

**Grafton Planning Commission**  
Regular Monthly Meeting  
Wednesday November 15, 7:00 PM  
Grafton Town Hall 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81340393010?pwd=TDk5Y3FDaUNYNVBHNmRRVGNwbWRiZz09>

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**MINUTES**

1. Meeting called to order at 7:04. Present: Buzz Fisher, Eric Stevens, Lester Schwalb, Matt Siano (Chair). Absent: Ron Pillette. November Agenda Approved.
2. October Minutes Approved
3. Waste Water Project

*Hannah Sotak. Ondine Freshwater Consultants: I help communities, organizations, private owners to steward their resources re: ponds and lakes. I work with lake organizations or pond associations, e.g. in Dorset, on preservation and restoration of the water body. I do the scientific work, the permitting and social dialogue so that we can provide a system for people to effect their goals. 16 years of experience working with non-profits, prior to that, served in the military for 8 years.*

PC: We have been looking at identifying the alternatives for waste water, we are staying in step with what T&B and now waiting for the 90% meeting. Expensive to pump water from the village uphill for about one mile, 600 feet in elevation. Also unknown how many people in the village want to buy into it. So, we're waiting for all the information. Then the town votes.

Question from Resident: There are 96 properties in village; how will the vote be structured?  
Answer: at this time, the vote is imagined as only residents and not 2nd home owners, but we're not even sure of the legality of that. Some 2nd home owners want to vote, particularly the person who can't drink water in their home. The state is supposed to pay for redress, but so far that hasn't happened.

*Hannah: Let's set out the portfolio of problems that you are trying to address, scope of the problem, what has been done.*

PC: Problem: our existing sewage and drinking water are located too closely, the overlapping doesn't meet state standards, and we have ground conditions that would quickly contaminate, so likely to be an issue, and it would be an issue of immense impact both economically and psychologically on the village. We are trying to get ahead of that situation. We are looking at the village district (75 homes). If these 75 homes were affected so would all of all 600 homes would be affected economically. Everybody who is attached to the town economically would be affected. Not everyone in Grafton sees it that way. For people who don't live in the village, why should I pay an extra 2K per year, how can I sustain that financially?

*Hannah: This is a common problem. This person is thinking that they are not going to get a new system in their home but they are investing in the wellness of the town. In addition, there is the problem that state standards are generated by best practices at the state and federal level and it can feel that there is a huge power differential, as these regulators don't come to the town to see how the small town could possibly handle these new standards.*

PC: these financial issues and this dissonance between state standards and Grafton residents is the reason that we have been trying to look at alternative solutions such as the Living Plant system.

PC: The economic impact (how it impacts the economy of the town) and the cost of the proposed systems and the political issue of who pays for it (what's in it for me?) has been discussed by the Select Board but not by the Planning Committee.

Select Board is receiving and potentially accepting the proposal of T&B, and then the proposal would be taken to the voters. The Planning Committee is not trying to duplicate the work of the Selectboard; we are just trying to lay out all the possible solutions. At one point T&B was ready to say that there is no solution for this town. Then the PC started asking questions about drip dispersal. We had a discussion with the state in which it emerged that the state was working on drip dispersal systems and that such a system could be funded by this state grant; and now that is the primary method that T&B is talking about. So, we stimulated that solution to be considered. Now we want possible solutions for processing the water, possibly contaminated by PFAS, so that we aren't just moving the PFAS around.

*Hannah: The solution costs twice as much as the ARPA money available. Compared to surrounding towns, Grafton has a smaller population to cover these costs.*

*The system at Sharon is post the drip system to ensure that the cleanest water possible is returned to the ground water.*

PC: thinks that Emily Hackett (rep from state) at the last T&B meeting said that the scope of the project (that includes water quality) may be able to draw down more funding from where?

*Hannah: An informed voter has to have all the pieces in front of them in order to decide. There is an educational piece to this issue.*

*Your next step has to be to begin to tie these pieces together. How can you all work together (Joe/Seth from Selectboard are meeting on zoom with T&B; the Select Board; the PC; Grafton public) to get to the next decision point. Can we add a webpage for the basic info on the issue on the town website with questions and answers, do fliers through the school? Generate a list of questions: who is going to receive and interpret this report?*

*–re: education, people will want to know how would the biological system work? What kind of PFAS are removed by this material? How much would we be able to reduce the land footprint for the drip system and so may not have to pump for a mile?*

PC: do you have scientific info about removal of PFAS by the biological system?

*Hannah: yes, I can provide resources, research, data.*

*Hannah: It's good to have an engineer who has experience building these and who could speak to an T&B engineer. It would be useful to get ball park estimates, as well.*

PC: Maybe contact VHP, contractor for Sharon, Dave, an engineer, could be a good contact. Contact Mark, he knows the state. Rob? We need to get someone to study, design this alternative and then present to T&B?

