make their presentation and Mark Johnson said the preliminary engineering report would take approximately six months. Drinking water wells, septic systems, and economic development are all time sensitive issues, he said, and so the study will need to be timely.

Cathy Siano asked about the certainty of state funding. Mark Johnson said that the funds should be available even though Grafton took advantage of the program 20 years ago for a previous study. He said that Grafton is still eligible for the program and there is no reason why the funding would not be granted. He suggested that infrastructure funds might be an option but that the engineering funding seems the most promising. Suzanne Welch said the selectboard has indicated that the federal American Rescue Plan Act 2021 (ARPA) funding for municipalities is going to be half of what it was originally thought to be, so the engineering planning study is helpful. The ARPA funding will be about $70,000, with $35,000 available each year for over two years.

DISCUSSION WITH VILLAGE PARK COMMITTEE

Al Sands commented that COVID-19 has been detrimental to public communication and that remote meetings have made it difficult to follow commission conversations. He said that the village park volunteers were feeling discouraged by the idea of possible changes to the park, and had concerns about clear cutting, the elimination of old trees, and buffering. Matt Siano said that T&B would be able to install a leach field without clear cutting or changing the space. He said that it is possible that the village park could provide a good option for the project and encouraged Al Sands to wait to hear about options from T&B. The Windham Foundation alpine meadow and the gravel area above Howland Mill field are currently the two other options for a site project. Matt Siano said that there would be three pumping stations needed to utilize the gravel pit above the Howland Mill field. There is no need for equipment installation as part of any potential project.

Suzanne Welch said the town previously rejected two proposals for wastewater management that included 120 properties and cost $2.5-$3 million, so the commission is focusing on fewer properties to solve the wastewater flow problem for a price the community may be able to bear. She said that if there are federal infrastructure dollars to pay for such a project this timing would be fortuitous. There was a 2018 study on the viability of the village park as a site, which is now an addendum to the current study, and that $2,650 was approved by the selectboard on April 17 for that 2018 study. At that time the selectboard decided to wait for the results of the soil test before proceeding. The village park committee, she said, has made a lot of progress making the site beautiful, and the commission would like to work closely with the volunteers so that everyone has an accurate understanding of any possible site project.

Al Sands asked about the process going forward from today to a vote by town residents. Matt Siano responded that T&B will make a presentation to the town and that there will be informational meetings. Cathy Siano said it will be like the process for the town plan: follow the steps, warn it, get the information, present it to the selectboard, make a presentation at the town meeting for a vote. Matt Siano said it’s important for the commission to present the case for the need for any wastewater system. Diana Lawrence suggested that an FAQ be posted on the town website and added to over time. Mark Johnson said that state regulators will want to see the town pursuing an alternative that is endorsed by the engineering firm and that public comments will be required as part of the process of hiring an engineering firm. Suzanne Welch suggested that the park volunteers meet with T&B to walk through that site and the other additional sites to answer any questions they might have. The commission cannot take a position on a possible site until the engineering study is finalized.

OTHER BUSINESS

Meg Gonzalez will submit the July article for *The Grafton News*

PUBLIC COMMENT

Suzanne Welch mentioned that four properties in the village have new owners and will need to be surveyed for the wastewater commission.

NEXT MEETING: July 21, 2021, in person, at the town hall, 6:30 to 7:30 pm

ADJOURN

Motion: Meg Gonzalez

Seconded: Diana Lawrence

Vote: Unanimous to approve

TIME: 7:58 pm