

MEMO

West Pawlet Village Center Master Plan

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**
Introductory Open House
June 27, 2022 3:00pm - 7:00pm WPV Firehouse



Public Comments and Input:

Attendees were invited to share their ideas for what they would like to see happen in the village - what would improve their quality of life, what would they like to see change, what would they like to see remain the same? What questions did they think we should ask in the upcoming community survey?

- Potential to adaptively re-use former slate quarry. Quarry pit sits uphill of village, is now filled with water. Potential to harness this as a gravity-fed system which pipes water down into the village to power fire suppression systems.
- Would like to see old firehouse building at the corner of New Street / Route 153 torn down. Building is in bad shape, no need for it any longer. Used as storage for old carnival equipment mostly.
- Fire department still has need for some on-site storage for necessary equipment. Is considering acquiring a pre-built storage shed which can be placed on the lot.
- Would like to see upgrades to the water treatment plant so it is not so costly.
- Need to make it easier to build in town, simpler for people to make property improvements. Used to be a structure across the street from Firehouse on New Street which was built close to road. That building no longer exists. Would like to build a new building there in same spot, on same footprint, however current zoning would not allow it - required setbacks are too large. Had previously put up a 10x16 shed on property but had to get approval letters from all the neighbors - if one neighbor had said no, wouldn't have been able to do it. Needs to be a simpler system, need to have reduced setbacks, reduced building coverage limits to give more flexibility.
- Used to be slate sidewalks in town. Now most are buried over, or busted up by plows. Was interested in restoring sidewalks on their property and bringing them back, and asked for permission from Town. Town said that they could do whatever they wanted with the sidewalks, but if they bring them back, sidewalks become their responsibility and liability if someone got hurt. Not interested in taking on potential liability, so no longer interested in restoring sidewalks. Would like to see that work differently.
- Village could use more parking.
- Would like to see wastewater treatment plant addresses so that sewer fees are not so high.
- Drainage and erosion issue on New Street - Town supposedly got a grant to make improvements. They started work, but did not come back to finish it. Were told that Town would fix the erosion runoff, erosion has gotten quite bad, created a large drop off along edge of road. Would like to see this fixed.
- There is an opportunity to create a very nice secluded area on south side of Indian River, between Route 152 and the Rail Trail. Opportunity to create a riverwalk path and a terraced view of the water on the hillside. Would be great for leaf peepers, tourists, visitors along the bike trail. Higher up on the hillside to the south of the Village there are views overlooking the village which would be great if they could be made accessible.
- There are blasters in the community who can blast rock. Could open up some of the ledge at rail trail parking area and make this area larger.
- Intersection in town is an issue. Police are not active in this area, Town relies on 2 constables. Should look at what Manchester did with the small roundabouts - formerly Malfunction Junction - made a big improvement.

Wife was in an accident in front of Post Office a few years ago. Added speed sign in town because it was an issue.

