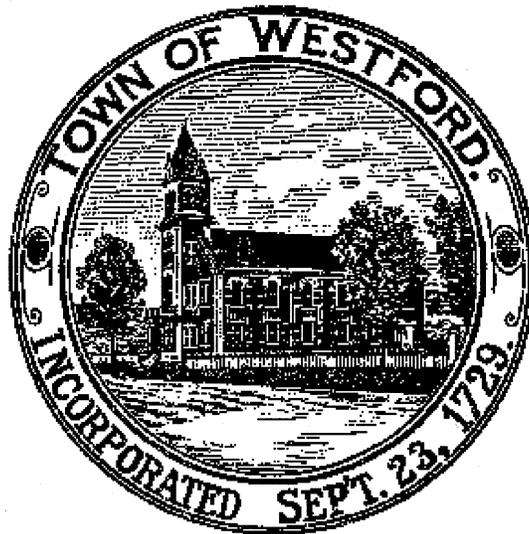


Report on House Numbering and Street Naming in Westford, MA



December 2008

Report compiled by John Mangiaratti, GIS Coordinator in collaboration with Fred Palmer, Planning Board; Norman Khumalo, Assistant Town Manager, Joe Targ, Fire Department; Tim Whitcomb, Police Department; Robin Fullford, Water Department; Kaari Tari, Town Clerk; Nancy Lima and Matt Hakala, Building Department; Richard Barrett, Highway Department; Paul Plouffe, Assessor; and Lucy Smith, School Department

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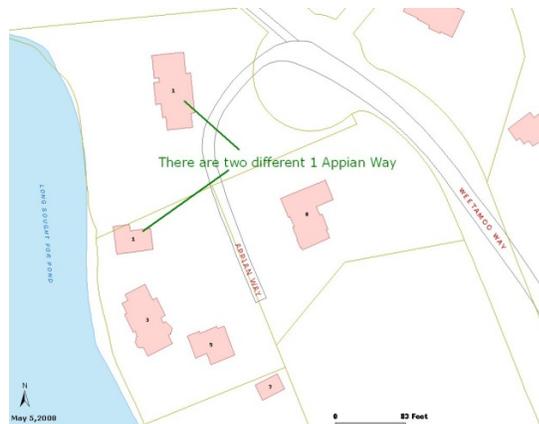
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Executive Summary

The Town of Westford can improve public safety and increase government efficiency by modifying its house numbering and street naming regulations. Inconsistent street names and missing or incorrect house numbers create delays in emergency responses. The policies used to name streets and assign house numbers have created challenges in the permitting and record keeping process. This report summarizes the key issues and offers recommendations that would improve public safety and reduce inefficiencies in permitting and recordkeeping.



Images of duplicate addresses at 303 Littleton Road and 1 Appian Way

Overview

The initial goal of this project was to create a master address database using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). A master address database contains an exact coordinate location for every known address, including condominium units and secondary buildings. The database is stored on a central server and accessed by all departments. The Town Clerk, Permitting Department, Board of Health, Tax Collector, Highway Department, Water Department and Assessing Department all use software that relies on accurate address data. It is inefficient to have each department use staff resources to maintain the addresses separately. If the individual applications all were integrated with a master address database this would ensure that address data is current and consistent throughout the town. This database was created in 2007 but it has not been fully implemented yet because of issues with addresses that were discovered during the project.

A field survey conducted during the development of this database revealed many issues with house numbering. These concerns were discussed by a group of town officials at regular meetings and in an online forum. This group examined different ways to resolve house numbering and street naming issues in Westford. The topics discussed by the group are shown below in the Summary of House Numbering Issues and the Summary of Street Naming issues sections of this report.

