Grafton Planning Commission

Regular Monthly Meeting

Wednesday November,9, 2022 7:00 PM

Grafton Town Hall 2nd Floor (Not ADA Compliant Please provide notice should access or assistance to the meeting be required.)

November 2022 Minutes

Members present: Eric Stevens, Matt Siano, Ron Pilette, Seth Pajcic, Lester Schwalb

1. Call to order at 7:15
2. Agenda approved.
3. Approved the October 11, 2022 Meeting Minute
4. John Kiernan remotely attending from "RCAP Solutions," Rural Community Assistance Partnership, a national non-profit organization, based in DC that lobbies for grants for water and waste projects and gets funding from HHS (based in Worcester, MA regionally). They can give 40-80 hours professional time to help with technical assistance and training, and can provide at no charge for most communities in VT. (This organization previously worked on a Grafton project re: private well assessment.) John is a professional engineer and can help with requirements that the state does not allow T&B to do. He tries to look at where RCAP can target the help. He said, "I know that these projects take a long time."

   John: One of the biggest things that I've learned, having assisted 4 or 5 communities: if there isn't a group of citizens in the town, a group that is really interested in putting in some hours for public outreach to find support, there won't be progress.

   PC: The history of this is that it is somewhat divisive, partly because there is the village, itself, where the project would be located, and the outlying residents, who outnumber them, and we face questions about who would pay and how. The make-up of the town has changed considerably. There is a new group coming in that may play a more active role in the community, who may be more interested in moving it forward. Agreed that it will not have legs unless there are people interested.

   John: The resident interest must be broad-based. For example, in Waitsfield, the group was too narrow, just small business owners. And when it went to the first public meeting, it got shellacked. That is where the misinformation started. You must have people from all sides involved, not just the people who would be benefitting. Contrasting example was the town of Rochester, and they got everyone on board.

   John: There is an "Intended Use Plan" fund from the state, could potentially give you about 4 million for this project.There are timelines that you have to meet. I don't know the deadlines, but we could try to help you figure out re: the large picture, big steps that need to get done. We also help with training (RCAP will hold a training between Jan- March). The training covers the steps that you need to do (when do you have to hire an operator, do ordinances, purchase land). Possible that you will want an income survey for Grafton. Targeted survey could show that you are eligible for more funding.

PC: What role can you play if the solutions offered by T&B do not work out? Can you help in identifying other solutions?

John: well, we don't do engineering work. I did see that a water system was a potential solution, if there aren't many individual septic problem issues present. A water system would definitely be a lot easier to permit and construct. And it would eliminate the potential contamination issue. You can collect and treat at one place, then that would be the best solution. If not, one must get creative about who can get connected to the system. Those decisions get pretty squirrelly.

PC: You say that a water system would be easier to move forward. What are the management needs for that, such as an engineer to manage the water?

John: Identify a piece of land that is protected that you could purchase or permanent easement, drill (water quality must be pristine), there would have to be a building that would be used for chemical additions, there would have to be an operator on staff, probably would be $60-$70,000 annually for operation. I would try to connect you to people in the town of Waitsfield who did it and then you can learn some info from them about how to do it. (After they did the water system, they did a small wastewater system for a couple of buildings, including a brewery. In that town, Waitsfield, there was a fear that if we did these systems, it would turn into a little metropolis, and that has not happened.)

John: If you have the capacity for septic, it can be done that way.

PC: We have one parcel, a village park that is total 60 acres, and we would only need 4 acres for this septic system.

There are two issues: 1) the water contamination issue which could be solved by a centralized system like John described. 2) but any growth of the village is currently stymied by the bathroom and waste water problem. Putting the public well in would take care of the potential for catastrophic contamination of the water supply. But that would not take care of the growth issue? In addition, the town is divided about putting in the septic system.

John: Yes, Waitsfield put in a water system and then followed it with a waste system. Other town, Warren, only did the waste system because they found a very large field that could handle the amount of septic needed. Neither way is preferred, depends on the needs and desires of the town.

PC: but there is a serious concern that, because the park acreage is above the town so you have to pump the waste up, and also people are worried about flooding from there (although no previous flood has resulted in flooding from that area into the town).

Are there towns of similar size that have done waste water systems?

