

PUBLIC MEETING – VILLAGE WASTEWATER STUDY

WESTFIELD SELECTBOARD

Minutes

December 18th, 2025 – 5:00 p.m.

Westfield Community Center, 59 North Hill Road

Meeting Recordings Available to View at <https://www.youtube.com/@TownofWestfieldVT>

Town Officials Present: Jacques Couture, Selectboard Chair; Richard Degre, Selectboard; Dennis Vincent, Selectboard; LaDonna Dunn, Town Clerk; Niki Dunn, Selectboard Clerk; Mike Piper, Constable; Shelley Martin, Town Health Officer

Others Present: Kevin Farrington, AES Northeast; Kalyani Mer, AES Northeast; Jan Degre, Jennifer Grace, Jeremy Dunn, Rick Danforth, John Hamelin

Present Via Zoom: Gary H.; Lynnette Claudon, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

- 1. Call Meeting to Order – Jacques Couture, Chair:** Jacques Couture called the meeting to order at 5:01PM.
- 2. Welcome & Introductions:** Jacques welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 3. Overview of the Village Wastewater Study:** Jacques noted that almost everyone in attendance was at the last meeting so it may not be necessary to go over the 30% report again. He reiterated that this is just a study and nobody will be affected monetarily until after a vote for or against a wastewater system is held.
- 4. 60 % Preliminary Engineering Report – Presented by AES Northeast:** Kalyani Mer from AES Northeast presented the 60% report. She began by giving a brief overview of what was discussed in the 30% report. She noted that the study is important as the village currently relies on private septic systems, there is no municipal wastewater system, and some of the systems were installed years ago and may not comply with new wastewater system requirements. There is high ground water in many of the areas where these homes are located and this can lead to system failure for private systems. Vermont passed Act 181 which encourages building density in villages and that is something that the current systems in the village would not be able to support. The area being looked at for the study is the Designated Village Center and 1/4 mile outside of that designation. There are approximately 71 parcels in this area, with most being residential. The previous report looked at conserved lands, wetlands and prime agricultural lands in this area.
 - a. Design Flow Estimates:** The total estimated design flow needed is 31,080 gallons per day. The future projected flow is 35,000 gallons per day. These numbers were gathered using the number of bedrooms in the projected study area.
 - b. Summary of Wastewater Alternatives Considered:** Kevin Farrington from AES Northeast discussed the alternatives that they have considered for this study. The first is Gravity Sewer Collection and Force main to Troy Pump Station. This alternative would allow systems to have gravity collection and then use a central pump station to feed the collected materials to the Troy Pump Station that is located near the Fire Station in Troy. Troy would then pump it the rest of the way to their treatment facility and handle treatment of the material. Shelley Martin questioned what type of waste would be collected with this alternative and Kevin noted it would be all waste. Alternative 2 would be Gravity Sewer Collection and On-Site Treatment. They used a parcel just outside the Designated Village Center as an example and to base numbers on, but that is not necessarily where a system would end up. This would be like having a large leach field. They used a Geotextile Sand Filter System to estimate costs for this alternative. Due to

the high ground water in the area, they would be looking at a mound system. This would discharge to groundwater according to VT Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) standards. The third alternative would be not to install any wastewater system.

c. **Preliminary Construction Cost Estimates:** For the first alternative the estimated construction cost is \$8,007,222. The estimated cost for the second alternative is \$10,484,487. The annual operating and maintenance cost estimate for alternative 1 is \$44,516 and for alternative 2 is \$61,905. The yearly cost for alternative 2 is higher due to having an operator just for that system. Shelley Martin questioned if there was a per household calculation for each alternative. Kevin explained that they will have more numbers for that at the meeting for the 90% report along with grant funding availability. Kevin noted that the 60% report with all these figures will be available online once DEC has looked over the report. John Hamelin questioned if the numbers are estimates and Kevin noted that they are. Shelley Martin questioned if the work that Jacques Couture and Kalyani Mer did looking at each property was used in these calculations. Kevin noted that they did use that information to figure out the number of gallons per day that would be discharged. He explained that the system would need to have a connection to each property that would then lead to whichever municipal collection site is determined based on the alternative chosen. These connections would be included in the cost for building the system. Shelley Martin asked if there was any extra cost to avoid the drinking water system that is already in place in the village. Kevin noted that there is no extra cost, but there are regulations they need to follow when placing the wastewater pipes. Jennifer Grace questioned how many homes they looked at and assessed directly. Kevin noted that they assessed the majority of them, over 50. Jennifer Grace questioned what the data decides based on the homes assessed for which alternative is better. Kevin explained that the assessment also looked at record searches for wastewater permits and most of the parcels did not have wastewater permits online. He noted that whether the systems are in good or poor condition it does not affect the alternative type, as a new connection to the system would need to be built for either collection alternative. Jennifer Grace questioned if there are legitimate problems with any systems and how many systems currently meet standards and how many do not. Kevin explained that there are 4 ways to look at systems, starting with just looking at the property all the way to digging into the ground and doing more extensive searches. This study does not look at systems that extensively and they did not identify any problems or failing systems during their on-site visits. Jennifer Grace again questioned what the problems are that would lead to having a wastewater system. Kevin noted that this is about sustainability and property value not about an existing problem. Jacques Couture noted that when they walked around the properties, they were not looking for problems, but they also did not see any problems. Kalyani Mer noted that the walk around was for GIS data collection not an evaluation of the existing systems condition. The data collected was to see where existing systems exited homes and where existing tanks are located. Kevin Farrington noted that he is aware that in Montgomery they were reporting failed systems which led to a wastewater system and this is not the case here. He noted that in the next report they will look at some comparisons with Montgomery's system. He also noted that Montgomery received all the funding for the capital system via state and federal grants. He will be discussing grant funding at the next meeting. Rick Danforth questioned if only the users would be paying for the system. Kevin explained that the yearly costs would be on the system users. Jeremy Dunn noted that in a recent flood his system took a big hit with all the floodwater flowing onto his property and it is only a matter of time before flooding affects systems in the village more drastically.