The addressing issues were presented to the Planning Board in August of 2007. The Planning Board supported the idea of evaluating current addressing policies and assigned a liaison, Fred Palmer to communicate with the group of town officials. The town officials represent the following departments: Assessing Department, Building Department, Fire Department, GIS Department, Highway Department, Permitting Department, Planning Department, Police Department, Town Clerk, School Department, and the Water Department. Also involved in this effort were representatives from Northern Middlesex Council of Government (NMCOG), and The Westford Women's Club. The Women's club collaborated with Town officials to administer a free house number giveaway which involved volunteers posting new larger, reflective house numbers on 46 houses where seniors live.

House Numbering

The Town of Westford is leaving some of its most vulnerable residents at risk. Due to confusing and incorrect house numbering a considerable number of residences are difficult to find during emergency response situations. This is a critical problem because in an emergency response, time wasted looking for an address, can be the difference between life and death for residents. Chapter 68 in the General Town Bylaws was amended in 2002 to comply with E911 standards but it falls short of requiring that house numbers are appropriately placed to assist public safety.

General Bylaws of the Town of Westford, Massachusetts

September 22, 2008

Chapter 68: Numbering of Buildings

[Adopted 3-18-61 Adj. ATM Art. 4. Amendments noted where applicable.]

§ 68.1. Authority to determine and designate numbers. [5-11-2002 ATM Art. 30]

The Board of Selectmen may determine and designate numbers for all buildings abutting upon or adjacent to public ways and so shall determine and designate numbers for these buildings.

§ 68.2. Compliance required. [5-11-2002 ATM Art. 30]

No person shall refuse or neglect to affix to any building owned by him/her the street number designated by the Board of Selectmen, nor shall any person affix or suffer to remain on any building owned or occupied by him/her a street number other than the one designated by the Selectmen.

§ 68.3. Size and placement of numbers. [5-11-2002 ATM Art. 30]

All numbers must be at least 2 inches in height and must be placed that they are visible from the street.

§ 68.4. Violations and penalties [5-11-2002 ATM Art. 30]

Any person or entity who violates this chapter shall be liable to the following fines for each day the violation continues:

For the first and each subsequent offense: \$25

The current house numbering bylaw shown above gives the Board of Selectmen the authority to determine and designate house numbers. The Board of Selectmen also have the authority to issue citations to those who violate the bylaw. In practice there has not been any occasion where fines have been issued and enforcement has been very challenging. Currently, the house numbers are assigned by the Building Commissioner and then have to be approved by the Police Department and Fire Department before being issued. The Fire Department requires a house number to be posted appropriately before it

will approve a certificate of occupancy. However, there is not an effective enforcement mechanism for existing dwellings.

Greater enforcement of house numbering regulations will make the community safer by improving response times of emergency service providers. To enable this enforcement, the Town needs to revise the bylaws and also define clear guidelines for house numbering. The recommended bylaw amendments are shown in Appendix A. In addition to this proposed bylaw, the Planning Board may be willing to consider a proposal to modify its Subdivision Rules and Regulations. The proposed modifications to these regulations are shown in Appendix B.

Summary of House Numbering Issues

- 1 The sign posting requirement and enforcement language in Chapter 68 are inadequate.
- 2 There are private ways that should have different numbers than the adjacent public ways. (ie: Juniper Lane, Moore Place)
- 3 There are duplicate addresses. (ie: 303 Littleton Rd)
- 4 There are house numbers that are not in sequential order (114 Dunstable Rd)
- 5 There are streets that are numbered backwards (Jefferson Road)
- 6 There are common driveways with no signage indicating which houses they provide access to. (ie: 39 Beaver Brook Road)
- 7 There are houses that have street number for an adjacent street but should have a house number for their actual street. (ie: 158 Groton Rd, 18 Tallard Rd, 2 Long Rd)
- 8 Inadequate signage for residences –example of incident on Cold Spring Rd where time was lost due to improper signage.
- 9 There is inconsistent numbering of units within multi properties. (ie: 1 Lan Dr, 65 Tadmuck)
- 10 There are house numbers that are very difficult to locate (158 Groton, 18 Tallard, 66 Keyes)
- 11 There are inlaw apartments without house numbers posted.