- Should look at opening up the river to people, an overlook with a flood resistant embankment, with riverwalk.
- There is a need for more affordable housing stock, people can't afford to live in the area like they used to. There is a new State Law about housing in the works, should look into what it is about.
- Should create an Industrial Park, where a lot of the preparation and approvals, permits, etc are taken care of in advance to make the site "shovel ready" and more accessible to businesses who want to locate here.
- Look into what (Building?) Better Places is doing in Vermont.
- There is a potential to repurpose the slate quarry into a tiered outdoor amphitheater for music performances (e.g. instead of "Red Rocks" CO., but "Blue Rocks").
- There used to be 2 or 3 hotels in West Pawlet.
- Husband is avid bicyclist, has different bike routes which he takes, one of them is named "Tour de Slate" similar to Tour de France but instead it travels along many of the former slate quarries in the area. This could be an idea where you create a bike route or road race with a similar theme that brings people to the area and promotes tourism, builds on the history of the area.
- Working on converting building into an art gallery and small/intimate community gathering spot. Have worked very hard on retrofit of building, have an interesting and eclectic collection, but progress is difficult. Never enough time and money.
- Should speak with Angela Miller about ideas. She used to be more active with organizing events in the village and is a great resource, may be able to help promote or support new initiatives.
- Would be nice to see redevelopment of the Hookery.
- Former school building at top of the hill, unsure what is happening with that property. Believe someone may be living there currently.
- Wastewater treatment plant fees are very high. Need to do something about that. Recently applied for State assistance and gets \$125 check to offset the costs. Also applied for heating assistance.
- Town is in the process of working with a grant writer who is an expert in sewer systems, they are hoping to help the town get funding to address the issue. Currently, the plant has to truck the waste away to an offsite facility up in Rutland, but this contributes a lot to the operation costs. The idea is to instead upgrade the equipment so that it can consolidate the sewer sludge into an additional tank in a more concentrated form, which would require less truck trips.
- More residences/businesses in town would potentially help to offset the sewer costs because it would divide the operation costs up into smaller amounts, but would need a lot of new hookups to make a difference.
- It is difficult to get more density out of the residential structures that are already here in the Village. There used to be more duplex buildings (two residences per house), but some of these were converted into single family houses. Zoning was changed several years ago which prevented people from converting back into duplex because they would exceed the density limits. This zoning change should be looked at again.
- Post Office is an important institution in the village, serves as community anchor. They still have 4.5 years left on their lease in the building.
- There are places along the rail trail where people can stop to rest or get a drink and some food, but there is nothing here. This needs to be a new waypoint for people along the trail. If we had something like that, would attract a lot more activity.
- Village has a lot of potential, it just needs some positive momentum, a catalyst which gets things rolling in the right direction.
- Town is working on a pedestrian study to identify areas for crosswalk or sidewalk improvements. There is potential that the village could see something similar, and that the Town could get grant money to restore/replace the sidewalks in West Pawlet.

- Have been considering replacing the sidewalks in front of my property. Would be willing to do this work at my own expense, and asked the (State?/Town?) if this was ok and they said yes. If I replaced the sidewalks now, and the Town got grant money later, is it possible I could get reimbursed later for my contribution?
- Could potentially allow people to retrofit existing homes to add more dwelling units by special permit if it is tastefully done, special permit conditions.
- There is a difference between adding more people to the Village and adding more activity to the Village. We need to bring more activity to the Village, which can generate more people and create a cycle of currency locally that helps everyone.
- Should look at what Jane Days is doing in Rupert with Sheldons Store as a model, providing coffee and yoga, etc.
- The extents of the “Village Center” as shown on the map are not what he had always understood the village to be. If you go outside the Village a way the speed limit turns from 30 to 50 mph. Have always understood the village boundaries to be where the speed limit changes, not the boundary drawn on these maps.
- The Hookery was looking into doing work with CBD, and possibly a marijuana dispensary. Unsure what they are doing now.
- The northern pond quarry is still being mined. Newmont Slate, owned by Jack Williams.
- Important to note that the State does not maintain Route 153, the Town does, even though it is a State Route.
- Project maps are odd because they seem to show that peak of the hill south of the Village (“Porch Hill”) as being on the Vermont side of the border, but have always been told that the large pine tree up at the peak of the hill was the NY line.
- Master Plan name could be “Pawlet - Next 100 Years”
- Rail trail has gates which are closed in the summer, but are opened in the winter to allow snowmobile use. Can take horses on trail, but cannot take a horse and carriage because of gates. When tropical storm Irene hit, the trail was the only way to get to and from Granville.
- Would like to convert small store (former antiques building) next to Celery Compound into a potential community store with a public bathroom. Could serve/provide local goods with community volunteers / participation and minimal attention. Similar to what they do in Shrewsbury. Currently working on an idea to open up the west side of this building with larger windows and a porch to make it more visible and inviting to people passing through or along the trail. Would be able to see goods for sale inside. Potential to have a seating area outside for people to take a break along the trail.
- A public bathroom is very much needed, would help to keep people from “using” the trail for bathroom activities. Don’t want a port-o-potty out there along the trail though, that looks awful, we need a real indoor restroom.
- Former Duchies site is a problem in its current unfinished state. Need to clean it up or finish it somehow. A “level 1” environmental study was already completed for the site. Expecting that this Fall money may be available for the follow up of a “level 2” to identify what needs to be done.
- Need to have a stop sign at the circle/monument - there is currently no traffic control, so any control there would be an improvement. Also, parking at the rail trail needs to be cleaned up or formalized. Right now it just looks like a place where the weeds have died, could be much improved.
- Town owns a lot of land north of the village. A lot you could do there with an industrial park, plenty of potential jobs.
- Red Rocks, Colorado is a famous place to see music and beautiful setting. Not many people know that it is owned by the Town, it isn’t privately owned. When they aren’t holding concerts there is still a park, not just sitting there dormant.
- Former slate quarry has potential as a solar farm, however it is limited because you cannot tie into the grid because the local substation capacity is already reserved by another solar facility being proposed. Perhaps there is an option instead for a local microgrid which only serves immediate village area?