Jacques Couture reiterated that this is a forward-thinking study that can be used down the road even if a system is not implemented right away. Kevin noted that this helps you look into funding for systems, you cannot look for grants without a study being done first.

Shelley Martin questioned what would happen if the first alternative was chosen and something happened to the Troy pump station; would the Westfield users be on the line for that cost. Kevin noted that if their costs go up then they could always increase user costs, and the pump station that would be located in Westfield would be up to Westfield users to take care of monetarily. Richard Degre noted that the town may have to pay an allocation for a certain number of gallons pumped to Troy each year.

Rick Danforth noted that when the water system was built property owners were given an option to join the system and he questioned if people would be required to connect to the system or given the option to connect. Kevin noted that it would be decided down the road and would be up to any sewer board or ordinance created.

Kevin asked if Lynnette Claudon had anything she would like to add to the discussion. Lynnette would like to save her comments for the 60% report and asked if there were any questions for her. Rick Danforth questioned if there is funding available now or within the next year. Lynnette noted that there are currently not any new grant opportunities available, but there are funding opportunities available right now through the Vermont Village Wastewater Initiative website.

Jennifer Grace questioned if Lynnette is the engineer on the Montgomery system and asked her to compare this study to the Montgomery system and what the cost is for the Montgomery system. Lynnette noted that she has not had a chance to look at the 60% report for Westfield but can speak on the experience in Montgomery. They started with a different process where the town identified that they needed to look at a wastewater system in their two villages. In 2019 they started a wastewater committee. They have their design complete and are almost ready for bids. The goal for the user rate in the community is to stay around 1% of the median household income in the area which is around \$400-\$500 per year. For a project to be considered viable that user rate needs to be within 2-3% of the median household income for the area. Rick Danforth questioned if they have reached this point of the study where they look at the median household income for the study area and Kevin noted that they have not. It was noted that Montgomery had been 100% funded for capital construction. Lynnette noted that they have what is called a whole funding package, they will need to pay for part of the project through a loan. The loan is supposed to stay around 1 million dollars, and the total project cost is around 16 million dollars.

John Hamelin noted that he thinks it will be around \$1,000 per year per user on the system.

Kevin noted that to close out the study they will choose an alternative and the Selectboard will be the ones deciding on that alternative. Jacques noted that the voters would still need to vote on any system, no matter what the alternative chosen to close out the study ends up being.

Shelley Martin questioned if the inflation rate was included in the number estimates. Kevin noted that they did include what costs may be through the year 2030.

5. **Schedule and Key Milestones:** Kevin noted where they are in the study and that the next meeting will be the 90% report which should be held around April of 2026. They will delve deeper into prices, funding strategies, environmental review, permitting, etc. He then noted that if it is decided upon to bring this to a public vote that will happen after the report/ study is finished.

Jennifer Grace questioned if grant funding is available and if the report should move to the 90% phase. Jacques noted that the fee for the study is covered 100% and the report can be finished all the way and will not cost the taxpayers anything. The \$125,000 for the study is fully funded, there would be no need to stop the study at this point. Jennifer Grace questioned funding for the

alternatives and grants being available to support those alternatives. Lynnette noted that most villages, after deciding to move into a preliminary design phase, will look for a fully subsidized loan or a grant source. She noted that these systems are a high priority right now for the state. She noted that the town could make a declaration using a non-binding application process to declare intent to build a system so if funds become available the town can take advantage of them.