Street Naming

In Westford there are many streets that are duplicated with the same name but a different street type. For example there is a Coolidge Avenue and a Coolidge Street. There is also an Elm Street and an Elm Road as well numerous other examples listed in the summary below. Duplicate names can cause confusion for emergency responses and also can cause problems with household deliveries and out of town visitors. The Planning Board plays a critical role in ensuring that streets are named properly. Currently the written guidelines for Planning Board applicants do not provide clear instructions or restrictions for proposed names.

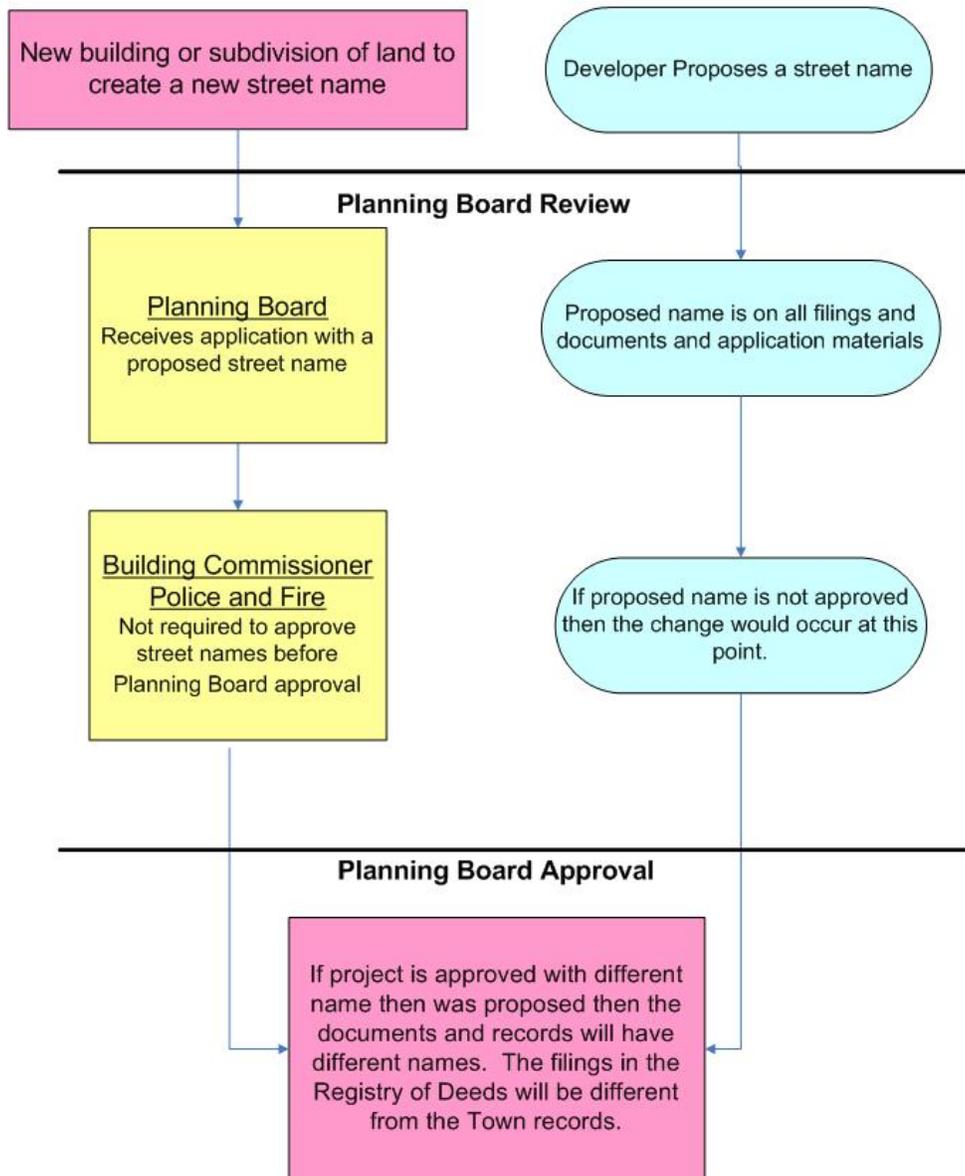
In the past, street names may not have been a significant part of the Planning Board application process. Today, street names are a critical issue because they are used to index the records in the town databases and the Northern Middlesex Registry of Deeds. Digital scanning and database technology allow the Town and the Registry to immediately index plans and documents. There is no longer a significant delay between when documents are submitted and when they are permanently filed and indexed.

