

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE Rural Development

Town of Waitsfield: **Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact**

AGENCY: Rural Utility Service, USDA

ACTION: Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact.

SUMMARY: The RUS has made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with respect to a request for possible financing assistance to the Town of Waitsfield for their Wastewater System project in Washington County, Vermont.

FURTHER INFORMATION: To obtain copies of the EA and FONSI, or for further information, contact: Alexander Gauthier, Community Programs Specialist, 28 Vernon Street, Suite 333, Brattleboro, VT 05301, 802.689.3034, Alexander.Gauthier@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed project consists of a village wastewater system to collect wastewater from Irasville and the Waitsfield Designated Village Center, providing primary treatment in shared neighborhood septic tanks, and pumping the wastewater effluent to a tertiary treatment and disposal system on a Town-owned site south of the village. The proposed wastewater project includes a Neighborhood STEP wastewater collection system that includes gravity sewer mains collecting to four municipal pump stations located at low points in the Service Area; a smaller neighborhood pump station to pump wastewater to the final pump station; municipal septic tanks provided prior to each pump station; a shared effluent force main connecting the pump stations to a gravity sewer line that drains to the final pump station; private STEP tanks for a small number of properties on the hill between the Village Residential District and Irasville to connect to the system; private STEP tanks for two properties located just below the final pump station; a pump station that will convey all of the effluent from the Service Area to the Munn Site treatment and disposal facility; a portable generator that can be used to power each of the municipal pump stations; a 95,040 gpd tertiary wastewater treatment facility located at the Munn Site. The installation and implementation of this plan will meet current design guidelines to improve quality and efficiency of wastewater collection, treatment and disposal and be less prone to leakage.

The proposed Project will utilize the Nationwide Programmatic Agreement Among the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Programs, National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for Sequencing Section 106 (NPA) to achieve conditional compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act for the purposes of obligating financial assistance only, and during the completion of Section 106 the agency will formally determine effects on historic properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Alternatives considered by RUS and the Town of Waitsfield include: No action; Connect remaining properties with private wells in the Irasville Commercial, Waitsfield Village Business, and Village Residential Zoning Districts to the water system; Provide increased disposal capacity at existing wastewater leachfields in well-suited soils within the Study Area; Develop community wastewater systems on one or more different sites; Clustered Community Wastewater Disposal Systems. The RUS has reviewed and approved the EA for the proposed project.

The availability of the EA for public review was announced via notice in the following newspaper: The Valley Reporter on December 12th, 2024 and December 19th, 2024. A 14-day comment period was announced in the newspaper notices. The EA was also available for public review at the USDA Rural Development office as well as digitally via email.

Based on its EA, commitments made by the Town of Waitsfield, and public comments received, RUS has concluded that the project would have no significant impact (or no impacts) to water quality, wetlands, floodplains, land use, aesthetics, transportation, or human health and safety.

The proposed project will have no adverse effect on resources listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Agency has also concluded that the proposed project is not likely to affect federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat thereof. The proposed project would not disproportionately affect minority and/or low-income populations.

No other potential significant impacts resulting from the proposed project have been identified. Therefore, RUS has determined that this FONSI fulfills its obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR §§ 1500-1508), and USDA Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970) for its action related to the project.

RUS is satisfied that the environmental impacts of the proposed project have been adequately addressed. RUS federal action would not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, and as such it will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for its action related to the proposed project.

Dated: 12/27/2024

Letters

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Health care and covered bridge

To The Editor:

As someone who grew up in the Mad River Valley, way back when, the 1940s and 50s, I was really shocked to read that the covered bridge is once again going through a new historic update. I believe it was in the 1970s when I took my complaints to the Vermont historic bridges organization and was told that the bridge must be completely redesigned, as it was, to meet with current standards. That is when the whole roof line was recreated on one side to cover the walkers' area. It has never looked right ever since! It now looks like a mall storefront instead of its original character. I painted it as it once stood in the 1940s and 50s to at least keep that character preserved. In my childhood, it looked very different. As I mourned the early death of my mother in 1946, I often hung over that walking area, looking north and downriver to my home where my mother lay dying on the North Road, Round Barn

Farm, and wished I could go home again.

