

Summary of Town Hall Hearing

on February 14, 2019

by Roger Demler, Town Center Waters Options Committee

Sherborn Town Center / 41 N. Main Street

3 issues

Thanks to everyone who spent Valentine's Day at Town Hall and to all who are following the conversations and taking an interest in Sherborn happenings. It is complicated and many of the questions we are all wrestling with are questions that have been wrestled and remarked on going back a long long time.

What has come out of recent conversations are three linked, but somewhat separate issues to be considered.

1) What development would people support on 41 N. Main Street - given economic realities of what is viable?

2) Town Center Water and Septic situation.

3) If Town supports a Town Center Water and collective Waste Treatment system, does the Town want to explore TIF as a mechanism for financing this?

Over the years surveys have been done, forums have been held and years of "built environment" meetings dreaming visions the optimal town center have happened. A small scale market, a coffee shop gathering space has been among some of the repeated wishes.

Looking at currently what we have in town, when Heritage was first opened they needed to petition ZBA to work within BOH constraints for the ability to have a couple tables in the "coffee shop." The request was granted, however, the number of seats added to the coffee shop was constrained by the septic capacity of the Heritage. The large grassy field behind Heritage is the septic leach field, just as the baseball fields are already Pine Hill's septic leach field. The Heritage is the only bathroom facility for C&L dining patrons and bike riders and other recreational visitors to Sherborn (something Heritage has graciously allowed.)

I've attended many State agency organized workshops and meetings to help communities

use their Housing Production plans to create affordable and diverse types of housing for aging in place in a sustainable way. Each time, it comes to the cost worksheet and the land and infrastructure costs of individual septic and well systems makes small scale construction such as a Woodhaven or Leland farms impossible to do in this age.

Having infrastructure in the town center would facilitate enabling smaller scale housing projects. This preference and ability to shape is only economically possible once the infrastructure is in place.

Town citizens need to look at the water septic system question and decide if they embrace supporting a system which enables the existing business to improve (add a bathroom for patrons, expand coffee shop seating, enable more food preparation, etc.).

Next, if the support of a town center infrastructure system is there, then how to finance it. There are many examples of town-run construction projects which have gone over budget and over time due to constraints unique to municipal projects.

If the town citizens see a need for town center infrastructure, and if town citizens are interested in pursuing a public/private partnership to build the infrastructure then it must be decided how that partnership is done. TIF has been presented as a possible financing tool. A town meeting vote would be required to authorize a TIF.

Now the conundrum is in order to figure out the financial numbers for the TIF, it is necessary to have development on 41 N. Main and the other side of the track on Hunting Lane with anticipated value/income generation to support the construction of the infrastructure.

So, what will people support for 41 North Main and Hunting Lane, that is financially viable?

To decide this in a productive way, it is helpful to decide the town center infrastructure question first.

Here is some background to give you an insight:

2017 Sherborn Annual Report (page 46)

https://www.sherbornma.org/sites/sherbornma/files/uploads/final_report.pdf

Water Commission & Town Center Water Systems Options Committee

The Water Commission and the Board of Selectmen formed the town center options committee (TCOC) in May of 2014 to study the technical and financial options for adding water and/or wastewater systems for the Town Center. This supports the Planning Board,

Board of Health, Conservation and the public in understanding the possibilities for improving public drinking water safety and land use flexibility in the densely developed commercial, multi-family housing and civic center of Town. The committee received \$20,000 from Town Meeting in 2016 to fund engineering studies in support of these boards. The Town approved a contract with Bristol Engineering Advisors (Bristol) to conduct this work.

Bristol developed some cost estimates for Town Center utilities. A public well system would cost around \$4 million. A shared septic system for all of the Town Center would also cost around \$4 million but could be economically be done in phases or perhaps just the business district for around \$2 million. Next steps would be to proof test a full scale well for perhaps \$100,000. On site feasibility tests for a shared septic field would require about \$40,000.

During the year the committee worked with Bristol on costs estimates and provided detailed data on the properties in the center. We met with the Conservation Agent and Bristol in the Price Woodlands to verify that the site is practical. We met with a lawyer, Christopher Woodcock, for his insight on how towns finance utility systems and options on how the costs could be recovered. We presented a progress report to the Town and the start of the annual Town Meeting. This year we will help the Planning Board explore the many options and ambitions for the Town Center.

Town Center Neighborhoods

Many of the potential changes needed to implement community water and wastewater systems require changes in zoning and regulations that are controlled by the vote of Town Meeting. In our study we realized that improvements might best be confined to just one or a few sections of the Town Center, for example the current business district north of the railroad crossing, or the Town campus. The Town could vote to form specific small or large districts that could legally limit access to new systems. We also realized that the boundaries of the districts and system options were best determined by the ambitions of the Planning Board and the Board of Health. One of our roles is to help them understand what is possible, practical, and affordable for improved water/wastewater. Drinking Water Safety - We reviewed ten years of monthly water test results for the 12 wells in the Center that the State regulates and did not find any alarming trends. Only salt levels in some wells exceeded State guide lines and that only requires those facilities to post public notices of the salt levels. The most significant threat to drinking water here is the potential for a nearby septic system failure. Other risks include a tanker truck or railway tank car accident in the Center.

Wastewater Safety

The Charles River Watershed Association conducted a short study on sewerage the entire Center to a central sewage treatment plant with an estimated \$4 million cost. A shared

septic system method may be more economical wherein a neighborhood would retain septic tanks and pipe the combined effluent to a remote recharge area (STEP: septic tank effluent pump). The combined system would be monitored, septic tanks would be routinely pumped and the recharge area would be some distance from the existing wells. Using a STEP system would also allow expansion of land use and more capacity for all customers. We interviewed one of the nation's major suppliers of STEP system equipment, Orenco, confirming the economic advantages for small groups of users.

The Planning Board could consider these systems in targeted areas where they want to change the use profiles. Bristol is in the process of estimating the cost of such systems and what the next engineering steps that would be needed to define viable recharge sites.

Town Well Possibility

Current state regulations would not allow public water wells for new construction at any of the current state monitored well sites in Sherborn because of their proximity to septic systems, property lines and structures. The current wells are allowed to be maintained but restricted to current uses.

Water supply from the MWRA through Framingham, or from Natick is being looked into but they appear to be impractical/expensive. An Ad Hoc group in town received funding from the town to test a well in 2007 at a site in Price Woodlands Conservation land at the end of Morse Road. The yield and water quality from the well were good and should be adequate to supply at least the area from Hunting Lane to Lake Street. At that time the installed cost was estimated to be \$2 million, now \$4 million, plus the cost of each customer connection. Proof testing of this well requires long term drawdown testing with surrounding monitor wells to assess the impact on existing wells. Besides providing safe water, the system would allow fire sprinklers to be installed. Such a system would allow safe growth in civic, residential, and commercial demands.

The committee worked with the Planning Board to define a base district that would include all town buildings, churches, condos, and businesses with few individual homes. This base district would include all buildings with public access and may provide a large enough customer base to offset the initial somewhat fixed capital cost of the well and support systems. Bristol is estimating the cost of a system and the cost of a full scale proof test of the wells capacity and water quality.

Respectfully submitted,

*Roger Demler,
for the Water Commissioners & Town Center Waters Options Committee*