- Sewer system extends quite a ways north from the village. It is gravity fed down from the top of the hill, however up in Spruce Gum it has to be pumped up to top of hill from other side before it comes down to village. The pumps at that station tend to burn out regularly. At the south end, sewer system extends south of the Hookery.
- Euclid Street used to be called chicken alley because of the chicken farm that was there.
- Date of Pawlet Charter is incorrect on the History board, was established 1761.

DISPLAY BOARD: “What IDEAS might you suggest to improve the quality of life in the Village of West Pawlet?”

- Reduce sewer fees
- Community Solar & Hydrogen?
- #1) Store (Dutchies); #2) Railtrail welcome center + expanded parking; #3) Monument / intersection improvement for safety.
- Fire House Annex: Re-imagine as a Community Center? (Ref: Rupert Sheldon Store); Store - Dutchies old site; Old School House - reimagine use - Apartments?; Trail head - Cafe would be great - been asked several times if coffee place in Town! Thank you!!
- Easier permitting
- Utilize funds record to reduce wastewater tax; Crosswalk in front of Post Office!!!
- Playground
- Village store - basic staples, beer/wine, food to go? Cafe - coffee, sandwiches; Pizza
- Ensure walkability of downtown areas / repair sidewalks
- Community garden
- Use existing infrastructure - like under-used buildings - to create more spaces for community gathering
- Community gathering space; Crosswalks
- Turn Antique shop (#14) into a community farm store and event space
- Re-create a micro economy where the whole community can flourish
- Putting a store where Dutchies was (#8) is a lot of logistics and a bit far fetched. Use existing infrastructure that we already have.

DISPLAY BOARD: “What aspects of the Village would you like to see STAY THE SAME?”

- Neighbors who help each other
- Industrial Park for businesses to be able to “set up” quickly
- Wonderful community school
- Use #1 Quarry H2O Hydram System for commercial & cheaper HO(?) insurance
- Quarry #2 converted into play/concert place - seating & a stage/roof?
- Update zoning!
- Quaint village center (w/ no chain stores)
- Sensible multi-unit

DISPLAY BOARD: “What aspects of the Village would you like to see CHANGE?”

- More opportunities to connect and interact as a community
- More welcoming to diverse community members

- Celebrate and learn about our slate quarries / industry / history
- Physical community gathering spaces
- Traffic
- Fix zoning setbacks

DISPLAY BOARD: “What questions or topics would you like to see us ask about in the Community Survey this summer?”

- How can the community benefit and participate?
- What is the one change that would make your life in West Pawlet easier? Why?
- What are you willing to do / contribute to improve West Pawlet?
- What actions have you seen in other communities that we should try in West Pawlet?

[** END MEETING **]

[Written comments collected via online forms to be appended when available]