

MEMO

West Pawlet Village Center Master Plan

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**
Public Workshop - Draft Plan Presentation
April 20, 2023 6:00pm - 8:00pm WPV Firehouse



Introduction:

A presentation and discussion was held at the West Pawlet Volunteer Firehouse to review the draft recommendations of the plan and solicit suggestions. A PDF copy of the draft plan was made available online a few days prior to the meeting, and printed handouts of the recommendations were also provided to meeting attendees for reference. A copy of the discussion slides was uploaded to the project webpage after the event. Note that due to the length of the conversation, not all of the presentation slides were covered at the meeting. The following represents notes of the public comments and discussion which took place.

Public Comments:

- History of West Pawlet section does not reflect the many Irish immigrants who relocated to the area to work in the slate industry, this should be added.
- The current Town of Pawlet Energy Plan is still being updated, however there are elements of it which should be better incorporated into the plan. Even though these recommendations are town-wide, there are some which could apply directly to West Pawlet.
- **Wastewater Treatment Plant.** The plan suggests utilizing solar energy to help run the wastewater treatment plant and reduce electrical costs, however local solar capacity in this area is limited to what the local infrastructure can accommodate. Plan also recommends seeking grant funding to upgrade/expand capacity of plant to reduce the frequency of truck trips needed to transfer waste to Rutland.
 - The current local infrastructure does not have the capacity to add larger community or utility-scale solar projects, however it can handle smaller private residential or commercial installations. It is anticipated that the wastewater treatment plant could be served by a smaller installation.
- Increasing the size or holding capacity of the wastewater treatment plant doesn't seem attractive to me, as we would still have to truck the waste offsite.
 - It is understood that this approach would reduce the number of truck trips (currently the #1 expense of the plant) but the actual math is still being looked at by engineers. If they determine that it would not result in a significant costs savings, then the town isn't going to bother pursuing that option and will have to find a different solution.
 - Can also investigate potential for some local discharge in the area, but that is likely difficult.
 - Currently plant is only running around 25% of its capacity, would potentially only need to run 3 days a week instead of 7, but we need an exemption from the state to allow that to happen.
 - Recommendation about a shared part-time operator doesn't work, as the town already utilizes a service provider, so this is essentially the same thing.
 - The plant is currently looking to hire a part-time position, however it is not known if this is a new position or re-filling a newly vacated one.
 - Instead of increasing storage capacity, should look into utilizing a press to compact the waste products, squeeze the liquid down. This would be different than the method described to bake or distill the waste products down to a denser mix. Should also investigate this option.

- Do we have any numbers on how much this would reduce costs of the plant?
 - Not yet. Working with engineer to figure that out, meeting this spring. Our goal is to have this worked out in time to make decisions and apply for grant funding which will be open toward the end of the year.
- Have you investigated any other alternative wastewater solutions, such as aerobic or wetland filtration?
 - Can include an assessment of other alternative strategies.
- Do the wastewater fees make a difference to potential homeowners or businesses in town? Is it a deterrent to coming here?
 - Yes, we believe it is a deterrent, and also know that it has caused some people to unhook from the system which only makes the fees for the rest of the users go up.
 - People are finding it is harder and harder to find places to live which aren't overpriced. The state is trying to encourage more housing to address this, especially in denser settlement areas where water and sewer can support it. Long-term we would like to increase the number of users and take advantage of the plant capacity, reduce costs per user.
- **Intersection / Safety Improvements.** Recommend that intersection be re-aligned to create a t-shaped configuration, allow for rail trail crossing at new corner. WWI memorial stone can be moved to new corner where it retains high visibility and has improved/safer setting, concluded with a re-dedication ceremony to honor them. This design concept was preferred unanimously by others at last meeting over other variations, including a traffic circle.
- I like the concept for the intersection re-alignment, however is there a way we could angle it differently so that headlights won't always be shining right into my house?
 - Potentially. Highway safety engineers will want us to likely keep this at a right-angle but can look into it.
 - May have room to move intersection south a bit to address this, and/or provide some plantings to help screen it.
- Has anyone actually been injured or killed at this intersection?
 - There have been a few property damage accidents, one or two involving the monument. Looking back through online police accident reports to the 90's does not show anything serious.
 - I was almost creamed by another car coming through that intersection some time ago, so I feel it is an issue.
 - I think if we relocate the monument, it will only make it worse. It should just stay where it is.
- Recommendations also include addressing speeding and the speed limit. Need to put the speed limit sign back in front of the Firehouse where it used to be.
 - Think we need to actually put a speed limit sign further out from the village, south on 153 up near the top of the hill by the Hookery, so gives people much more warning as they approach the village.
 - The idea to put the radar speed limit warning signs works. VTrans has told us we cannot continue to put them on Route 30 where they have been, but we can put them here in West Pawlet.
- There is a problem with overgrown brush on the side of 153 coming south into the village, (Monty's?) property on the right hand side before the rail trail parking area. This is overgrown and needs to be beaten back. They let us cut it back years ago before, but it needs it again.
- If we move the monument will it encourage people to speed through the intersection instead?
- I live out by Spruce Gum neighborhood, people in private cars speed around corner all the time. The trucks take it more carefully but the cars don't.
- How come people get tickets in Cambridge all the time but never here?
 - Cambridge has its own police/sheriff to write tickets. Same with Dorset, they an agreement with Bennington County Sheriff to patrol once and awhile. We don't have a contract with any local police to do that for us.

