

Thetford Planning Commission
Minutes – Meeting March 20th, 2007

Present: Liora Alschuler, Hayden Brownell, Heather Carlos, Dennis A. Donahue, Lori Howard, Wayne Parks (Chair)

Absent: Stuart Blood, Donn E. Downey, Rick Howard,

Guests: John Bacon (SB), Chris Sargent (TRORC), Tim Taylor (DRB)

7:26 Meeting Called to Order

7:27 Public Comment: None

7:28 Review of Prior Minutes: the minutes were adopted as amended, with one abstention.

7:36 Town Plan - Report on Selectboard 2nd Hearing: LA reported on the SB hearing of Monday, March 19th, at which the Town Plan was passed. She mentioned the concern expressed by those present about restrictions on steep driveways (with slopes of 25% or more); this issue will have to be considered carefully by the PC.

7:45 Zoning: C. Sargent of TRORC presented his most recent updates to the draft bylaws and distributed a document titled: “Thetford Zoning Ordinance Draft Chapters: Articles II & IV.” He proposed that the detailed description of the Historic Preservation Area Overlay in Article II be deleted. An extensive discussion ensued on the relative reliability of maps as opposed to written specifications. He noted that functionally the PC has “an official district map,” and that while no map can be 100% up-to-date and accurate, the town map can be accurate enough for zoning purposes. In response to questions, he acknowledged that public dissatisfaction with the map is always a possibility. The PC could include a statement in the bylaws that the zoning administrator’s delineation of zones stands, based on the map. TRORC can help the PC update the official maps periodically. In CS’s opinion, a map is easier to read and more accessible than a written description of a zone. He noted that by law zoning maps should always be available at the Town Clerk’s office; when the zoning is completed, TRORC can supply appropriate maps.

Further discussion followed on the distinction between zone delineations and parcel boundaries. CS said that parcel boundaries shouldn’t be equivalent to zoning boundaries because property lines are fluid. HB mentioned that any such fluctuation probably wouldn’t be significant and suggested that zoning follow property boundaries. CS acknowledged that the current lines are arbitrary but said that they are arrived at through public input and reflect the town’s wishes. A fluctuating line would be very difficult to administer. DAD expressed concern about the problem of parcels divided between two different zones. HB suggested that, rather than be plotted on a map, a zone could be defined as a list of parcels; by this definition no maps would be necessary. WP asked how that might work in the event of annexation or adjustment of property lines. HB said that a solution might be to add the zone code onto a parcel number, so that any particular parcel would always remain in the same zone. LA noted the attractiveness of the proposal; however, the definition of an overlay is that it “transcends the zone.” The logic of overlays is that they follow geographical or commercial features, etc., rather than parcel boundaries. She mentioned scenarios where dividing a parcel across two zones might be

desirable. CS noted that there's no precedent for zoning by parcel lines rather than maps; such an undertaking would be "hugely difficult." Also, accessing parcel information would be less convenient for property owners than referral to a map. DAD expressed doubts that using a map is easier, especially where the zone boundary crosses properties. CS acknowledged that professional measurement might be necessary to solve potential problems. He noted Vermont's cutting-edge efforts to produce accurate GIS data. HC recommended cutting the overlay description and attaching it to the map. DAD noted that to be reliable, the data would have to be cross-checked first. CS said that if a written description is provided for one zone, it would be recommended (but not required) to provide one for the other zones as well.

Regarding Section 240 (Article II), CS recommended that a Table of Permitted Uses be appended to the text description for each zone. WP asked if there were any objections to this proposal. LA noted that the table and text would have to match exactly. CS affirmed that this is feasible. LA suggested that such a step be left until the end of the drafting process. This was agreed.

Regarding Section 380 (Mobile Home Parks - Article IV), CS asked if the minimum lot size specifications adopted from Bethel model were acceptable. He clarified that standard rural residential bylaws don't apply to mobile home parks, so the specifications can be adjusted. A discussion followed as to whether minimum plot sizes were necessary so long as total park density is limited. CS noted that they might be, to avoid the park owner crowding mobile homes together; for instance, if a large part of the park is wetland, owners might have an incentive to crowd people into the remainder of site. LA noted that in some cases clustering might be desirable and that "scattering" shouldn't be enforced with disregard for the park's geographical configuration. The issue is how to find language ensuring flexibility and appropriateness. WP and HC concurred that the aesthetics of the entire park should be considered, not necessarily each individual site. HC expressed a preference for more vague language to allow various configurations; she requested that CS provide other examples in addition to the Bethel model. J. Bacon suggested the West Brattleboro model. CS agreed to look into it.

Regarding Telecommunications Facility – DAD clarified that the PC will permit wireless facilities in all zones of Thetford. T. Taylor suggested that multiple principle uses for one property be enabled (conditional use.) CS clarified that a satellite dish doesn't qualify as a Small Scale facility. LA expressed concerns about granting SSF permits without a hearing. T. Taylor recommended conditional use hearings. CS concurred.

8:50 MEG Grant Seminar – HB summarized the email message he'd previously distributed regarding Brian Schupe's ideas for a workshop. CS endorsed Mr. Schupe as highly qualified. T. Taylor warned against following Norwich's example as too expensive; he noted that the Thetford bylaws have so far worked well in their current form. HC moved to accept HB's proposal that Brian Schupe be invited to design a workshop for the PC. LA seconded. The motion passed unanimously. HB will invite Mr. Schupe, the DRB, and Richard Blackwell to the next PC meeting. LA noted that an agenda should be drafted first. HB will outline what guidance is needed.

8:58 Old Business- None

8:59 New Business- None

The meeting adjourned at 9:00
Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Jabareen
(PC clerk)