

Minutes
Acton Water Resources Advisory Committee
November 15, 2006
Acton Senior Citizen Center
Cafeteria
Audubon Hill, Acton

Attendees

Members: Andrew Magee, Lauren Rosenzweig, Eric Hilfer, Helen Probst, Joanne Bissetta, Allen Nitschelm, Ann Chang

Associates: Carol Holley, Ron Beck

Support Staff: Doug Halley, Brent Reagor

Public: Mary Michelman, Terra Friedrichs, Aidan Smith

The meeting opened at 7:15 P.M.

Mr. Magee, as Chairman pro-tem, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. Minutes for the meeting of October 11, 2006 were discussed. Ms. Friedrichs noted that the intent of her comments in paragraph 2 of the minutes was to bring attention to the Committee the need discuss a “do nothing” option. Mr. Magee agreed that it should be on a future agenda.

Mr. Magee noted that John Murray was unable to make the meeting to give his presentation on the financial aspects of expanding sewers.

Ms. Friedrichs felt that the second sentence in the second full paragraph on page three of the minutes did not reflect the full purpose of the Sewer Expansion Feasibility Committee. She felt that the area of each needs area would also be re-examined. Mr. Magee suggested that at the end of the sentence add “as well as, re-evaluate the needs areas”.

Ms. Rosenzweig moved to accept the minutes of October 11, 2006 as amended. Ms. Bissetta seconded the motion. The Committee unanimously approved the motion.

Mr. Magee discussed communication issues. He stressed the need to circulate information within the email shells established for the Committee and the citizen distribution list. He noted that the Open Meeting Law did not allow business of the Committee to be discussed on-line outside the confines of a duly noticed meeting.

Ms. Rosenzweig gave a report on the first meeting of the Sewer Expansion Feasibility subcommittee. She noted that the committee consisted of Mr. Nitschelm, Mr. Ryder, Mr. Head, Mr. Halley and herself. Ms. Tavernier has also requested to be on the subcommittee.

At the first meeting Mr. Halley reviewed the sewer expansion recommendations of the CWRMP, both the public and private options. He noted how the AWCAC made decisions regarding proximity to the environmental needs. Ms. Rosenzweig added concentrated growth, school campus growth, DEP requirements and Beaver encroachment as considerations in expansion choices.

During questions and comments at the Sewer Expansion Subcommittee meeting, concerns were expressed regarding housing development and sewer availability; the ability to do sewer expansion piecemeal; seeking buy in from impacted residents; balancing environmental and non-technical needs; smart growth vs. growth promotion.

Mr. Beck, commenting on the subcommittee meeting, noted that the Town needed to be careful to look at the school choices regarding wastewater options. A framework for the entire Town needs to be set up. Ms. Chang said that elected officials should meet with the School Committee to discuss the CWRMP.

Mr. Nitschelm said that an analysis of the cost benefits of bringing the sewers to the Douglas/Gates complex should be done as compared to providing an on-site solution.

Other items discussed by the Committee included environmental reasons for expanding to Spencer Road area; the prioritization within the CWRMP; approaching West Acton with a CWRMP education program; funding a project at Annual Town Meeting; and the economics of piecemeal sewer expansion.

Mr. Nitschelm said that the Spencer Road should be top priority. The residents want it and there is an environmental need. The Town should move forward on that project but should address what residents will pay and the question of “will the Town front the initial money?”.

Ms. Probst noted that she had been on the Citizen’s Advisory Committee that reviewed the CWRMP and was concerned the reports findings weren’t developed sufficiently for public acceptance. She was in favor of developing a transparent environmental metric that would clearly demonstrate environmental need.

The Committee expressed interest in having a placeholder article for Town Meeting for a study of sewer expansion of the Spencer Road area. Some of the committee thought it was in the best interest of the Town to fund a study. Ms. Holley felt that the CPA fund should be looked at. Mr. Magee noted that those funds were not available for this type of work. Mr. Nitschelm asked what should the Town pay for and why. It was noted that in the development of the existing sewer area that studies were paid for by the Town; engineering and construction paid for by the properties in the sewer area.

Mr. Smith stated that he was coming to these meetings to become educated regarding the Town’s needs. He felt that the people in the affected areas should be asked what options they favored.

The Committee discussed a framework for assessing needs areas for prioritization. Mr. Beck noted that the Health Department had a huge amount of information but there was no way to get

at it. Issues discussed included what data exists that is not being used; relative analysis vs. absolute analysis; the \$500,000 already expended for the environmental analysis of the existing CWRMP; environmental issues can be similar and yet require different solutions; and needs areas should be revisited in terms of ranking.

Ms. Rosenszweig noted that the comments and advice made at this meeting would be taken back to the Sewer Expansion Feasibility Subcommittee for consideration.

Ms. Probst gave a report on the first meeting of the Capacity Optimization Subcommittee. She noted that the committee consisted of Mr. Nitschelm, Ms. Bissetta, Mr. Head, Mr. Reagor and herself.

Issues discussed by the subcommittee included the existing sewer plant, collection system and discharge area; what did it take to get what was built; what needs to be done next to increase capacity; what is the process of approval through DEP; what concerns for the Assabet River and EPA; what does groundwater monitoring show; can homeowners along the sewer line opt out; what is the impact of betterment reassessments; and how much reserve capacity is necessary.

Woodard & Curran has been asked to draft a budget for increasing the permitted capacity of the wastewater system. The collection system, treatment plant and discharge area each have different capacity issues. The biggest limitation is the discharge area.

Ms. Rosenszweig noted that MAPC and USGS were developing a watershed model for the SUASCO basin and that Acton was one of three towns chosen to study. They will be taking water withdrawal predictions from the Water District for the next twenty years and looking at the impacts of sewer expansion on water recharge. They will be using the recommendations of the CWRMP in regards to potential sewer expansion.

Mr. Magee requested that the members of the Committee review the Mission statement and be prepared to discuss it at the next Committee meeting.

Mr. Hilfer made a presentation of a schedule for on-going tasks.

Outstanding issues further discussed were refining the ranking process; documenting how the Committee responds to expansion requests like Sylvia Street; and which Town Meeting expansion or capacity issues should be brought to.

It was noted that the next WRAC meeting was scheduled for December 13th and the Committee determined to have another meeting on January 10th.

The Meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M.