

SPECIAL MEETING
West Cornwall Water/Septic Study Group

Hughes Library in West Cornwall
June 19, 2018

Members Present: Richard Griggs (RG), Ian Ingersoll (II), Libby Mitchell (LM), Priscilla Pavel (PP), Todd Piker (TP) and Joanne Wojtusiak (JW); Absent: David Dolinsky (DD). Also present Ex Officio Members: Gordon Ridgway (GR) and Richard Bramley (RB). Invited Guest: Stephen McDonnell, WMC Consulting Engineers.

A video of the entire proceeding is available at: <https://youtu.be/slgafenEM5E>

TP called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM.

A motion to accept the Minutes from the May 8th meeting as presented was made by PP and seconded by II; passed unanimously.

Correspondence from DD and TP were read.

There was a discussion of recent revised proposal by HVA for the development of The Bend property. RG raised the possibility of incorporating a septic solution into the HVA project. GR explained that the town is currently looking at a licensing arrangement with Eversource to use The Bend property; such an agreement could be terminated by either party with 30 days' notice and would not be recorded on the land records. The new proposal will not disturb any of the ground on the site.

TP expressed his concern about whether or not townspeople actually support or want a community septic system in WC. He asked about the possibility of conducting a vote to determine an answer. GR expressed his feeling that while there may be concerns, he believes that the public does not have sufficient information to make an informed decision so a vote would not be appropriate at this time. TP reiterated his concern about the need to know the level and intensity of community support. LM noted that she feels there is zero hope of the current proposal working in its current form.

TP referred to the innovative options being used in rural Maine and RI communities and being studied in MA according to information provided by the Connecticut Conference on Municipalities. Stephen McDonnell said that his firm has been involved with some IA (innovative alternative) systems involving Intensive (expensive!) pre-treatment and recycling in shore-line communities along Long Island Sound. He said it could be worthwhile looking at some of these options, but he reminded everyone that some land is still needed to get rid of the water in any system that is installed. He did say that while he would urge all WC property owners to have their water tested, he said he believes that if there was wide-spread contamination it would have shown up already.

TP said that some legislation had been proposed to look at the possibility of allowing IA systems in CT but he heard that the proposed legislation had died in committee; GR said he will look into this. JW suggested that Sen. Miner and Rep. Ohler be contacted.

There was some discussion about whether our focus should be limited to solving current septic issues (primarily the inability to effectively use existing commercial space) or should include a solution that could handle future problems. TP expressed his concern that we not abandon our village centers.

TP asked what Eversource's position is vis a vis selling versus licensing The Bend property to the town. When no definitive answer was forthcoming, he said that perhaps there were too many hurdles involved with this property and that it might be time for this committee to acknowledge that it is time to turn this project back to the Board of Selectmen; he again suggested the idea of a town vote to determine support (or not) for moving ahead to install a septic system in WC. He suggested that perhaps a smaller sub-committee might be designated to continue working on this issue.

Discussion continued around the fact that West Cornwall is a tourist destination as opposed to the other Cornwall hamlets. TP reminded those present that town residents had expressed strong support for maintaining a mix of residential and commercial activities in WC when the last POCAD was prepared. JW mentioned that the POCAD sub-committee on Economic Development is supporting a septic solution for WC, but she doubted they were cognizant of the costs. In response to an audience question, Steve McDonnell explained that costs not covered by grants are typically borne by those property owners who abut the sewer line; it is called a Sewer Benefit Assessment because whether the property owner connects to the line or not, the value of the property is deemed to have increased because of the availability of a sewer hook-up. WC property owners present at the meeting continued to press the committee to consider a location other than The Bend. It has been estimated that moving the location to the open fields north of the village would add \$1 – \$1,500,000 to the original cost estimates. GR mentioned the possibility of using railroad right of way property for leaching fields; one resident said they already do this for their own system and pay the railroad a fee each year. Some committee members recalled that this idea was presented by Ryan Biggs' firm very early in our discussions, but was dismissed because he admitted that he had never done such a project in Connecticut and did not believe it would be allowed under present regulations.

TP read the original charge for the committee and again suggested that the committee had met that and that he urged that the baton be handed back to the BOS. After some discussion, the committee agreed not to dis-band and agreed to meet after a summer hiatus; next meeting set for September 11th at 5pm at the Hughes Library in WC.

TP agreed to contact POCAD Economic Development Committee Chair, Anna Timell, and attend one of their meetings to brief them on the septic situation in WC so that their recommendations will be appropriate in light of the present (and future) septic situation in WC.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanne Wojtusiak
Secretary