The absence of street naming guidelines allows developers to submit applications with street names that will be deemed unacceptable because of their potential impacts on public safety or confusion they may cause in record keeping. When an application is submitted with an unacceptable name, it will be recorded and filed before the applicant is required to change the name. The diagram on page 8 shows the existing system for street naming in the Planning Board application process.

Summary of Street Naming Issues

- 1 The Town does not have clear guidelines for the naming of streets or ways.
- 2 There are duplicate street names. (ie: Elm, Fletcher, Lincoln, Maple, Nutting, Oak, Pine, Pond, Sawmill)
- 3 The Town does not have a system to keep track of names for private streets and common driveways.
- 4 There are streets with the same name that do not connect. (see images below of Jefferson Rd and Elliot Rd)
- 5 There are driveways that have unofficial names posted.

Existing Process To Name a Street



Revised 11-26-08

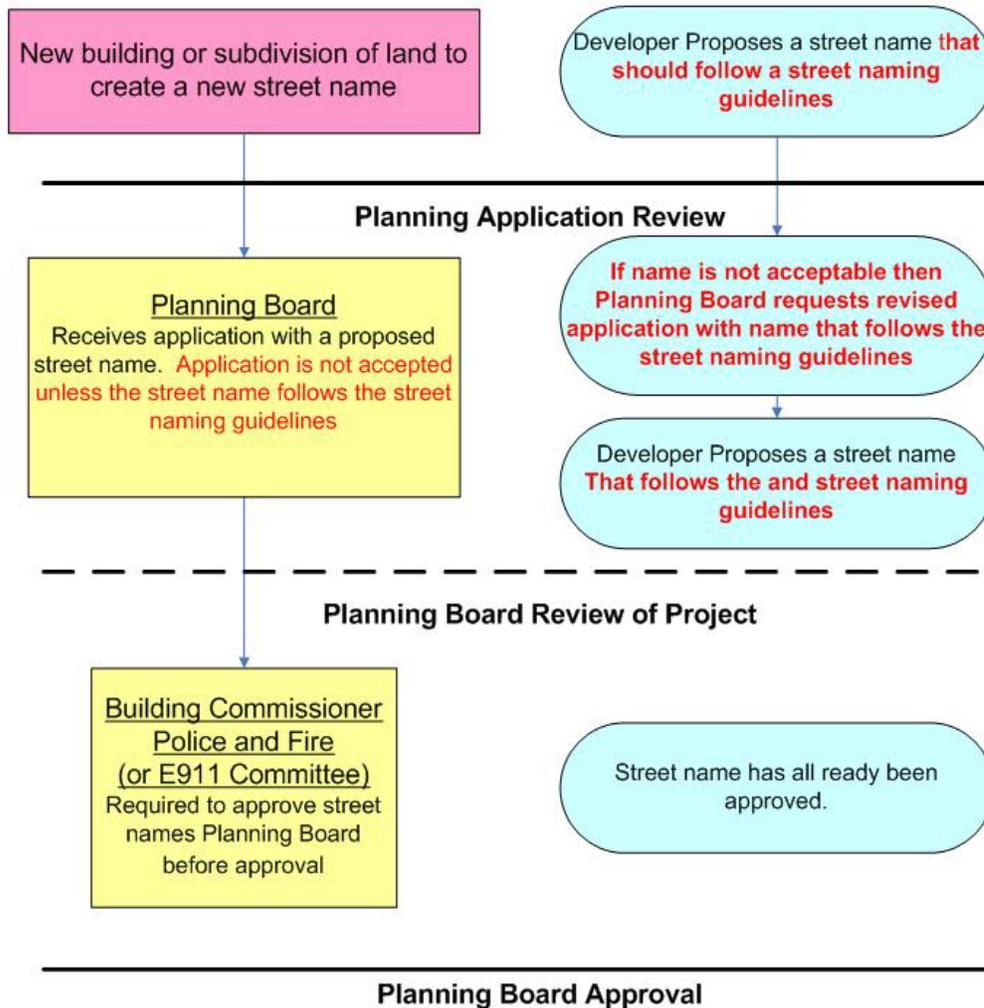
The left side of the diagram shows the phases in the application process. The right side shows the way that street names are handled at each phase of the process.