- Left turn at the proposed intersection pushes everything up, should look into moving things a bit and see if that is better.
- The monument is a clear deterrent to people, if we take it away I think it will create problems.
- Need to look at the space in front of the former Fish & Game building. People park in front of the Post Office but there is barely any room for this, people at risk of getting sideswiped. But there is plenty of right-of-way to work with. You can re-align the center of the road slightly north toward the fire station where there is more room. This would free up a few more feet in front of post office for parked cars there, make it safer. Could almost do it just by repainting the lines.
- If the centerline of the roadway here were moved slightly north, would that free up space at the intersection to fit a traffic circle instead?
 - Very little room for a traffic circle to function here. Would also have issue of trucks and fire engines being able to navigate it. Already the edge of 153 just skirts by the monument, but can take a second look at how it might work.
 - The smaller traffic circles like in Manchester are not appealing. Because they need to be mountable-curb and the trucks drive over them, they are paved. Looks crummy after a year or two, with cracked pavement and weeds growing out.
 - Could we look into moving monument to the south sidewalk, and then doing a traffic circle.
 - What about adding a flagpole where the monument is?
 - Possible, would give it more visibility, but that would not address any of the right-of-way issues or confusion.
 - Still believe that the monument is not a problem, and we should leave it where it is.
- Do we know what the actual traffic volume is along this road?
- I am dismayed because monument has been here for a long time without any really serious problem, however a traffic circle may cause issues, the fire department needs to be able to get around the village. After hurricane Irene we were trapped in our house and water came to within 3 inches of our electrical system. West Pawlet Fire Department rescued us. Whatever we do here we need to make sure that the Fire Department has what it needs and can work with it.
- Is the threat of more flooding something that we need to better address in the plan?
 - Irene was a rare occurrence, but we were lucky. There was a band that dropped 7 inches more rain than we got here locally, it went through Mettawee Valley instead. If that had come through this valley instead it would have been way worse.
 - There was an issue with private homeowner plugging up drainage flow, but that was a misunderstanding. Likely not an issue again.
 - There is a water-hole/pothole near the top of Egg Street which hasn't been maintained for awhile. Should be straightened out.
- A gopher or something has been digging up the area near the rail trail parking.
- We here in Vermont are surrounded by greenspace. Don't need to add any.
- General road safety - what about planning more sidewalks?
- **New Local Store.** Recommend best option for village is to spearhead effort at a grassroots level to establish a new store, through a newly formed non-profit, similar to other models used in the state with the assistance of the Preservation Trust of Vermont.
- Obvious location for a new local store is to renovate the Firehouse annex at the corner.
- Former antiques building - this has sewer but apparently no water. Would be a nice building but realistically it is too small for a store. Firehouse would be enough space, would not need to be expanded.
- In lieu of the non-profit organization model, should look at the Rutland Co-Op model.

