

Greensboro Selectboard

November 21, 2024 Special Meeting – Minutes

[This was a hybrid meeting held at the Greensboro Free Library]

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: David Kelley, Eric Hanson, Bobbie Nisbet, Ellen Celnik

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: MacNeil

OTHERS PRESENT in person: Jan Terweisch, Jim Fredericks, JoAnn Hanowski, DeDe Stabler, Tim Nisbet, Stew Arnold, Erika Karp, Nancy Hill, Josh Karp, Kim Greaves, John Reilley, Amy DeCola, Christine Armstrong, Paul Fixx, Davis Barnett, Sandra Macleod, BJ Gray, Judy Carpenter, Chris Cogswell, Nan Perron

OTHERS PRESENT remote: Lynnette Claudon, Dave Edson, Elissa Mackin, Glenn Olds, Janet Long, Iola Benedict, Kent Hansen, Marty McDonald, Rick Ely, Stefanie Cravedi, Dan Predpall, Mary McGrath, Cilla Smith, Jeff Bennett, Gail Worcelo, Betsy Hunt, Kristen Leahy, Mallory Rakowski, Nancy Riege, Aileen Gebbie, Vince Cabbage, Palma Bickford, Mary White, Liz Steel, Lisa Sartorius, Brenden Beer, Anne Stevens, John Cannon, Sara Slater, Sheila Dillon, Peter Cook, Emily Hackett-Fiske, Elsa Shultz, Chad Sims, Mimi Carter, Sandy Gebbie, Liz Baum, Andrea Macleod, Lise Armstrong

CALLED TO ORDER: 2:30 PM

AGENDA: Community Wastewater Project – next steps

Eric: MacNeil has recused himself from any involvement with the community wastewater project as long as the Perron Farm parcel is being considered.

First there will be a presentation from engineering firm Hoyle Tanner (H/T) explaining recent testing results and decisions that need to be made going forward. This will be followed by a Q&A period, first from the selectboard, then from the wastewater advisory committee, then from the public. We'll alternate between questions from in-person and remote participants.

John Reilly and Amy DeCola: H/T presentation

For the past four years we've been working with the selectboard and wastewater committee on this project.

The town has been very fortunate to receive considerable grant funding for the project totaling \$4.9M, assuming affordable housing is included. If affordable housing ends up not being part of the project, the \$800K Community Recovery and Revitalization Program (CRRP) grant is lost. One of the three remaining grants, a \$1M Northern Borders Regional Commission (NBRC) grant, requires a 20% non-federal match which was initially met by the CRRP grant. So, if the CRRP grant is lost, this \$200K match requirement would have to be met in another way or the NBRC grant will also be lost, leaving \$3M for the project.

No town funds have been spent on this project to date.

Cluster septic systems consist of septic tanks at individual buildings, a collection sewer, treatment tanks, and a soil-based disposal field. This is different from systems in a larger towns where treated effluent is discharged into a river. Finding a suitable disposal field has proven very challenging.

In September H/T began hydrogeological investigations on the Perron Farm site on Craftsbury Rd. Our analysis has shown that the site has a maximum capacity of 5300 gallons per day (GPD). This is a preliminary value and may decrease upon further analysis.

This site's capacity is inadequate for the proposed RuralEdge town hall redevelopment. Ellen said RuralEdge has not been involved with any of the recent wastewater project activity.

The next step for the town is to define how to allocate this estimated capacity to a service area and specific properties. Communities often establish a priority system to serve the highest-need users first, which could be defined as users with underperforming or failing systems or buildings that can't be used due to inadequate septic systems. The town could choose to prioritize businesses, town buildings and residences located in the village core. Another approach is first come, first served, with towns distributing user agreements and those who submit them first are prioritized.

H/T estimates that if the Willey's Store, library and Grange all hooked up, there would be capacity for an additional 17 residences.

Progress deadlines are fast approaching. H/T's final preliminary engineering report (PER) must be completed by 12/31/24 for construction funding to continue. An executed purchase and sales agreement (PSA) or easement for the disposal site will also be required by this date.

ARPA funds must be spent by 8/31/26. Working backwards using this as the project completion deadline, the town would need to award a construction contract by the end of 2025, and put the project out to bid in the fall of 2025. Final system design, regulatory approval, and easements must be completed by July 2025 so bids can be solicited.

H/T recommends the selectboard begin negotiations on the PSA immediately, as well as confirming sewer service area priorities.

O&A

Bobbie asked if H/T takes care of all permits. John said this would be clarified in the 'Step 2 Engineering Services Agreement', a later step.

David asked what the annual cost would be for those who connect to the system, and what the annual maintenance costs would be for the town. John said at this preliminary stage all he can provide is a wide range of user fees based on systems in other communities: \$20 – \$100 monthly. These fees cover all annual maintenance costs.

David asked what the town's obligations would be, other than billing. John said in addition to administering the billing, the town would need to enact a wastewater ordinance and likely hire a contract operator to run the system.

David asked whether attorney fees can be expected. John said there would be some legal costs associated with acquiring any necessary easements, but these are grant-reimbursable costs.

David asked whether this project as presented can be completed with current grant funding. John said it could, that \$3M in grant funding is a sizable sum for a project that would only serve 20 or so properties.

Ellen: Our initial hope was that we'd have a community system that would service 50-100 properties. Are operating costs higher per user with small systems? Will the town be liable for costs above and beyond what the user fees would cover? Will the user fees will pay for operations? John said user fees will pay for the operations and maintenance of the system.

Ellen asked why the Greensboro Nursing Home (GNH) wasn't included in H/T's initial scope, since its septic has had issues over the years and they are unable to add beds due to septic capacity limitations. Lynnette with VT DEC's Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) said that since the GNH is located outside of Greensboro's designated village center, it is not eligible to hook up to this community system. It was unclear which of the four grants require the system to serve the village center only.

Dan said after St. Michael's church decided it didn't want to work with the town, there were few options left until the Craftsbury Rd. site came along. Due to extremely tight deadlines the town is now up against, this is a 'hail mary' project - no question about it, he said. Another option is to just stop this project now, and start over on a new community wastewater project – but the \$2.5M in ARPA funds will be gone and the town may end up having to contribute funds to a future system.

Ellen asked whether residents have to approve a community septic system. John said the grants don't stipulate this but the town could certainly choose to hold a vote.

Ellen: if this wastewater project doesn't happen, can any of these grant funds be put towards a septic system for affordable housing? Lynette said no, those are really two separate projects with separate funding.

Christine: do these grants cover personnel costs to manage the project? Lynette said assuming there's money left, hiring a project coordinator is a covered project cost, with most towns using staff from their regional planning commission.

Christine: if a second site can be found near this initial site, could a second system be constructed in the future? John said yes, but this would have to be pursued as a new, separate project.

Christine: if the town borrows \$200K for the non-federal match as required by the NBRC grant, can the town choose to allocate some system capacity to ADU housing units? John said this may be possible but he'd have to look into it, the funding is complicated.

Mary White: I'm concerned about the disposal field being so close to Caspian Lake. Will an environmental impact assessment be done? John said if the town decides to move forward with the project, H/T would do whatever is required by the State in terms of environmental clearance. Stew said this may not be an issue as the site is outside of the Caspian Lake watershed.

Judy: looking ahead, you've been looking at sites for a long time, what is the potential of finding future sites in Greensboro? John said it's been a challenge, there are difficult soils here in town.

Paul asked whether there are septic tanks at each served location, and if the cost of pumping these is included in the user fees. John said the town would own the tanks, and that periodic maintenance of the tanks would be included in user fee.

Sheila Dillon: I'm a direct abutter to what is being proposed, there's been no communication with me. I'm concerned about what is being proposed and potential adverse impacts to my backyard. Who might I reach out to for more information? John told Sheila to reach out to H/T, and he said he understands her concerns. He added H/T just got the GPD capacity results last week and we're trying to meet tight deadlines for the town.

Bobbie: To clarify, abutting landowners will have a part in the process going forward, they will be notified and have input? John: Yes, we just haven't gotten to that point yet.

Jan: The Willey's Store septic system is grandfathered, if the store is sold outside of the family this would trigger a new septic permit and there's no place to put it, we could lose our store.

Nancy Hill asked whether the Perrons have agreed to sell the property.

Nan Perron said she read about the wastewater project in The Chronicle, and was shocked to read about the proposal. She said she didn't give consent for the project, and would object to anyone in her family selling this land. David said no one from the Perron family has consented to anything, other than giving permission to do the soil testing.

Paul asked whether the disposal field may be grazed. John said typically not.

Ellen said the town doesn't want the Perrons to feel pressured to make a decision. At this meeting, the board is being asked only whether the town wants to continue to explore this possibility.

John said the selectboard needs to:

1. Commence discussions with the property owners regarding land acquisition or permanent easement;
2. Confirm the general sewer service area. H/T has shown you a proposal, if you want to modify the service area, we need to know by 11/30;
3. Confirm the specific priorities you have for users of the system. Amy said H/T is not looking for a specific list of properties at this time.

Dave made the following motion:

The board accepts the proposed timeline for a town wastewater system as presented.

Bobbie seconded the motion. She clarified that by voting yea on this motion, the board is saying the town doesn't want to lose this grant funding and wants to move forward with a town wastewater project.

Vote: unanimous.

David made the following motion:

The board will begin discussions with the Perrons about the septic disposal field. This could take the form of a sale or an easement.

Bobbie seconded the motion. John said H/T would be available to answer questions during this process.

Discussion of a property appraisal. Lynette (VT CWSRF) said a regular appraisal is adequate, and grant funds may be used to cover the cost.

Vote: unanimous.

John said a concentrated, contiguous service area is a factor as the board establishes priorities for system users. Typical high-priority users would be properties with failing or underperforming septs, since most properties in the village are constrained by soils/soil conditions in terms of replacement systems. Other priorities could include properties with holding tanks; vital businesses or town buildings; and other vital property uses.

Davis asked whether the town could prioritize housing needs such as future ADU's.

Christine asked whether the town should be prioritizing homes that are occupied by residents.

Bobbie asked how many businesses this system could accommodate. John said Willey's Store alone might need 1200 GPD of capacity (close to 25% of system capacity).

Eric made the following motion:

The town will establish the following priorities within the service area boundary: vital town properties, followed by failing or constrained septic systems.

Bobbie seconded the motion. Andrea Macleod said her system is failing and she would like to be included on the list. Erika asked where information can be found about the wastewater status of various sites and parcels in town. John suggested looking at the VT Wastewater Permit Navigator.

Vote: unanimous.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 4 PM.

Respectfully Submitted: Josh Karp, Selectboard Clerk