Recommendations

1. The Town should start a public outreach campaign to encourage residents to improve their house number signage for safety reasons.
2. The Town should modify the house numbering and street naming regulations in Chapter 68 of the General Town Bylaws. (see Appendix A)
3. The Town should establish internal policies on use of address information in record keeping and permitting.
4. The Planning Board should modify its application process and the Subdivision Rules and Regulations to include mandatory street naming criteria and require approval of street names and house numbers earlier in the review process. (see Appendix B) The diagram below shows proposed changes to how street names are handled in the Planning Board application process.
5. The Town should create an official body to oversee house numbering and street naming called the E911 Committee. (see Appendix C) There was an official House Numbering Committee in Westford from 1970- 1979.
6. The Town should conduct a field verification survey to classify each property based on compliance to the amended house numbering bylaw.
7. The Town should post a sign on every officially named public and private street and prohibit any posting of street signs without permission.
8. The Town should officially change the names of streets that are considered hazardous to public safety (as determined by the E911 Committee).
9. Designate an official address for every vacant and land locked property including parks, forests, and undevelopable lands.

The diagram below shows the proposed system for street naming in the Planning Board application process.

Proposed Process To Name a Street



Action Plan

1. Public outreach

- A. Develop a website with images and other information about addressing. Show links to articles about addressing problems and other towns efforts to promote addressing. This website should be linked with the town homepage, Fire, Police, Council on Aging, GIS, and Town Clerk, Planning homepages.

- B. Develop a series of publications for the issues that are attention grabbing and provide contact info and references to the website.
 - i. Create a flyer to insert in town census and tax bill and water bill mailings.
 - ii. Write a press release for the local newspapers.
 - iii. Prepare a poster that can be posted at community bulletin boards and in hardware stores.
 - iv. Produce a TV show for Westford CAT.

2. Propose bylaw change at Town Meeting

- A. Discuss the bylaw change with the Board of Selectmen and Bylaw Review Committee.
- B. With the support of Public Safety, Planning Board and Board of Selectmen, present these proposed changes to Chapter 68 of the General Town Bylaws.
- C. Officially create the E911 committee.

3. Allow a grace period for compliance to new bylaw before enforcement

- A. Encourage residents to display numbers
 - i. Board of Selectmen, Town Manager and E911 Committee could issue an official letter encouraging residents to make sure their house number meets safety standards.

Appendix A

Changes to the Chapter 68

CURRENT BYLAW

General Bylaws of the Town of Westford, Massachusetts

September 22, 2008

Chapter 68: Numbering of Buildings

[Adopted 3-18-61 Adj. ATM Art. 4. Amendments noted where applicable.]

§ 68.1. Authority to determine and designate numbers. [5-11-2002 ATM Art. 30]

The Board of Selectmen may determine and designate numbers for all buildings abutting upon or adjacent to public ways and so shall determine and designate numbers for these buildings.

§ 68.2. Compliance required. [5-11-2002 ATM Art. 30]

No person shall refuse or neglect to affix to any building owned by him/her the street number designated by the Board of Selectmen, nor shall any person affix or suffer to remain on any building owned or occupied by him/her a street number other than the one designated by the Selectmen.

§ 68.3. Size and placement of numbers. [5-11-2002 ATM Art. 30]

All numbers must be at least 2 inches in height and must be placed that they are visible from the street.

§ 68.4. Violations and penalties [5-11-2002 ATM Art. 30]

Any person or entity who violates this chapter shall be liable to the following fines for each day the violation continues:.

For the first and each subsequent offense: \$25

PROPOSED BYLAW FOR HOUSE NUMBERING

Chapter 68: Numbering of Buildings

§ 68.1. Address numbers to be displayed.

Every building in the Town of Westford, including, but not limited to, dwellings, apartment buildings, condominiums, and business establishments shall have affixed thereto a number representing the address of such building. Said number shall be situated on the building or appurtenant land so that, it is visible from the nearest street or road providing vehicular access to such building.

§ 68.2 Unnamed Streets and Common Driveways.

Owner of property accessed by unnamed street or common driveway shall have a sign posted at the beginning and at each branching of driveway to designate access to each property.

§ 68.3. Authority to determine and designate numbers.

The E911 Committee shall determine and designate numbers for all buildings abutting upon or adjacent to any private or public ways in the Town of Westford. To the extent possible, even numbers shall be assigned to one side of a street and odd numbers shall be assigned to the other side and an adequate interval between numbers shall be reserved for future development.

§ 68.4. Compliance required.

No person shall refuse or neglect to affix to any building owned by him/her the street number designated by the E911 Committee, nor shall any person affix or suffer to remain on any building owned or occupied by him/her a street number other than the one designated by the Committee.

§ 68.5 . Size and placement of numbers.

All numbers must be at least 3 inches in height and must be placed in approved locations that are visible from the street. All signs must meet the Town of Westford and Commonwealth of Massachusetts regulations.

§ 68.6. Notification of violations.

Owners who are found to be in violation will receive a written notice of non-compliance and ordered to comply within 30 days. Penalties for violations will be assessed if owners fail to comply within 90 days of written notice.

§ 68.7. Violations and penalties

The Building Commissioner, Fire Chief, and Police Chief shall have authority to enforce this By-Law. Any person or entity who violates this chapter shall be subject to a fine of \$25 for each day the violation continues.

PROPOSED BYLAW FOR STREET NAMING

Chapter ____ STREET NAMING

- All new streets and roadways of every nature must be approved by the E911 Committee.
- Any public and private ways that serves more than two separately owned, occupied structures are required to be named.
- Names shall not be duplicated. Once a name has been used as the first part of a street name, it shall not be used again by changing the second part of the name with another designation such as avenue, way, drive, boulevard, circle, road, etc. A name shall not be used that sounds similar another existing street name.
- The designation EXT or EXTENSION can not be used as part of the official street name.

Appendix B

Proposed Changes to Subdivision Rules and Regulations

The proposed new language is shown in red.

Changes to Subdivision Rules Sec 218-9 B Contents of Plan (Page 9)

B. Contents of plan.

(15) Proposed street name that follows the guidelines for street naming provided by the Board and General Town Bylaws

Changes to Subdivision Rules Sec 218-11 J (2) (Page 20)

J. Certificate of approval.

(2) Final approval of the definitive plan does not constitute the laying out or acceptance by the Town of streets within a subdivision. The applicant shall furnish the Planning Board a street plan or plans, as the case may be, at a scale of one (1) inch equals eight hundred (800) feet, suitable for recording and in a form acceptable to the Board and the Town Counsel and showing approved street names, address numbers, boundaries, and other such data as is necessary for the Town to properly lay out and accept the street or streets shown thereon.

Changes to Subdivision Rules Sec 218 -13 G Street Signs (Page 33)

Section 218-13. Specific Design Requirements

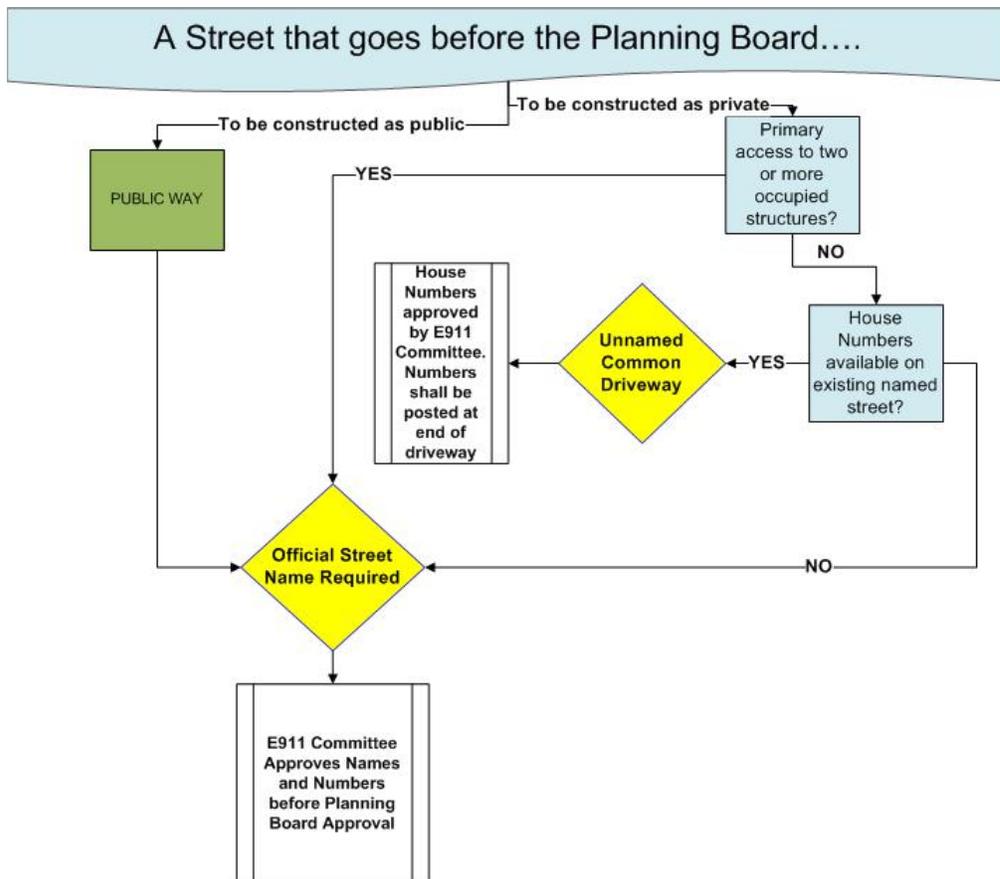
G. Street name signs. Developers shall erect a street name sign at each street intersection prior to any lots being released within the new subdivision. Street name signs shall be erected at the inside curb edge and have the street name on each side of the sign so it can be visible from either approach. [Amended 7-10-00] All named private roads and common driveways shall have the letters "Private" on both sides of the sign to indicate it is not a public road.

Proposed Addition to the General Conditions used in Decisions

General Conditions:

- a) House number signs must be posted above ground to avoid being covered by snow in the winter.
- b) In cases where more than one lot shares a common or shared driveway, a sign shall be posted at the street end of the driveway on the same side of the street in such a way as to easily be seen by emergency vehicles approaching from either direction. This sign shall designate the range of numbers for which the driveway serves. This sign should include the full set of numbers in a way easily seen from emergency vehicles. The numbers shall not be less than three (3) inches in height. Each driveway branching off of the common or shared driveway, and all subsequent branching, must have additional sign(s), dimensioned and visible as outlined above, at that immediate junction indicating which number(s) are served by that driveway.