- Owner of small building on Railroad Ave may be open to selling property. It is technically 3 stories because it has basement level below, has bathroom and is ADA compliant.
- Need to address Co-Op store options more in the plan.
- Recent article in the news about a small-town grassroots effort to get a local store in Kansas or Kentucky. Utilized creative ideas like having school kids volunteer to run the store, had a bunch of resources which can be used as a toolkit for doing something similar. Will send info.
- A great store location is right next to the rail trail. It was once Burdicks, then Fish & Game and now the Celery Compound. The owner has been fixing it up, apartments upstairs, repairing brickwork.
 - Unknown, currently the owner appears interested in keeping downstairs as multi-purpose community space, but it has potential.
- Regarding Co-Ops, the Shrewsbury Co-Op was well funded, but you go in their now and there is practically nothing in the store, only a token amount of stuff. The Barnard non-profit example is much more interesting
- Many places such as the store in Wells do pretty well but they don't have gas pumps. Gas pumps bring in customers who buy other stuff, makes business more profitable. Look at what H.N. Williams has done.
- In lieu of gas pumps, which are very costly, take up a lot of space and have a lot of environmental regulations, what about electrical charging stations? Not a lot of them in this area, would be much easier to build.
- Former antiques building would be a great place to serve lemonade, coffee, snacks, etc., but is really too small for a store. The firehouse annex is bet place for the store. Ray's place on Railroad has lots of potential for other uses.
- **Railroad Freight Shed.** Plan proposes that this building could be restored as a joint venture between the Pawlet Historical Society and Vtrans. Building could be a museum showcasing history of West Pawlet, the Railroad and the Slate industry as a welcome center and comfort station to visitors along the rail trail.
 - Could this building be a local store instead?
 - Yes, that option is in the plan also, but there are different variables. If we do one, then cant do the other, etc. Or maybe it has a store in it also?
 - Obviously this idea would require that the current owner of the shed is willing to sell it or work with us in some way to make this happen. Building is in private ownership, currently in bankruptcy proceedings.
 - VTrans previously wanted the structure off of their property, but has since opened up to the idea of potentially allowing it to stay on state land if it can be adapted in some way to supporting the rail trail.
 - Obvious problem with this idea is having the sewer treatment plant right across the street?
 - There also may be a new snafu with apparently people being unable to find the deed or ownership papers to the building.
- **Vacant Land South of Quarry.** There is a large second parcel south of the quarry, currently owned by the Town of Pawlet. Much of this property is open space, fields and forest. Town could potentially subdivide off this non-quarry land and get it back onto the tax rolls. Instead of simply allowing it to be subdivided randomly, could instead create a planned development there for small cottages on small lots with shared open space and trails, served by sewer system. Create smaller housing options more in keeping with scale of village for young family starter homes, seniors, etc.
 - Affordability is subject to market forces. We cant control that.
 - Access to property might require second route, and/or emergency access route.
 - Unknown if the town already had other plans for this property, but getting it back on the tax rolls is worth discussion.
 - Potential area for retirement homes.
- **Volunteerism.** Many of the ideas collected from local residents will need the assistance of volunteer efforts. There are people who have come forward, looking to help, but don't know where to start. Need to assign a

person (volunteer) to keep a list of volunteer items and help assign/matchmake them to how they can help. A starter list of items is provided in the plan, can be amended over time.

- Michael Allen would like to start get the ball rolling and volunteer to help with one of these efforts.
- Need people to come forward and step up.
- **Firehouse.** Supporting the firehouse is an important element of the community. Volunteerism is down, as well as general participation in community events. There are measures being considered at the state level to provide tax breaks and incentives for volunteer firefighters/EMS. Additional measures which allow municipalities at the local level to also provide some property tax breaks, similar to what is happening in NY, should also be pushed. Recommend letter-writing campaign to help support these measures.
 - Firehouse could also reach out to locals, learn what types of events they would most like to support, as well as improve outreach to new residents.
 - There has been a wave of new residents in past years, will be important to try and help include them in the community.
- **Next Steps.** Will be using the comments collected tonight to revise and improve the plan, and will be leaving the comment period open for a few weeks to collect other input. Will be meeting with Planning Commission next week to introduce recommendations to them and ask for their review as well. Eventual plan is to revise and present to the Town Selectboard for their review and comment. This plan, if accepted, would be adopted as a sub-part of the larger Town Plan.

[** END MEETING 8:15pm**]

Written comments collected via the online comment form to date copied below:

[No new comments collected online since presentation]