

Jamaica Planning Commission (JPC)
Draft Meeting Minutes - Regular Meeting
May 15, 2023
Jamaica Town Offices, 28 Town Office Road
Jamaica VT 05343

Commissioners present: Bryan Zieroff, Charlie Peck, Chris Robbins, John Van Hoesen

Public present: none

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

1. It was agreed to add a discussion of recent correspondence about the MERP grant program to the agenda under item 6.
2. The April 17, 2023 draft meeting minutes were approved as written, by unanimous vote of members present.
3. Bryan summarized the presentation that he gave at the April 25th Selectboard meeting where he discussed the wastewater feasibility study. The discussion included a quick recap as to why we are conducting the study, the application process for obtaining State funding for the project, the process (including meetings) where our hired engineer presents findings to the State to show that the State required 30%, 60%, and 90% milestones have been met, the anticipated upcoming schedule, and a question and answer session with the Selectboard and the public. In a response to questions about posting any reports to the website, Bryan reiterated that our engineer didn't prepare a report called "The 60% Report", but has a draft report that is approximately 60% complete, with actual site specific data being compiled for the 90% completion level of the draft report. Bryan reiterated that the State required progress (30%, 60%, and 90%) meetings are open to the public, anyone can attend a Jamaica Planning Commission Meeting or email Bryan at blzieroff@gmail.com to ask questions about the feasibility study, and we have a State-approved scope and budget to present the findings of the study and the report at an advertised town-wide public information and discussion meeting. In an effort to maintain an open dialogue, the group of residents that are members of the Wastewater Committee are putting together documents with a plan to post information on the website.
4. Bryan summarized the key points of a recent GMP (Green Mountain Power) presentation to the Selectboard concerning GMP's future plans to armor or bury much of the region's electric distribution network in an effort to reduce power outages caused by storm damage to utility lines and poles. GMP's long range plans to reduce storm damage related outages do not include identification or removal of presently existing hazardous trees that are likely to break and fall on power lines during storm events. There was general agreement among JPC members that GMP's plans for future armoring of as much of the distribution network as possible will likely be helpful, if and when actually accomplished, but will not, in the short term, help to reduce frequent outages caused by past poor line maintenance practices and a large accumulation of dead, dying, or otherwise obviously hazardous trees presently existing in close proximity to electric distribution lines.

With regard to funding cutting down hazard trees to improve the electric grid's resilience, Chris pointed out that the Planning Commission's recommendation to the Selectboard included a recommendation to fund an energy audit of town buildings using ARPA town funds in the amount approximately equal to MERP funds for the same purpose. While it is the Planning Commission's unanimous position that the road engineering study should be the first priority for funds not yet committed, if all the remaining funding is not required for it and the MERP grant funds the energy audit, repurposing the ARPA town funds we recommended for the energy audit is a possible way to fund hazard tree removal.

5. Chris reported that Sertex, DVFiber's labor contractor, has commenced work in stringing fiber optic cable. In a departure from previous plans to complete a sufficient portion of the southern ring to connect to a second POPs internet uplink to provide a minimum level of redundancy, Sertex will provide connections to subscribers in Readsboro and Stamford as they are passed. This is because analysis has shown the importance of acquiring subscribers as early as possible. Subscribers in Readsboro will be able to connect as early as June/July and Stamford in August/September. The second POPs will be reached in December. DVFiber expects to pass 1000 potential subscribers in this time frame and our subscription rate will set precedent for the rest of the program.

Jamaica's pledge of \$22,100 to DVFiber to supplement the Excess costs of connecting Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) recipients had been considered closed business with the submitting the Selectboard's resolution of June 17, 2022 to DVFiber. However, the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB) now requires a pledge letter as a condition to matching contributions. We have received a model pledge letter and Chris has filled in the blanks including stipulations on what the town's contribution is to fund. Since DVFiber has changed its connection policy making all connections free unless excessively costly, all of the funds pledged may not be used for connection cost subsidies. Chris added a second possible use namely subsidizing computer literacy and computing resource purchase for those ACP recipients who are without computers or internet connection and are needy of training to use them. The pledge letter is due to the VCBB by May 31, 2023 to receive matching funding.

Chris circulated a picture of the actual routes of the three ring backbone of DVFiber's network following the roads through DVFiber's member towns.

6. The JPC discussed recent correspondence from Town Administrator Mike Tuller, requesting input from the JPC on possible ways to utilize grant funds now available through the state's Municipal Energy Resiliency Program (MERP). It was pointed out that this program has provided funding for Regional Planning Commissions to provide staff assistance to member towns concerning effective local utilization of the available MERP funds. It was suggested that Mike reach out to WRC Senior Planner Margo Ghia (the WRC "point person" for the MERP program) and seek her input on how Jamaica might best utilize these funds. Charlie will try to follow up on this topic.

7. No members of the public were present.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.