

Westmoreland Planning Board
Minutes 3/21/22

Attending: Laruen Bressett, Alison Fissette, Bruce Smith, Jim Starkey, Larry Siegel, John Snowdon (selectman) Liana Capra (alt), , Kristen Riley (clerk). Excused: Nancy Zeller (alt), Tim Thompson. There were 9 members of the public present.

Absent:

Nancy Zeller (alt), Tim Thompson

[Lauren Bressett] called the meeting to order at [time].

Review of minutes: 02/21/2022

Alison Fissette made a motion to accept the minutes as written, Liana Capra seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Discussion of the future of Westmoreland housing and the MTAG Grant

Lauren Bressett led an activity with a continuum of views of Westmoreland and its potential changes. Results were as follows:

Our open space, natural resources, and rural vistas are of primary importance.

Yes 12- 0 -0 No

Westmoreland is and should remain a rural bedroom community.

Yes 14 - 0 - 0 No

Westmoreland should develop a business, commercial, and services town center.

Yes 2 - 1 - 4 - 8 No

Westmoreland should become an outdoor recreational destination.

Yes 1 - 0 - 6 - 5 No

Public transportation is needed for Westmoreland.

Yes 0 - 0 - 12 No

Westmoreland should develop a major transportation corridor through town.

Yes 0 - 0 - 5 - 9 No

List words that you feel describe Westmoreland Today.

Quaint, quiet, charming, rural

Rural quiet

Home, rural

Divided

In transition perhaps

Nature, great school

Rural, farms

Agricultural, low population

great
Same as all above

List words that you would like to see describe Westmoreland Future.

Rural – low population – agricultural community
Harmonious, respectful
Quiet, country, charming, community involvement
Vibrant, Natural resources, vistas
Rural, younger
Rural
Rural
Rural
Rural
Same as all above

Lauren Bressett reviewed the results of the activity with the room. She then asked Lisa Murphy of the Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC), to speak on the Municipal Technical Assistance Grant and how it could be used. Lisa Murphy would be the one to write the grant, if the town were to move forward with doing so. Her job would be to look at regulations, see what is outdated and inconsistent with RSAs and regulations. She would also look at master plan and zoning ordinances and compare to see if they are consistent in the master plan. At the end of the review she would give a list of findings and provide potential options to help meet current regulations. The planning board would determine any final actions that would be taken. The town would need to vote on any proposed ordinances.

Lauren Bressett asked if there are strings attached. Lisa Murphy said they cannot legally force the town to change regulations. Part of the grant money is allocated to Lisa writing up to 3 ordinances but it would be the planning board's decision whether or not they choose to adopt them. An annual report is required. Alison Fissette asked who prepares the annual report and Lisa Murphy said the town would. Lauren then opened discussion up to the board.

Jim Starkey asked if there would be monetary costs. Lisa said it appears that MTAG has dropped the match requirement, there would be no cost to the town. Jim Starkey asked how many towns have reached out to SWRPC for this MTAG grant? Lisa Murphy said not very many.

John Snowdon said he was aware of SWRPC programs. People are worried about their property taxes. John wanted to explore if there was a way we can pursue economic development so that we can alleviate some property taxes. John brought this to select board and they said it would not be possible with current ordinances. John wants to look at the grant because it is better than using tax dollars. He referenced Pembroke, and how the town was sued because the planning board voted inconsistently with their ordinances. This grant would look at inconsistencies in Westmoreland ordinances. It would give a regulatory review of the ordinances.

Alison Fissette said the planning board is looking for someone to reorganize the ordinance book. We are not looking to expand housing. Alison Fissette referenced the MTAG grant application guidelines, "Projects must be clearly intended to increase housing options. You must have a project that

demonstrates needs and readiness.”

Frank Reeder noted that from the perspective of grant money, Westmoreland is considered wealthy and little grant money is available for any purpose. He asked if we put the housing topic aside, is there anything else you are opposed to?

Larry Siegel said he notices that there is a clear idea that SWRPC has to offer... but the grant guidelines don't clearly offer what we are looking for. It clearly talks about housing. Yes, we would like to review the ordinances, but the grant doesn't look like the means to do it. John Snowdon said the grant also provides what could possibly work for housing in the future. The key to that entire piece is that it does not have to be accepted. Nonetheless, we still get to bring along the regulatory review. Larry Siegel doesn't disagree that there should be a discussion about housing, but the point of the grant from the planning board is to get regulations reviewed.