Instead, I was housed at what was the Moriarty residence, next to Riford Joslin's grist mill and my grandfather Walter Moriarty's sawmill yard out behind. Oh how things have changed! (If you would like a photo of the old bridge, I could probably send you a copy of my painting.)

Also, I would like to send my kudos to Walter Carpenter's letter this week about the real need to adopt a single-payer/universal health care plan, not only for Vermont, but also at the federal level, if we are ever going to even out some of the atrocious inequities in our private for-profit health system in this country.

And, oh yes, I almost forgot, I have moved from Montpelier to Rochester, the Park House, right on Route 100, where the old-fashioned flavor of Waitsfield, as I once knew it, still exists.

MaryAlice Bisbee
Rochester

Clinic closing

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They also told us that 28% of the current patients here drive by other clinics that are closer to them. Their plan is to encourage those patients to start using those other clinics but did state that if the current providers here go to Waterbury and a patient wants to keep their current provider, they will still have that option.

We talked about the fact that the clinic here and the amount of rent paid is a small line item in their overall budget. We argued that the actual dollar savings of closing the clinic had to be minimal, but that the impact of The Valley losing this clinic (and one that residents paid for!) will be devastating. All they could say is that they understand that the decision is a hard one, but one they claim they had to make.

GMCB ORDER ISSUED 10/1/2024

They did also claim that the order from Green Mountain Care Board (GMCB) to reduce their budget was issued on 10/1/2024 which is the first day of CVMC's fiscal year, leaving them little time to adequately prepare and plan for the \$16M in cuts they were ordered to make. They claim they did look at administrative costs first and did cut \$1.2M, but that is well short of the \$16M they were ordered to cut. They did acknowledge that their plan has been developed on the

fly, but claim they had little choice in the matter.

We did talk about the fact that it does not make sense that the GMCB is so focused on patient revenues and that reducing revenues will be at all beneficial. Clearly, if CVMC and UVM are seeing more patients and sicker patients, revenues will be up. And if they are increasing revenues, and not their margins, then they are incurring higher costs to deliver this care. This should not be a problem, but with the current metrics being used by the GMCB there seems little room for movement. Anna Noonan said she has been in touch with the GMCB and that she hopes to meet with them and work on making their relationship less adversarial and more focused on serving Vermonters. While that is a good idea, it sounds like it is too little, too late for our clinic!

PEOPLE MOST IMPACTED

We tried to emphasize that the people that will likely be most impacted, those that cannot travel, those who do not have internet access, those who do not have reliable cell service, and those who do not have a real voice in what is happening here, i.e., the most marginalized in our community, will be the ones that will lose the most. Their care will deteriorate; they will likely have less preventative care and more emergency room visits.

What are we?

To The Editor:

I don't know if anybody else has noticed:

But all of our necessary services are leaving The Valley.

Two banks, a pharmacy and now our health center are not considered profitable.

Our schools are not profitable.

They're too expensive. (Billions for exterminating Palestinians are fine.)

Do you have a problem with this?

Well, I do.

We will not do anything to help our homeless, hungry neighbors.

That's too difficult.

We can't afford it.

(Billions for the extermination of Palestinians.)

We CAN afford that.

We can't afford a health center.

Do you find that odd?

Or immoral?

I laugh with tears in my eyes,

Funding genocide is affordable but a health center is not.

What are we?

Robin Lehman
Warren

This entire process has been difficult and frustrating for the board. It is hard to have a real discussion about the merits of keeping or closing this clinic when CVMC and UVM show no willingness to have that discussion.

Compounding the frustration is the fact that there seems to be no one that can effect a change. The GMCB tells us that they have no authority to delve into the specifics of what is or is not cut from a hospital's budget but that they only have the power to set limits on that budget. Our legislators similarly tell us that the Legislature doesn't get to vote on such cuts or hospital budgets. The governor's office has so far not provided any specific help other than to state that, "The Agency of Human Services will continue to press all health care stakeholders to make accurate and informed decisions."

The board will continue to push for options and continued discussions.

Health center board members include:

Don Murray, president

– Fayston

Polly Bednash, vice president

– Waitsfield

Rosemarie White, treasurer

– Warren

Steve Fried, secretary

– Waitsfield

Bill Zekas – Moretown

Danielle Hampton – Fayston

Judy Phelon – Warren

Mike Curtin – Fayston

Ted LaRock – Warren