

Municipal Planning Grant Application

1.a. Project title: Prioritizing Uses of Limited Wastewater Disposal Capacity in West Charlotte Village

1.b. What does the project accomplish: The project will prioritize the allocation of capacity in a proposed municipal wastewater system within the village, determine the preferred method of financing construction of the system, determine user rates, and develop a draft ordinance.

2. Why is the project important? The project will allow the town to take a critical step towards allowing commercial and higher density residential development within the West Charlotte village. Since the early 1990's, the West Charlotte village has been identified as the "town center." The town hall, library and senior center were constructed within the village, and the post office and fire station were reconstructed within the village in the same timeframe. Several iterations of the Town Plan have indicated that the West Charlotte village should have more commercial and residential development, which would increase the vibrancy of the village. The lack of either a municipal wastewater system or a municipal water system is the primary limiting factor to such development.

In the year 2000 the town acquired a property adjacent to the village (the "Burns property") which has soils that are well suited for wastewater disposal. The town developed a wastewater disposal system that currently serves three town-owned buildings (town hall, library, & senior center) and the fire station. This system has the ability to be expanded—potentially to the capacity limit allowed under the small-scale wastewater disposal program (6,499 gallons per day), or potentially to an even great capacity under the indirect discharge permit program. The town also acquired some easements for wastewater disposal on other parcels within or relatively close to the village, which could provide additional capacity to support village development, potentially in a phased build-out.

In 2010, following a discussion at Town Meeting, the Selectboard appointed a committee to examine the potential for providing wastewater disposal capacity to commercial and residential uses within the West Charlotte village by expanding the existing system on the Burns property and potentially creating disposal systems where the town holds wastewater disposal easements. The committee (composed of Charlotte residents) included a municipal planner, a high level staff person at the Agency of Natural Resources, and a professional engineer. The report issued by this committee is attached to this application.

The report preliminarily analyzes and provides recommendations regarding available capacity, allocation of the capacity, the service area, construction costs, and user fees. The report indicates that expansion of the existing system on the Burns property to serve new commercial and residential uses is definitely feasible—however, there are questions that remain, particularly since the wastewater disposal capacity is fairly limited, such as: to what uses does the town want to allocate this limited capacity? what portion of the village should be included

in the service area? how will the expansion of the wastewater disposal system be financed? and what will be the ultimate cost to users? The purpose of the grant application is to assist the town with finding the answers to these questions.

The Planning Commission has been working on an update of the Town Plan since 2011. The existing Town Plan was re-adopted in 2013 in order to allow the Planning Commission more time with the update. The Planning Commission is getting close to holding a public hearing on the proposed Town Plan.

3. How does the project meet the competitive criteria?

- a) The 2013 Town Plan (which is the 2008 Town Plan, readopted) includes the following: Section 4.4.3 states: "Charlotte's planning goals and policies support the concentration of growth in or near the existing settlements of East and West Villages, although new rural hamlets and clustered developments are also allowed in certain situations."

"The number-one element of the vision for the Town expressed by this (2002) plan is that the Town is committed "to reinforc(ing) historic settlement patterns by focusing growth in village centers." Every plan since 1990 has stated that "The villages of East and West Charlotte will provide for housing, commercial services, and public buildings and facilities. These areas were selected based on their central location, the presence of existing development at a higher density than the remainder of Town, the presence of and potential for commercial services, the availability of land for additional development, and the presence of soils with slight limitations for development."

Every Town Plan since 1990 has supported compact patterns of development that place more people within close proximity to services, public transportation and each other to reduce the need for automobile travel and to create a center for community activity. Additionally, the Town needs to provide for a variety of housing opportunities, especially affordable family and senior housing, in order to maintain economic and age diversity in the population here. Furthermore, the villages are the most appropriate locations for such housing, particularly for seniors, because of the proximity to existing and prospective services."

Section 4.6.2 states: "The Selectboard is currently reviewing the wastewater disposal master plan, and is considering how to plan for the best use of the septic capacity to further the goals of the village."

Section 5.1.1. Policy 3 states: "Charlotte supports a land use plan which fosters a pattern of small, concentrated settlements in the village and hamlet areas, along with the preservation of agriculture and other areas of high public value. The Town will attempt to direct the majority of future growth into village areas and existing and new hamlets and clustered developments, so as to reinforce the historic pattern of compact settlements surrounded by rural, open land."

Section 5.1.1. Policy 5 states: “Non-agricultural commercial services will primarily be located within or near the village areas. Locations for light industrial development will be provided in the Commercial/Light Industrial District within the West Charlotte Village. Home occupations are encouraged by the Town. Agriculturally related businesses may be allowed in conjunction with active farms.”

Section 5.1.2. Policy 8 states: “Village areas will contain a mixture of uses and activities. The West Charlotte Village will continue to be the town center and will provide for public facilities, commercial services for residents; and housing.”

Section 5.1.2. Policy 9 states: “The purpose of the Village Commercial District is to offer residential uses and small scale retail, personal service and hospitality services, office space, public buildings and public facilities.”

Section 5.3.1. Policy 3 states: “Commercial development is encouraged in the West Charlotte and East Charlotte village areas, in accordance with other policies and strategies of the Town Plan.”

Section 5.3.2. Strategy 1 states: “Essential commercial services which meet Charlotte’s residents such as a small grocery store, hardware store, pharmacy, and/or cafe/restaurant will be encouraged to locate within the existing village areas with a particular emphasis on the West Village/ Town Center area.”

Section 5.3.2. Strategy 4 states: “Within the next two years, the Town should conduct a groundwater and wastewater capacity study for the Village and Commercial Districts and analyze the need for and feasibility of a local community water and wastewater system to serve these areas. If feasible, a community system would allow for greater densities in the Village areas and help to achieve the Town’s goal of focusing growth in existing compact settlements.”

Section 5.3.2. Strategy 5 states: “A wastewater allocation plan for the West Charlotte village should be developed. The plan would provide some allocation for failing residential systems, some allocation for new commercial and residential uses, and some allocation that is not committed.”

Section 5.8.3. Strategy 2 states: “Plan for the best use of the wastewater capacity on the Burns property for existing and new uses in the West Charlotte village area.”

- b) Citizen participation will be a large and significant component of the process of prioritizing the allocation of wastewater disposal capacity. This will build on past wastewater planning that included surveying all property owners within the potential service area. The proposed process will utilize multiple strategies, including: personal contact of property owners within the potential service area; social media postings to elicit broader public input; local newspaper articles to educate and publicize the planning process; and several public meetings to both educate and receive feedback from the public and potential users.