PC: We don't seem to get any attention from the Select Board on this alternative. We don't seem to get any attention from T&B re: this alternative. We are looking at this biological system as an enhancement to the system that they have proposed. It is purifying the water further.

PC: Having a central system that does the job well is much preferable than having small solutions for several houses. Then you have a concrete field taking up the backyard like MKT has installed.

PC: The Select Board has to begin to work on who can vote, not wait too long and educate the public about the reasons for who can vote. Maybe Seth can look into what is a water district and who gets a vote on issues re: a water district. The formation of a water district may not be the same as regular town government voting district.

*Hannah: I can help with the cohesion of these various people, committees, and pieces and I'm happy to collaborate but it's good to have someone who the town already knows and trusts.*

PC: We can also use Chris Campany from Windham Regional Foundation. WRF would have to set up a contract with the Select Board for WRF assistance on educating and helping public.

Discussion re: education of the public:

PC: There probably isn't an immediate danger of flooding, but the village is built on a flood plain. The ground water level is high, we have gravels so water will travel quickly through those gravels.

*Hannah: if you collapse the economic engine of the village by not supporting its infrastructure, schools close, bridges don't get rebuilt, your taxes will go up.*

*Hannah: Importance of increasing flexibility of narratives about the town. A negative narrative already exists; people should be able to articulate it with a sense of release; frequently negative feelings about 2nd home owners, that gives rise to a fear that if they vote they will stick us with a cost; listening to people's concerns about the cost of the waste water; but there is also a different narrative to articulate: the revenue that comes in with 2nd home owners, people who come in and love the town who put their businesses here, who treasure the place. This educational piece is not to persuade people to vote a particular way. It is to make sure that if they vote "no," they know the consequences. The problem doesn't go away if you vote "no." Consequence: How many flushes, how many sink full of dishes, how many guests can visit you?*

Guest: I'm for the water project, but we can't have 85-100 people who pay for it. We all pay for the school. We all pay for the roads. We need to research this alternative smaller footprint biological system—if we spend 4 weeks on that research and present to the Select Board?

PC: The biological system is not an alternative to T&B's proposal, it is a purification of water system added on to the drip system.

*Hannah: I can provide community liaisonship and education for the purpose of moving the community forward through this process. Not to make the decision for the community. Chris also may have things that he may be better at. Create a profile and list of responsibilities and to whom that person would report.*

PC: What is your approximate cost?

*Hannah: Dorset project was 2 years. They voted \$5000 and it cost \$3,200 (in that case also had to hire someone who could tell us about indigenous tribes, historical preservation, etc). Reasonable to expect \$3500 to \$4500, but I don't bill unless it's actual hours. I could structure it that I work 10 hrs per week, 20 hrs per week, whatever is wanted.*

Action item: Recommendation to the Select Board to pay a liaison or ombudsperson for education for the waste water information to prepare for a vote. T&B does not do that kind of outreach to educate the town; they just do the 30, 60, 90% meetings

Action Item: For the December Select Board Meeting. Decision re: the vote so everyone is prepared, and request an ombudsperson wastewater/water project.

4. 2024 Budget. Request to Select Board for \$4000 budget is approved. Budget line items included are new OWL sound system. The existing speaker sound system for televised meetings is not acceptable. Speakers and conversation are not easy to hear and comprehend. Funds also for Morgan to assist the PC.
5. New Business: Grafton Outdoor Alliance applying for a grant. Megan Zolas, Windham Foundation grant administrator for philanthropic giving. Looking also at cross-promotional work for the Grafton Outdoor Alliance (Nature Museum, Grafton Trails, Grafton Outdoor Association, the town, the village park, reps from the businesses and potentially also the snowmobile outing club and Pinnacle). There is a grant opportunity from the State for VT towns to enhance the outdoor experience in Vt. So, Megan is looking at the Planning track grant to hire an expert to look at connecting the trails that already exist, trail maps for example that would include the Pinnacle connection, signage, marketing, branding (if you have an hour, what can you do here? If you have a day? If you have 3 days?), making visible historical and cultural pieces that are embedded in the outdoor environment already (Turner, soapstone quarry, etc). Also, Grafton Trails as a venue for events. Maybe do survey or focus groups. Also, to make more inclusive experiences: for lower-income people maybe a gear closet where you can check out equipment. For schools: use the Grafton Ponds Outdoor Center to learn how to be bike mechanics. We're just looking for input from the PC and from the public. The grant is due Dec 15th.
6. Next Scheduled Meeting is Tues December 12,2023 at 7pm.