

# On Wastewater, ‘Smart Growth’ and the Town Plan

BY THE GUILFORD CONSERVATION AND PLANNING COMMISSIONS

A few Guilford residents have expressed concern that the 2022-2030 Town Plan states that the Town will “conduct feasibility studies to expand the Algiers sewer district and establish a sewer and water district for Guilford Center and northern Weatherhead Hollow Road.” (Land Use Section).

In the process of adopting the Town Plan, the Planning Commission recognized that the focus on a “sewer district” was too narrow in scope, and should be broadened to consider other types of wastewater management systems appropriate for rural areas. It doesn’t plan to conduct a feasibility study to look at sewer expansion. The Town Plan will be modified to reflect this change in a future revision.

The consideration of water management systems in the Town Plan is in response to State statute (24 VSA section 4302): that development should be planned in such a way that it is in accordance with ‘Smart Growth’ principles. One of these principles is to concentrate growth in pre-existing, historical village centers and residential areas, rather than creating new roads and long driveways that result in forest fragmentation and loss of agricultural land. ‘Smart Growth’ depends partially on having infrastructure like water and wastewater systems in place, so evaluating current needs and planning for future growth is a central purpose of any Town Plan.

Vermont’s ‘Climate Action Plan’ seeks to minimize negative impacts of climate change, including by anticipating an influx of more “climate refugees” from

other, more vulnerable parts of the country. The state experienced a wave of new residents during the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic, affecting housing availability and affordability for locals and new residents alike. It is anticipated that these pressures will continue unabated. Guilford will be a desirable area for development due to its geographic location, natural beauty and strong community spirit.

At present, Guilford lacks tools to guide growth in a way that preserves its character. It is vulnerable to unregulated housing and industry development as we don’t have enforceable land use policies. We can only articulate a vision of how Guilford will grow in the Town Plan. Currently the sole means to regulate construction of high-rise apartments or tract housing in Guilford is Act 250 regulations, which apply to a small subset of developments. Surrounding towns in Windham County have addressed these issues. Going forward the Planning Commission will consult with the Windham Regional Commission to learn about the strategies our neighbors have used to shape growth appropriately.

Wastewater management and water system issues affect Guilford in multiple ways, both in the present and as we look ahead to potential Smart Growth developments. There are currently some limiting or failing in-ground wastewater systems in at least three areas: Algiers, Weatherhead Hollow north of the Fairgrounds, and Guilford Center. Readers might be aware of the efforts of the Fairground people to deal with wastewater at the annual Guilford Fair. An upgraded wastewater system would alleviate its ongoing problems and allow for

smaller events year-round. Across the road from the Fairground there are houses limited in size to one bedroom because of state septic system requirements. Adding an accessory dwelling unit or additional bedrooms, either of which would expand housing availability, aren’t options for those homes. Creatively exploring ways to address these hyper-local wastewater management issues could result in enhancements for homeowners, businesses and recreational facilities.

Other areas in Guilford are affected by the lack of comprehensive wastewater systems. Key-Gots Mini Storage in Algiers, based on its septic system, can only have three employees, even fewer employees if there is water used in the factory processes. There was a bank auction for much of the open land north of Algiers on Route 5. The bids came in far below expectations because the soil did not allow for residential-type septic systems. Notably the buildings that Friends of Algiers renovated or had built wouldn’t have been possible without the Algiers water and wastewater systems expansions. Similarly, the affordable housing planned for the GPI property off Partridge Road could only move forward due to the existence of appropriate wastewater and water infrastructure.

The Planning and Conservation Commissions are currently learning about a number of traditional and innovative wastewater

*Continued on next page*

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# How's Your Internet?

BY ZON EASTES

No doubt the most frequently asked question for DVFiber is: When? When can I get service? Though we cannot yet provide absolute dates, it's coming—and sooner than we had originally envisioned!

## What's important to keep in mind as DVFiber moves forward?

- DVFiber wants service as quickly as you do! DVFiber, like all eight of its colleague CUDs, is a new venture. DVFiber is still learning what's involved in planning and predicting;
- Internet infrastructure funds are coming much sooner than originally expected, and the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB), the state's designated oversight board, is working quickly to get them out to the CUDs. VCBB is also the state's decision maker for disbursing American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds intended for Vermont's CUDs;
- DVFiber is working with an operations business partner, Great Works Internet (GWI). The relationship frame by which the two organizations will function was signed in May. Construction can begin in earnest and in fact, will begin in the fourth quarter of this year in some parts of the CUD;
- The far western portion of Guilford (west of Hinesburg Road) is now part of the first-round construction effort. One of DVFiber's central tenets is to reach first toward those towns with little or no service. Halifax is one



such town, and—like in this case—the engineering calls for some overlaps into nearby communities;

- Though COVID has released a once-in-a-generation funding opportunity for the development of Internet systems, COVID has also slowed some aspects of construction and bulk buying (for fiber cable, say) works in some cases, but there are notable interruptions;
- Don't forget that this effort to secure reliable, affordable Internet in Guilford and across the entire 24-town district is largely a volunteer effort. Yes, we are working with a solid business partner, but much of the governing, policy, design, and communication work remains in the hands of about 50 volunteers.

## Other news

With our partner Great Works Internet (GWI), DVFiber has recently completed the network's high-level design. This design will organize construction and

readiness across the 24-town district. We also met with Green Mountain Power (GMP) to schedule make-ready pole and conduit work.

At its annual meeting in May, the DVFiber governing board elected Steven John of Marlboro as chair and Ann Manwaring of Wilmington as vice-chair. Zon Eastes, Guilford's representative to DVFiber, was elected to the Executive Committee, as were David Cherry of Windham, Phil Edelstein of Whitingham, Munson Hicks of Vernon, and Ellen Seidman of Londonderry. Additionally, customer connection and customer accessibility and affordability policies were approved by DVFiber's governing board.

DVFiber also has successfully contracted with Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) for grants management and administrative support.

## Learn more and get involved

Intrigued? To learn more, visit our website at [DVFiber.net](http://DVFiber.net). Sign up for our newsletter to stay informed.

We are always looking for people to contribute and serve on the district's three committees (Communications, Finance and Audit, and Operations). There is an enormous amount of work ahead to secure broadband for the region and win customers to DVFiber. If you would like to get involved, please contact Zon Eastes at 802.-380.-9550 or at: [zon.eastes@dvfiber.net](mailto:zon.eastes@dvfiber.net)

## On Wastewater, continued

management solutions, including community septic systems, methane digesters

and plant-based recycling systems among others. There are State grants available to support towns in addressing wastewater

needs, so this is an exciting time to be having the conversation. Stay tuned!



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