

## Grafton Planning Commission

Regular Monthly Meeting

Tuesday April 9, 7:00 PM

Grafton Town Hall 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

ADA Accessible

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

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### MINUTES

Attending: Matt Siano, Buzz Fisher, Ron Pillete, Lester Schwalb

Meeting called to Order: 7:04

- 1. April Agenda Approved**
- 2. Approval of the March minutes**
- 3. Wastewater Update:** Lester reported on the webinar held by John Kiernan. This issue has been going on for hundred years. How to deal with uncertainty. How to engage the community. What to do after failed bond vote. There are 300 small villages in VT that have had these kind of wastewater issues. Since 1985, about 5 villages have been successful in creating a wastewater system. Comment: many of these villages are too small to need one. Common Resistance to wastewater projects: lack of trust, property rights, high costs, uncertainty, misaligned goals, NIMBY. How did the successful projects come to be? Foremost, there is some kind of toxic event that causes the state to hammer them to get something done. Something akin to what Eric has warned about cross-contamination of the water and the septics. Another strategy that has been successful is private funding (as the MKT and Foundation have done here). Determined individuals. Summary: the situation is bleak but our problems are the usual ones that other villages encounter.

Discussion: which places did have successful projects?

A: Don't recall the names but the places with successful projects were completed in villages with populations larger than Grafton's. Matt reviewed some of the history of Grafton's attempt. Studies were done, beginning in 2004, and the studies just sit on a shelf. Recently, Joe Pollio pressed that we should do another study and actually follow through. Maybe there are other more practical strategies, maybe more frequent pumping, more water testing and do it on a case-by-case basis. Might force a public discussion. Open question about the PFAS, however. The state regulated such a low number of acceptable units that they then withdrew the regulation. Is it worthwhile to go to the state and ask what we need to test for? John Kiernan gets paid to assist small towns in testing the water, so we can use RCAP At no cost to Grafton.

Re: wastewater, there is also these little cluster systems that T&B has described in the past, perhaps to deal with any localized issue.

How many voters are going to vote to raise their taxes when they don't see a real need? And there is always going to be a tension about it between inside and outside of the village. And, how much is Grafton going to grow? There are the food regulations and Act 250 [as limits on growth anyway?]. The cluster systems are most often privately funded and that was the solution that little towns had if they needed something. Do a couple more of those kinds of systems that June did. They are probably not eligible for state funding. We can ask T&B if that is true.

Our next steps: should we continue to research the Living Machine? The problem is that it is not cheaper and is a kind of overlay on the other system. Is it worth pursuing? We should find out more about the state regs for water quality [Grafton?] town ordinance (from 1999) requires: On-site septic pumping for the ArBnbs should be more often. Check with Kim to see if it has been enforced that people show proof of pumping. We don't want to impose an onerous task on Kim but should find out and consider next steps.

Re: water testing, you can have the individuals send it in, but ideally you want to do it as a group so that it is done correctly. There is no ordinance about water testing. Is that an option that we should consider? A couple of people had E. Coli problems but they found why. One had a rodent get in. Mkt and the Grafton cheese factory and the Inn surely have to test.

4. **Town Plan:** The Rockingham Town Plan circulated by e-mail. We can look at their plan and maybe analyze it a bit as we go into doing our plan. They are submitting it to us as part of the process, sharing it with neighboring towns before their hearing. Thinking about Cambridgeport. Some components of their town plan, like their recreational component, may help us. They are part of our school. Where do they see themselves going? Discussion: we have no ability to manage our growth. It's not just a problem for today but for the future. And it's not just Grafton. The concern of the impact of growth, the regulation has gone too far in avoiding fast growth. Burlington and Williston are having a lot of development though. You have the municipal systems that allow the growth. Also, 1/3 of the state's population lives there.

Grafton has changed a lot; it used to have 30 or 40 farms. The grange and the church were both very much part of the fabric of the town. It's nice to see when the community comes together, but it appears we are losing that. Example: sugar on snow event. I don't think that community fabric is coming back; the town has changed. So what are your goals and how can you logically get there? Low-income housing is a good objective, but if someone lives here, where do they work? There was an affordable housing retirement with levels of assisted living in Townsend; what was the effect of that on that town? That could be possible here.

Now we are in a "Grafton exists," mode, without prospect of change. Now, we do have people here, working here remotely or working elsewhere. Branding: Grafton is not in the middle of nowhere globally and that is a selling point for Grafton. We should market to people coming into town for weddings in Grafton. Southern Vt not that far of a drive to the airport in Boston or Hartford. Maybe that is an opportunity; people do want a more rural life for their children. That is a critical mass kind of question. Maybe that can help pull in younger families. Discussion of kinds of schooling: used to be five small schools in Grafton. More people home schooling now,. Also, young families sometimes want sports league activity that isn't here.

As we prepare the Town Plan, we should think about what we can do to attract families with that kind of branding. Not just families with young kids but adults who want to work remotely but have the benefits of living in a place like Grafton. We have to think about what we want and also what we can do.

5. **Vermont Housing Workshop:** There is a fair housing workshop on 4/17. Comments about lack of development of new housing in the area. There is a project of affordable housing in Putney and a new single-family housing development in Charleston but very little else in the area. There seems to be focus on rehabbing, which is expensive but you don't have to get people to agree to do something. On the one hand we are told that we need more affordable housing and at the same time, we are told that we can't build. Also, 28% of the housing in Vermont is are second home owners. Did we over-regulate ourselves?
6. **Old Business** Maybe we should get back to that monthly Q&A in the Grafton News. Throw out a question and see if we get some answers. At each mtg we could come up with a question. Planning Commission questionnaire. "Imagine Grafton in the future" question

Ron: we have several proposals in front of the legislature, Seth had written letters re: these proposals. Re: the Act 250 going through. Maybe the Regional Planning Commission could do a map that would show the changes. When people see that 90% of Grafton is off limits, that would generate some discussion. Can we ask Morgan to find out if there could be a map made of the proposed changes. There is a state map but can we magnify and print out for Grafton? Put one outside and put an insert in the Grafton News and say that this is what is being done. That is a question that the PC could put to the community for comment relevant to our creating a new town plan.

7. No New Business
8. No Public Comment
9. Next Meeting: June 11, 7PM. Agreed to skip May meeting and have a homework assignment before our June Meeting.  
Q re: open meeting law; can we generate questions for Grafton News through e-mail. Yes, if we do it as Matt sends to each of us individually to ask to generate a question.

Adjourned 9:00