

West Cornwall Water/Septic Study Group

December 12, 2017 at 5PM at
Town Hall in Cornwall Village

Members Present: Richard Griggs (RG), Ian Ingersoll (II), Libby Mitchell (LM), Priscilla Pavel (PP), Todd Piker (TP) and Joanne Wojtusiak (JW). Also present Ex Officio Members: Gordon Ridgway (GR) and Richard Bramley (RB). Also attending: Stephen McDonnell from WMC Consulting Engineers. There was a large public turnout.

TP called the meeting to order promptly at 5PM.

Corrections to the 11/7/17 minutes were made by LM. Motion made by LM and seconded by II to accept the November minutes as revised; passed unanimously. JW arrived late and began recording the minutes.

TP read a letter from Betsy Preston (attached to these minutes). He assured all present that the Group takes the issues raised very seriously.

TP welcomed the public and Rep. Brian Ohler and Sen. Craig Miner and thanked them for coming. The original contact with our legislators was made by JW in an effort to encourage their support to permit more innovative options for Connecticut, especially those that are already being used in neighboring states. Sen. Miner, co-chair of the Environmental Committee, explained that they had looked at IA systems but found that opposition to them came from both DEEP and the environmental community. TP noted that the Group had moved past the consideration of individual IA systems but it was interesting to hear that they had been considered by our legislators.

GR noted that we are further along the path of considering a septic solution than we have ever been in the past, but that we are still at a "young stage". In response to his questions about funds that might be available via a STEAP grant, Sen. Miner noted that they are very close to the bonding limit on those, but he felt that there might be a number of places the town could look for funding beyond those focused strictly on funding septic improvements including those that support recreational and environmental projects. He specifically mentioned Clean Water Act funding that comes in the form of a grant/loan.

Sen. Miner also suggested the possibility of creating a regional letter of support that could be presented to DECD to garner their support. Stephen McDonnell (SM) noted that USDA has the largest pot of available funds and that some grants are additive while others are not.

JW raised questions about the appropriateness of focusing on finding funding sources when we have not received regulatory approval for this proposal; she noted that DEEP will be the governing regulatory authority, not TAHD. TP said he had been in contact with Ann Straut at DEEP but that she had been unable to attend any of our meetings. SM offered to contact DEEP and set up a meeting with them - possibly in Hartford. TP noted that the final WMC report has been sent to Ann Straut at DEEP.

TP opened the floor for questions. Judy Herkimer expressed support for the need to address the septic issues in WC, but was concerned about dumping effluent into the Housatonic and that “upland options” had not been sufficiently examined. She went on to ask what actual “hard data” was available to support the need for this project.

GR responded that TAHD had determined that ½ of the systems in WC were either sub-standard or no records were available and that it was their observation that property owners were unable to fully utilize their properties because of septic/water issues. GR further noted that small lot sizes in WC made it impossible for to meet current TAHD and DEEP requirements. Based on this response, Judy Herkimer asked “so was this project based solely on a “sidewalk consultation” with TAHD”? GR did not respond.

Lynn Fowler, WC property owner, raised concerns about the project and presented a letter detailing her concerns. The letter was accepted and a copy is attached to these minutes.

Wayne Trudeau spoke about his fondness for the Housatonic and its wildlife and asked about whether an environmental impact study had been done? SM said there was some info on this in the Study, but the actual environmental impact study would be done down the line. Trudeau also expressed concerns about regular flooding along the river and how that might impact the proposed solution. He concluded his comments by stating that he does not believe people come to this area for shopping, but rather to enjoy the scenery and recreational activities. He stated he would be a cheerleader for this project if it was located in a different location.

Megan Wilson inquired about the involvement of the Trinity Retreat Center. GR said he was in regular contact with the directors and that it was a positive for the town to have the property active again. He noted they now have 12 or so full time employees and that they have been very open to discussions, but that right now they are very much focused on getting their operation up and going. Discussions about the possibility of a pumped system on the property remain a topic for future consideration. A further question about why Eversource would agree to let the town have access to the so-called Bend property was answered by GR who said that they consider it “excess” property and that the town has been in discussions for ten years over the future of this property.

Betsy Preston asked why the northernmost option for the location of the septic installation was not chosen? SM said they later learned that it was almost entirely within the floodplain which makes it an unacceptable choice. He further stated that other options were viewed as cost prohibitive.

Mark Wison presented a petition signed by 20 residents who oppose this project. The petition will be attached to these minutes and also sent to the BOS.

TP asked SM to look into possible funding from the EPA Clean Water Fund. SM will also follow-up on setting up a meeting with DEEP. He suggested that we have a small informal meeting before completing the “Where to Begin” form that JW had shared with the Group.

Meeting dates for 2018 were set as the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the WC Library at 5PM. Motion to set these dates, location and time was made by II and seconded by RG. Passed unanimously.

II moved and RG seconded a motion to re-appoint the current slate of officers: Todd Piker, Chair; Libby Mitchell, Vice-Chair; Joanne Wojtusiak, Secretary. Passed unanimously.

SM said he agreed that a meeting with regulatory authorities was the appropriate next step and that would include DEEP and USDA representatives. SM said he is presently researching the waste load limitation in place on the Housatonic. He knows the River can accept treated wastewater, but the question is: how much?

Motion to adjourn at 6:25 pm was made by LM and seconded by PP. Passed unanimously.