Lisa Murphy said showing demographics, there is little planning money to help towns. SWRPC doesn't advocate for a specific thing. They will gather all information and listen to what the town has to say and make suggestions they feel would help accomplish what the town desires.

Lauren Bressett then opened discussion up to the public. Marshall Patmos, Conservation Commission, asked if there is a graduate student that might be able to do this. Russ Austin asked if we could just have the ordinances reviewed. Lisa Murphy said she would review it and help where the planning board wants, but if it is outside the grant there would be a cost.

Frank Reeder said we should look at ordinances since we passed ADUs. The town won't vote on expanding housing, but we can focus on the other aspects of this grant.

April Ferguson (member of the public) asked if SWRPC comes to bat for the town legally if the town gets sued related to this work. Lisa Murphy said no, her expertise is planning recommendations.

John Snowdon reiterated that the town went to SWRPC, not the other way around.

Jim Starkey asked if we took housing out of the equation, would we agree? Would housing have to be on the application? Lisa Murphy said while housing is in the grant, the town would not have to move forward with an ordinance related to housing. Housing discussion would have to be on the application but is not the only work that has to be done. She gave Temple as an example, their final MTAG actions were related to water quality.

Lauren Bressett reminded folks that in the opening activity, it was unanimous that Westmoreland is and should remain a bedroom community. That means housing is a primary consideration. She shared statistics that show we meet the standard of affordable housing regarding housing sales. Where Westmoreland falls short is rental availability and cost. The planning board proposed Accessory Dwelling Units as one way to meet this need. We need to take a look at current housing, and consider how we want to shape our growth and possibly address our rental issue for current housing. Part of the grant could address if we need a permit for ADUs, are we doing ADU's right. All towns grow. We need to be smart in how we manage it. This grant could help us consider what future housing growth should be and the grant would also do some of the needed work on the ordinances that would otherwise cost about \$4,000. It will not completely organize the ordinance book, but it will give the

board a head start and ultimately be less expensive.

Lisa Murphy said the idea is to look at all of the options. Bruce Smith asked what percentage of your time will you be looking at and reviewing ordinances versus housing requirements? Lisa said the majority of the time will be looking at regulations and ordinances.

Larry Siegel said the apprehensions are clearly regarding housing development. However, housing discussions are going to be had. Getting to have them in this context is a safe way to have these discussions. It has to be discussed for the master plan. We direct the ordinances that Lisa writes. John Snowdon said this is our time to make sure we have regulations in place, before people start developing.

Lauren asked the board what they think and where they stand.

Jim Starkey asked Lisa Murphy if, during this discussion, she has heard any information that is incorrect, in her opinion as a professional. Lisa Murphy said yes, because this grant does not have to expand housing. Lisa Murphy said she wants what the town wants and has the skill to help. She has worked on antiquated master plans where there is no professional expertise, which is why having regional planning agencies assistance is important.

Alison Fissette asked how is Lisa getting paid thus far if the board hasn't voted for the grant? Lisa Murphy said she has gotten paid from a previous grant in place that identified economic development and senior housing as topics for further consideration. Thus writing the application falls under that grant. If the town moves forward, the town is the recipient of the MTAG money and subcontracts out the work to be done. Officially, as subcontractor, she is working for and at the direction of the town of Westmoreland.

Lianna Capra wants to make sure the application is clear on what is expected from the planning board, zoning board, and selectmen. Jim Starkey and Alison Fissette are opposed to the grant at this time. April Ferguson from the Conservation Commission supports a pause. Their board is uninformed and they will need more answers.

Bruce would like to see a quote of what it would cost to have someone review and organize the ordinances. Lauren noted that a quote was received for reorganization and passed on to the select board. It was \$3,200 to \$3,700. But this didn't include review for consistency with state laws and the master plan which the grant would cover.

Frank Reeder suggested that there be a "pause" to be the time it takes Lisa Murphy to write the application, so there is time for review from boards before it is submitted. We would then have language to discuss. Lisa Murphy noted she only has about 3 hours of time left for this. It was suggested that the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Zoning Board review and make suggestions to the current draft. Then Lisa could finalize the application, and it could be reviewed by the boards before it is submitted. The conservation commission members, Liana Capra, and Jim Starkey were in favor. Selectmen would appoint an ad hoc committee to do this.

Liana made a motion to recommend that the select board makes a committee to review the application before we decide to actually submit the application to the state. Larry Siegel Seconded that motion. Motion passed unanimously with Alison Fissette abstaining.

Larry Siegel moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Jim Starkey, passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:23 PM.

Kristen Riley, Secretary