

WEST WINDSOR PLANNING COMMISSION

Draft Minutes

December 29, 2011

Present: Hal Pyke, Barbara Truex, Elvin Kaplan, Mark Isenberg, Glenn Seward, Mike Gannon, Martha Harrison

1. Call to Order – Planning Commission Chair Hal Pyke called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.
2. Changes or Additions – Law enforcement
3. Public Comment – None
4. Municipal Planning Grant – Martha said the town's grant application was approved so the PC needs to come up with a plan to accomplish the work by May of 2013.
5. Discuss community wastewater findings and consider need for action – Glenn said the wastewater study has indicated pollution in the village and limited development potential and has suggested 3 possible solutions. Glenn summarized the options. Glenn said the town needs to consider buying the sewer line. Glenn outlined the consequences of doing nothing, including a continued slide in the value of property across the brook. Glenn said the Selectboard feels that there is too much at stake to do nothing but they have not had much feedback. Glenn said a "per parcel" assessment for the acquisition of the sewer line would be \$36, and a "per parcel" assessment to extend the sewer line into the village would be \$62, for a total of \$100 per parcel. Elvin said if the village has no development potential, the town would eventually lose its center. Glenn said village residents whose systems fail would be faced with expensive replacement options. Hal said it will be a hard sell to people who are used to having "free" wastewater treatment in the form of on-site septic systems. Glenn agreed that spending money for the greater good is a hard sell. Barbara asked if declining property values would make the Resort more attractive for someone to buy and convert to another use. Glenn said he does not think the Resort will sell until the sewer situation is straightened out. Glenn said Windsor is interested in owning the portion of the sewer line that is on their side of the town line but they don't have the funds to purchase it at this time. Elvin noted that when the Ottauquechee River was being polluted, the state stepped in and mandated a solution. Elvin asked if that is likely to happen in this situation. Glenn said the water system is regulated by the Public Service Board so that's a non-issue. Glenn said the Act 250 permit for the sewer line states that it must be operated as a non-profit with the users bearing all costs. Glenn noted that the users are concerned about hidden profits in the sewer rates. There was discussion about the current ownership of the pipeline and the collection system. Martha asked if a decline in property values at the Resort would affect property values in the rest of the town. Mark said yes but it's hard to quantify; the closure of the ski area has already affected the real estate market because skiers are no longer looking for property in West Windsor. On the other hand, Glenn said, he doesn't think the closure of the ski area has had much effect on equestrian properties. Hal asked what action Windsor is going to take for past due treatment charges, and suggested that Windsor place a lien on the property. Glenn said the system is in a state of disrepair and whoever owns it is going to have to charge a significant amount for repairs and maintenance. There was further discussion of the options including doing nothing, purchasing the sewer line, and forming a fire district. There was also discussion about mandatory hookups and funding. Martha noted that the town just got a grant to plan for economic development but, without the sewer line, there can be no development. Barbara was concerned about the town taking on responsibility for the unpaid bills of the Resort and other property owners. Mike Gannon said he has paid his bill for 15 years and some of the payment was supposed to be set aside for repairs and maintenance. If that wasn't done, Mike said, it's not fair to him and the other property owners who paid their bills to charge them again. Elvin asked what development is envisioned for the village and suggested that it may be necessary to present a vision of what the village could be like if it were connected to the sewer line and compare that to what it will be like if it is not connected. Hal suggested a structured marketing approach. Elvin agreed that we need a "product" to promote in order to get a positive vote. Barbara noted that, if the sewer line came into the village, ½-acre zoning would

be possible, which could increase the downtown population and improve the viability of commercial enterprises. Glenn said it would also lower the user rates for the sewer line. Hal suggested that the PC outline the major issues and the information needed. Glenn said it's a choice between ignoring the situation and getting involved. Hal said he thinks we need to study the situation before we get involved. Glenn said we don't have four or five years. Elvin suggested developing a "product" (i.e. a vision of the town's future); promoting the product; having the town vote on the product; and presenting the manner in which the product can become a reality (i.e. by connecting to the sewer line). Mark said the town would have to have public meetings and a vote to approve the purchase and that would take years. Martha suggested a brainstorming session focused on the pros and cons of acquiring the sewer line. Mark said he thinks the Selectboard should make a decision and move forward. Glenn said he'd like to at least have an advisory vote at town meeting. Glenn said if the vote is affirmative, the Selectboard can then negotiate for the acquisition. Barbara asked if the Selectboard will have numbers for town meeting. Martha said the pro-development folks who voted against acquiring Mile Long Field should be in favor of this. Hal suggested informational meetings. Glenn agreed that developing and marketing the concept is important. Mark mentioned the Kingdom Trails. Glenn said the Selectboard has budgeted \$25,000 for upgrading and maintaining the town forest for recreational use.

6. Law Enforcement – Glenn said West Windsor and surrounding towns have been talking about forming a regional police force but the concept is not developing very quickly. Glenn said the Sheriff's Department won't respond to 911 calls, and the State Police have said that their typical response time to a 911 call from West Windsor would be about 45 minutes. Glenn said the Selectboard has negotiated a contract with Windsor for 24/7 emergency response and 15 hours of roving patrols for \$70,000 per year. Glenn said that translates to \$8 per hour for 24/7 access to emergency response, or 2 cents on the tax rate. Glenn said some people don't understand why we can't just hire another local individual to be on call 24/7. Glenn said, even if we could find someone, we would still only have one officer and there has to be two for serious situations. Furthermore, Glenn said, the Selectboard is not qualified to supervise a police department. Glenn said the Selectboard is having a public meeting to discuss this issue on January 9th. Glenn asked the PC for their thoughts on contracting with Windsor without a town vote. Hal said he is in favor of it; West Windsor can't go without police protection and 6 months is not a lot of time. Elvin asked if there is anyone in town who wants the position. Glenn said there have been inquiries but they would need to go to the police academy. Mark said he believes that the Selectboard has done their due diligence and he is in favor of the contract with Windsor. Elvin asked about Windsor's position on this. Glenn said they are enthusiastic about the notion of an improved relationship with West Windsor and they have been great to work with. There was general discussion about the need for public safety. Mike Gannon said there used to be a streetlight near his house on Ski Tow Road. Glenn said he thinks that was a property owners' association light.
7. Discuss the impact of Brook Road not being rebuilt – Mark said we discussed this issue last time.
8. Discuss possibility of permanent closure of ski area & impact on town – Martha said the PC will be discussing this when they discuss economic development for the town plan update. There was brief discussion about the current status of the Resort. Mark noted that the outfitter business shut down.
9. Review and approve revised report on Zoning Regulations – The PC reviewed the Selectboard's changes to the zoning regulations. Barbara noted an error. Mark did not like the elimination of the exemption for fences less than 4'. The PC reviewed the revised report. **Mark made a motion to approve the revised report. Barbara seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**
10. Adjourn – **Elvin made a motion to adjourn at 8:30 PM. Barbara seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison