

Water Resources Advisory Committee

Draft Minutes of Meeting

May 27, 2009

Town Hall Room 126

Members present: Ron Beck (chair), Barry Rosen, Helen Probst, Carol Holley (clerk).

Guests: Terra Friedrichs, Matt Liebman

The meeting opened at 7:17 p.m. The minutes of the April 29 meeting were reviewed. Ms Probst moved to accept as submitted, Mr. Rosen seconded, and all voted in favor.

Mr. Beck read the mission statement as approved by the Board of Selectmen. The group discussed comparative merits of being reportable to Board of Selectmen or Board of Health. Groundwater protection and threats to certain town wells, and potential ways to mitigate those threats, were reviewed. The general consensus was that, given the complexity and interconnectedness of water related issues, the Selectmen might be the proper oversight authority.

Ms Probst gave a summary of Sewer Action Committee activities, and asked if the WRAC has a position on the current sewer project. Mr. Beck noted that, in general, the group should think about sewers, but this particular project was taken out of this committee and given to another committee. What would it accomplish if this group came to a conclusion that we didn't agree? It's already on the road for the town to vote on it. Mr. Beck didn't agree with some of the statements some people made, but that's water under the bridge, and he felt that, going forward, the group should definitely be playing a role in how to use up the rest of the plant's capacity. Ms Friedrichs noted that over the summer the Selectmen will be engaging in capacity workshops regarding all phases of town infrastructure and prioritizing uses for them.

Mr. Beck felt that the group needed to set criteria and go through a specific activity – what pollutants are generated, and what are the cost/benefit ratios of mitigating them? Ms Probst talked about outreach and education, and recommended an EPA document available at www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/outreach/documents Potential future WRAC efforts were noted to be a combination of marketing and science. Criteria for determining needs areas based on data and measurement were discussed. Mr. Beck observed that the group needs criteria, data, and measurement; he would like to see the annual town report have water quality status information for the town – is it getting better or worse? Mr. Barry believed that at the moment it's getting worse.

Mr. Beck felt that, regarding the STF project, this group could get that go. Mr. Rosen agreed that, aside from the suggestion the WRAC had already made (about maintenance), the group should let it go. Mr. Rosen asked what would happen if the cost comes in higher than predicted, and Ms Probst replied that

it would have to go before a Town Meeting again. Mr. Rosen is concerned about the location of the water pipes in that neighborhood , given factors of age, ledge in the street, and ignorance of their exact placement.

Ms Probst felt that, as the WRAC, the group could discuss environmentally sensitive areas – what are the indicators that cause septic systems to fail or to be less effective? 60% of the town will remain on on-site systems, with the rest on sewer or clustered systems. The group will have to come up with a wastewater management district and will have to set parameters for concerns. What criteria raise red flags?

Getting back to the original topic, Mr. Beck stated he doesn't want to take a position with STF, and moved that the group not do so. Ms Holley seconded. Mr. Rosen didn't think the group could take a position. Ms Probst wondered, is this the best proposal as the SAC goes before Town Meeting? Is it OK? She agreed that the WRAC should stay neutral. The vote was unanimous not to take an official position on the STF warrant article. It was noted that committee members retain the right to speak as individuals.

Mr. Liebman stated he was willing to help with data analysis, since he has the appropriate skillset to do so. He noted that there are different data sets – septic system functioning data, and monitoring data.

The group informally discussed the legal issues involved with management groups and septic system inspections.

Mr. Beck felt that the group had to talk about what monitoring criteria it wanted and where. Mr. Rosen felt the group had to define for the Selectmen that there are things other than being close to the physical treatment plant that could indicate for sewerage. Certain numbered needs areas might be prioritized because there is no way to treat wastewater on site or create a cluster; we need to start thinking about those areas. He noted that it is going to be hard to clearly define needs areas because there are too many unknowns. He thought the committee would have to discuss filling plant capacity with the Selectmen. Ms Friedrichs noted that there are many other issues regarding capacity that require strategic decisions.

Mr. Beck suggested that the group see if it can summarize what it is planning to do. Ms Probst noted that we have just been reconstituted, and we have some action items, and one of the first ones is taking a step back and looking at the CWRMP. We need a global view. Mr. Rosen noted that we don't know what the capacity will be yet. He thought the group needed to let the Selectmen know that we are re-examining issues and one of the things that affects water issues is sewer capacity – we are wrestling with a bunch of problems, including pervious paving. We would like to weigh in on future use of treatment plant capacity, but we want time to explore the science behind it. Ms Holley suggested that WRAC members simply have informal, one-on-one conversations with members of the Board of Selectmen regarding some of these issues.

Ms Friedrichs left for an appointment.

Mr. Beck assigned homework – think about criteria, issues with monitoring and data. Testing protocols used in the Health Dept. lab were a concern to some present.

The discussion turned to pervious paving. Mr. Rosen related that he has been reviewing materials from Iowa and talking to the “water guy” at UNH. . The Mass. DEP began its study of the technology in 2008 and has yet to develop a formal position. Jen Peterson of the Mass. Water Works Association doesn’t have any handouts on the topic. Some people at the Acton Water District have talked to Mr. Rosen about pervious paving, and they expressed concerns. Mr. Beck noted that this technology evolved in the south where there are very pervious soils. Mr. Rosen related that the study Iowa found that compressive strength of the material decreases as void size in the paving increases, and in the Northeast it should be 6 inches thick. The Iowa study felt more studies were needed, and recommended looking into some fibrous materials. Pervious paving can be subject to frost heaves, requires careful plowing, and chemicals can concentrate in substrata – lots of salt can show up in the area quickly. Fuel and oil from vehicles can and do penetrate into the soil. Mr. Rosen thinks this technology should be banned from Zone IIs. The Iowa study recommends street sweeping on a weekly basis after one year. Permeability can be reduced by 20% after one year. The geotextile underlinings can fill up with pollutants, including heavy metals – lead, zinc, cadmium get trapped. You have to remove the pavement to get to the underlining every 10-15 years. Nitrates and phosphorous are not remediated.

Mr. Rosen and Ms Probst felt that the WRAC should weigh in on the pervious paving issue. Mr. Rosen will talk to a person related to the Iowa study in Iowa. Mr. Beck moved that, on a preliminary basis, the WRAC should express that it has a lot of concerns and is going to work on a position paper, which will take a month or so to get together. The WRAC will speak to, and act with, the AWD on this matter. On a preliminary basis, the WRAC has a number of concerns and is still gathering information. Ms Holley seconded this motion; Mr. Beck will send out a draft position paper for review and comment. All voted in favor.

The educational flyer was noted, as was the short timeline to get it out. Mr. Beck will email the document as a pdf for a final sanity check and any issues should be communicated to him.

Meeting schedules were discussed. To keep a rhythm, the next meeting should be June 24, 7:15 p.m. There was no concern for post-town-meeting fatigue. On July 13, a Board of Selectmen oversight meeting has been scheduled at 7:40 p.m. On the 24th, a presentation to the Selectmen will be reviewed for focus and content. Next meeting, the group also has to talk about criteria, because that discussion needs to be brought before the Selectmen. What is meant by criteria? Mr. Beck thinks it should be high level – what criteria do we use to decide how to handle different needs areas. Ms Probst noted that criteria can be economic development, environmental risk, and cost. Mr. Beck was concerned about how to measure risk, noting that if you look at a global level, the town has X time and X money to spend. How do you make decisions? Mr. Rosen felt the group needed to identify the problems, then it will have to make a judgment and rank them, and which ones we think we can suggest solutions for that are within our area of expertise.

Mr. Liebman noted that there are EPA documents that talk about stress response and models; source, transport and receptors of pollutants, indicators for risk – think about pathways and models for risk that are occurring in town. Ms Probst noted that the group has to think about what it might see 20 years from now, and she thought that was hard to do. If the community keeps going the way we are going and ignoring old septic systems, etc. – if we don't think ahead today – we should be looking at risks to avoid disasters.

Mr. Beck suggested that the group plan, as a general statement, to meet the last Wednesday of each month as readjust as required. Ms Holley will contact Andrea Ristine regarding room reservations. If we are not done with the presentation to the Selectmen on the scheduled meeting in June, we will schedule another before the review meeting.

Ms Probst moved to adjourn, Mr. Rosen seconded, and all voted in favor. Meeting adjourned 10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Holley, Clerk