John: Yes, Cabot, about 200 homes. They were required to do something and they could not find land for subsurface disposal, so they had to put in a [discharge] system. Their user fees are $1,300 per year per home. Huge operational costs for them. You have to decide success. Not everyone is happy with the result. Pownal had a much larger project. Shoreham (smaller, 35k gallons per day of capacity) was under an administrative order because they had pipes from the village properties into a cedar swamp. Everyone was upset, thought that it was going to be a monstrosity that would lead to development expansion, but it came out well. A bank and medical office could be accommodated and the inn, which previously could not accommodate the public except on 2 days per year, was able to be expanded to be

open to the public and it became a gastro pub and became a meeting place for the townspeople. It's a recirculating sand filter system (collection sewers, gravity sewer to pump station, central location, septic tanks, recirculating sand system, UV). They have an operator, not full-time (also works on town road crew). I can share the budget info. But that's a little premature for you. There really haven't been very many brand new waste water projects in the last 20 years. A lot of them were built in the 1970s and are being upgraded. Every 20 years, you need to study and fix/upgrade if necessary.

PC: The Foundation's Inn is filled with people for weddings almost every weekend. Several years ago, there was an informal deal struck with the Foundation that they would pay half of any waste water system because it is so important to the Inn. So, they would also have a big say in what happens.

John: Additional funding is possible, perhaps, from the Community Recovery and Revitalization funds with $40 million pot of money, to give to non-profits, businesses, child-care. Municipalities can get the money for debt service of bond and operational costs if it would result in development (maybe could be retention of businesses, if people in the town are interested in maintaining this business of the Inn).

re: the process. Hydraulic testing, if above 6500 gallons per day, must go through extensive testing. The state makes you prove that the receiving water would not be affected. Can cost of tens of thousands of dollars.

PC: We are under the impression that T&B said that the village park was a usable site.

John: the question to ask, is that just based on soil mapping? That is one step further. But, until you have a permit, you need to do groundwater monitoring and other things. So, that testing can change the amount of waste that is feasible to put in. When you do these projects, depending on what phase you are in, you have a different level of testing. So there will be more testing—beyond soil testing--for that village park land. You need "indirect discharge" testing (if above 6,500 gallons per day system, which I think that you will have).

PC: What would be the process that a town would go through before spending the money for this kind of extra testing?

John: the engineer would advise you about how confident they are about the testing that they have already done and further steps that need to be done. It would probably be worthwhile to go beyond just the soil testing, not necessarily as much testing as you would need for the permit, but more testing re: how much capacity you really have there. I can talk to T&B about that issue.

PC: Would we go for a grant for that extensive testing, because people in the town aren't going to pay for expensive testing for something that we may not want to even build.

John: you are halfway through the design phase. When this report is done, you will have a description of all the alternatives (gravity sewers, pressure sewers, different potential sites, potential alternatives). The hope is that there will be one recommended solution that PC and Select Board can get behind. That will only have predictions. But once they are in the design phase, they will do the actual boring for ledge etc. You don't know the total cost until all that extensive testing is done. The state does have money for planning/testing. But having a bond vote for money for extensive testing is a good way to test the town's will to do it .Every phase in the process, you will get a more refined scope of work that will then more accurately tell you the cost.

John finished by saying that he will put us on dis list for the training session. He would be happy to provide more information in our relation to T&B. He does not want to subvert or argue with what they are suggesting.

PC: T&B is providing one kind of solution, and we are aware of other ways of addressing our problems, would you also be able to be a resource for evaluating those other alternatives. Yes, I can help you to figure out if that other alternative is worth studying and help you to present that to T&B and ask if they could evaluate it.

PC continued discussion re: Grafton as a destination for restaurant or medical/professional services.

5. Flood Hazard Mitigation Plan review tabled because Eric was absent, so we did not discuss. We should all look at the flood hazard document at the December.
6. Town Survey. Seth spoke to Wendy about putting questions in the Grafton news and people could respond to an e-mail address. In addition, to publicize a public meeting for a discussion of the T&B feasibility study.
7. Budget request. Bill Kearns suggests that in an abundance of caution, we should ask for interim budget request up to 50 hours of work at $40/hr. for flood hazard work. Motion: amend the budget to add for additional funds for flood hazard administrative officer. Approved. Adjust money requested for survey, because the coming year, is not when we are going to need the money for the survey, which would be the following year. Total Budget of $3200 approved and Seth was to submit it to Kim Record.
8. No New Business
9. No Public Comment
10. Next Scheduled Meeting set December 15, 2022 at 7pm
11. Meeting Adjournment at 9:00