Rick Danforth noted that the water system was set up with a negative interest rate to build the system. He feels that there will be loans that need to be taken to get this set up.

Jacques questioned if the report from AES Northeast will have a fully designed system. Kevin noted that they are not designing a system, but the designer can pick up from the work they have done on this report and use it as a schematic to design the system.

Rick Danforth questioned if the town would be responsible for the bond, not just the users. Jacques noted that he has never dealt with something like this, so he is not sure. If they can get grants that cover the construction costs, then nobody would be on the hook for them. The yearly costs would be on the users after that. Rick Danforth noted that the Westfield Fire District takes on the responsibility for the water system, he assumes the Selectboard would take responsibility for the wastewater system. Kevin noted that a sewer district would probably be set up, similar to the current Westfield Fire District. If a sewer district is set up, then members of that district would be the ones that vote on the system. It was questioned who votes on a potential system, the whole town or the users of the system. LaDonna Dunn noted that for the sake of the study the Selectboard would pick a final alternative. Kevin confirmed that was correct and the public vote would be on whether to pursue a system and to create a sewer district or not. He also noted that legal counsel should be questioned when moving forward to decide on who votes and what they are voting on. Jacques noted that it may be best to give the voters the option to decide which option they would want to vote on. Jennifer Grace explained that she is concerned about legal costs. Kevin felt that giving opinions on which alternative is preferred while the study is going on may be the best way to have a consensus on which alternative is the one most people would prefer to vote on. Rick Danforth felt the users should meet to determine which way they want to go, and it should not be up to the Selectboard. He feels that the costs should be based on how many people are in each residence. He feels that this is a process that could take years.

Jacques questioned if the water system has meters. Shelley Martin noted that there are meters but they are not used because it would cost more money to pay someone to read the water meters. Kevin noted that sewer systems are not metered, although some rely on the water meters when they are available. Some systems are set up by type of use, residential, business, etc. and they charge based on that. He can get some more information on these things for the 90% meeting.

John Hamelin questioned if Troy is willing to take the output that Westfield would produce. Jacques noted that a while back Troy invited him and Pat Sagui to a board meeting and they were reassured that they would be happy to take the output from Westfield as they have more than enough room.

Jennifer Grace questioned the unknowns beyond the 60% report. Kevin noted that they cannot figure out all the complexities that may come along, but they are trying to look into everything that may come up. He noted that they build a 30% contingency into their estimates. As they get further into the design and they become more confident of the estimates they lower their contingency percentage.

Shelley Martin noted that if the town connected with Troy, they are at the mercy of the rates that Troy sets. Mike Piper noted that you would have a contract with Troy to keep rates steady for a set number of years. Rick Danforth felt that if the costs were covered by grants, then he would rather have the system owned by Westfield and not go to Troy.

Jacques questioned at what point they should establish a committee comprised of people who would be affected by this that could look at what it entails to combine the water and sewer systems within the Fire District. He felt that some of these things may already be going on in other towns. Kevin noted that there would eventually be a sewer district. Lynnette felt it was a great idea to have a local committee involved with these projects. They have a workbook on the village wastewater initiatives page that helps committees. Shelley Martin questioned what Lynnette felt about combining the water and sewer district into one district. Lynnette noted that some communities have done this and it could be explored down the road. She noted that it could have advantages although none of the communities she has worked with have combined districts.

- a. **90% Report and Public Meeting April 2026:** Meeting to be held around April 2026.
- b. **Final Report August 2026 Public Vote TBD:** This date will be determined when it is closer to the report being finished.

6. **Public Comments and Questions:** Public comments and questions were taken throughout the meeting. Jennifer Grace had sent questions prior to the meeting and Jacques asked if her questions had been answered or if there was anything she did not feel she got an answer to. She noted that she felt they were all covered. She did feel like she would like to pull from experiences of people in Montgomery. Lynnette felt that Burke may be a good community to discuss this with as they are also a small community.

Rick Danforth felt that he could feel safer knowing the whole town is paying for it. He equated it to paying for a Road Commissioner that he sees no benefit from paying for as he lives on a state highway. Kevin noted that there are regulations around sewer districts that may limit this. Dennis Vincent thanked Rick Danforth for his insight into the water district and Jennifer Grace for her questions.

Lynnette noted that it will take some time to get a project completed, the fastest she has seen one completed is five years.

7. **Adjourn:** The meeting was adjourned at 6:30PM.

Westfield Selectboard Approval Date: 1/2/26 with 0 change(s).

X

Jacques Couture
Selectboard Chair

X Richard Degre

Richard Degre
Selectboard

X Dennis Vincent

Dennis Vincent
Selectboard