Proposed Policy for Naming of Public and Private Ways



Appendix C

Proposed E911 Committee Responsibilities

1. Publish annually an official street list that includes “official” names of private streets in the Annual Report.
2. Actively enforce house numbering bylaws to the extent possible and issue citations where appropriate
3. Adapt specific house numbering requirements and policies that further define the requirements that are generally covered in the bylaws. This would include the creation of a document called Street Naming and House Numbering Guide Applications.
4. Develop an official policy and procedure for address changes and requests.
5. Designate an official address for every vacant and land locked property including parks, forests, municipal water facilities, and undevelopable lands.
6. Develop a registration process for private street names.

Appendix D

Review of Town Documents

This is a review of the different terms used in official Town documents to refer to streets. The purpose of this review is to highlight the inconsistencies in the terminology and provide information that can be used to improve the documents.

In the Annual Town Reports:

According to a review of Annual Town Reports, Westford had a House Numbering Committee until 1991. There was a report from the House Numbering Committee chaired by Norman Day in 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978. There were reports from Chairman Norman K. Nesmith in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982. Finally there were reports from Austin Fitzsimmons as Chairman in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987. The last report was from 1991 with Leo Daley, Geo. Rogers, Ray Peachey listed as members. It is not clear why the House Numbering Committee was discontinued.

The General Town Bylaws, Zoning Bylaws and the Planning Board Regulations define certain terms that apply to the proposed address bylaw. You will see below that there is no clear definition of private street in any of these documents. Also, the official definition of driveway does not work in Westford given the large number of driveways that are off private roads (not off public ways as defined).

In the General Town Bylaws:

Public way shall mean the entire width between the lines of every way publicly maintained when any part thereof is open to the use of the public for purposes of vehicular travel and shall include the entire width of any sidewalk within the lines of such way. In the case of ways established by prescription or concerning which no official layout exist, the edges of the surface of the traveled way shall be deemed to be the lines of such public way.

Driveway shall mean a privately owned access to and from a public way.

Through way shall mean any way designated as such by the Department of Public Works or the Board of Selectmen, as authorized under section 9 of chapter 89 of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended.

In the Zoning Bylaws:

Common Driveway: A driveway providing access to two (2) or more separate lots, over which vehicular access may be provided to said lots. "Common driveways" serving two (2) or more lots shall be built as per the standards for new roadway construction as outlined in the Planning Board's Rules and Regulations.

Thoroughfare: A street open at both ends, affording an unobstructed exit at each end into another street.

In the Subdivision Rules and Regulations:

STREET — A public way or a way having, in the opinion of the Planning Board, sufficient width, suitable grades and adequate construction to provide for the proposed use of the land abutting thereon or served thereby (major, secondary and minor streets are defined in Article V of these regulations).

[1] **Major street:** a street, which is being used or will be used as a thoroughfare between different portions of the Town.

[2] **Secondary street:** a street intercepting several minor streets and which may carry traffic from such minor streets to a major street or community facility, including the principal access/ circulation streets of a residential subdivision and all streets of a business or industrial subdivision.

[3] **Minor street:** a street used to provide access to abutting lots and which is not intended for use by through traffic.

[4] **Private street:** an otherwise minor street with various standards waived and thus not able to be accepted by the Town. **[Added 9-18-00]**

Appendix E

Massachusetts Comparable Communities

Needham, MA	http://www.wickedlocal.com/needham/archive/x853831037
Concord, MA	http://www.concordnet.org/Pages/ConcordMA_Bylaws/house
Grafton, MA	http://www.town.grafton.ma.us/Public_Documents/GraftonMA_Admin/General%20Town%20By-Laws/Article%2018.pdf
Sheffield, MA	http://www.sheffieldma.gov/Pages/SheffieldMA_Fire/House_Numbering_By_Law
West Boylson, MA	http://www.westboylston.com/Pages/WBoylstonMA_Bylaws/gen_article26
Bolton, MA	http://www.townofbolton.com/Pages/BoltonMA_BBoard/I004F50B9