

# Opening Comments –West Cornwall Water/Septic Study Group

---

SPECIAL MEETING-JANUARY 20, 2017

Hello. My name is Todd Piker. I am the Chairman of the West Cornwall Water/Septic Study Group. We were empaneled last January 2016 by the Board of Selectman. We hold public and noticed meetings on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month. The present Board is composed of 7 members. Priscilla Pavel, David Dolinsky, Ian Ingersol, Richard Griggs, Joanne Wojtusiak, Libby Mitchell and myself. Lib Mitchell is Vice Chair.

Our charge has been to assess the nature of the existing septic challenges in West Cornwall and make recommendations to the Selectmen. In discussions with the Torrington Area Health officials there was consensus that to maintain a residential/commercial mix in West Cornwall (as recommended by the 2010 Town Plan of Conservation and Development) the time had come to act. There is sufficient and growing belief that land-values are being endangered by an incoherent approach to the commitment to both commercial and residential activity within the confines identified as the West Cornwall commercial district. Therefore, our first area of examination is primarily to inventory and examine; a snapshot, if you will, of what the existing systems are, what activities they service and how best to preserve, protect and enhance those systems to ensure we leave a vibrant main street community for our offspring and their friends. Tonight's meeting is to introduce the full community to the firm retained to conduct a study that will, among other things, identify this inventory.

This concept, investing time and money to ascertain the potential benefit of a community solution to West Cornwall's most intractable barrier to development, is truly a double-edged sword. Those of us that have volunteered our time to take a long hard look at the potential for both good and ill are well aware that we are running thru a minefield of sorts. In the distance is the mirage of a bustling village with all manner of homes and businesses, libraries and parks, recreation and enjoyment that define many of America's most heralded destination settings. But the path to get us from here to that promise land is mythically torturous. As our democracy matures we are more than ever skeptical of development and loathe sacrificing hard-won empty space, peace and quiet and, most of all, a very low mill rate. Each one of us on this committee shares a profound love for this town, its commitment to family values and respect for its natural beauty. We also like low taxes.

In light of these seemingly oppositional concepts we gather tonight so that we--the members of this committee studying the issue of what we are calling Water In/Water

# Opening Comments –West Cornwall Water/Septic Study Group

---

SPECIAL MEETING-JANUARY 20, 2017

Out for West Cornwall – can introduce you (the stakeholders of this community) to the firm we recommended - Wendell, McDonnell and Costello, Consulting Engineers (better known as WMC). After on-site tours of West Cornwall, long and hard interviews, a carefully documented vetting process this firm was chosen from 5 invited to submit proposals to study the historic and existing issues of water in/water out in the hamlet of West Cornwall. We were careful to follow State guidelines in this process in order to remain eligible for any funding that might originate at that level. Although the Quality Based Selection (QBS) process was complex and seemingly arbitrary, due to staying focused on fulfilling that procedural requirement we feel confident we have found the firm that can best assess our predicament, then recommend alternatives while keeping an experienced eye on guidelines specific to local and State requirements. The Selectmen, after securing a major source of funding (over 90% of the needed monies), approved the contract. Our first order of business, now that the contract has been signed and the work will begin, is to begin to expand the public dialogue by introducing the firm to the community and vice-versa. They will tell you in more detail what their mission and charge is but I will leave you with these seminal words from the grant request crafted by Jocelyn Ayers, Director of Community and Economic Development at the Northwest Council of Governments:

**The greatest obstacle the project faces is fear of the unknown. Some residents fear that this project may burden users with large bills for installation/operating costs of an upgraded sewer/water system. There is also concern that the topography and geology of the area will make this project very expensive. Some people are also sensitive to increased parking and traffic issues of commercial (re)development. With state assistance for planning, real costs and estimates can be established. Also a creative planning process will help residents see the benefits of a revitalized West Cornwall. Currently there is some local opposition of spending tax dollars to benefit only one part of town. A state grant would help allay those concerns. The town can use the experience of state agencies to help guide our community through the complicated process.**

Respectfully,

*Todd Piker*

I have some comments to make subsequent to this introductory to clarify that the work of the West Cornwall Water/Septic Study Committee reflects stakeholders from all walks of life. We have homeowners with property throughout Cornwall. Some of these are business owners and some are not. Some are retired and some are not. It would appear we reflect a good cross section of the town. But it is important to comment that none of us are young, none of us represent an ethnic minority; nobody, to my knowledge is a tenant. I'm going to go out on a limb here but in my opinion these are groups that generally are woefully under-represented on our boards. This is not a red herring; this fact has repercussions with significance – a dwindling school enrollment; a stagnating economic development climate, a decline in property values to name but a few of what I consider issues reflecting our stifling Zoning regs.

As we close in on the 2020 Town Plan there will be study groups formed examining all manner of civic issues. As usual we will assess the viability of our Zoning regulations and continue weighing the value of the restrictions relative to the kind of town we have versus the kind of town we want. This will forever be an inquiry concerning net sum gain. In the 40+ years as a resident I have worn a variety of hats. I've had kids in the daycare, the schools and the choir at the church. I've been involved in affairs specific to West Cornwall and Cornwall Bridge, nurtured and groomed the public tennis presence, helped celebrate the town's 250<sup>th</sup> and watched young people like myself become the establishment. We must not lose sight of the fact that change is the natural order and should be embraced with vigor and courage lest we wake up to find the world has passed us by for settings that are both more diverse and alert to the powerful engine of change. I am heartened by the vigilance of our current Zoning Board-and Board of Appeals- to wrestle with contentious issues precipitated by regulations crafted for a pre-internet economy without attempting to abdicate their charge: reflecting the will of the people to keep Cornwall vibrant for its residents, our children and our friends. When change comes, and it will, we all must be involved to be sure the new reality reflects choices made with an eye towards an inclusive future. Present political circumstances notwithstanding the future will belong to the visionaries.