

**Thetford Planning Commission
Minutes – March 17, 2009**

Present: Liora Alschuler, Stuart Blood, Laurie Burnham, Mike Fernandez, Rick Howard (7:35), Kevin O’Hara, Wayne Parks (Chair)

Absent: Lori Howard

Guests: Heather Carlos (7:15-8:55), Stephanie Carter (7:15-8:55), Jens Hilke (7:15-8:55), Ben Pershouse (7:15-9:10), Li Shen (7:15-8:55), Connie Snyder (7:15-8:55)

7:17: Meeting called to order by Wayne Parks, Chair.

7:18: Public comment: None.

7:18: Review of prior minutes: Stuart Blood moved to accept the minutes of March 3, 2009. Kevin O’Hara seconded. The vote passed unanimously.

7:20: Program: Vermont Wildlife Department: Kevin O’Hara introduced Jens Hilke, Conservation Biologist, Community Wildlife Program, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

Jens Hilke explained that his role is to help towns with planning. He noted that he works with all towns in Vermont, and can help by reporting on methods used in various towns. Hilke distributed maps of habitat blocks in Thetford, from the Linking Lands Alliance, and copies of the book, “Conserving Vermont’s Natural Heritage”. He reviewed levels of science, variety of scales, and tools. He explained that an easy approach is to preserve big blocks of contiguous lands. Regarding tools, he noted for example, language such as “no undue or adverse effect on significant wildlife habitat,” which could be defined as determined by the Planning Commission, for example, as rare species.

In discussion, it was asked how to proceed with regulations, without mapping. Jens Hilke explained that the regulations could first address big blocks, then when there is mapping wetlands and significant habitat species. Another option is to have conditional use apply to development on big blocks of land, with a policy that there be no development within a specified number of feet from, for example a deeryard, and then on each application to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Department. The same method could apply to vernal pools. It was noted that for small developments, it would be up to the applicant to come forward. Another option would be to charge the Conservation Commission with developing standards.

Jens Hilke commented that first the town needs to decide which habitat they are concerned about; and then what tool to use, for example re-drawing zoning, or identifying blocks. It could be done on a smaller scale, by identifying what is known, and implementing for example wetland and stream buffers; and protecting rare and endangered species.

It was discussed that regulation of ridgelines and steep slopes could be a good place to start the conservation effort. Laurie Burnham will distribute Ridgeline information she just found.

Jens Hilke noted that his department has resources to continue to work with the town to prioritize conservation, and write zoning.

8:56: Planning Commission Applicant: The Planning Commission discussed with Ben Pershouse, his interest in serving on the Commission. It was noted that there are two candidates for one vacancy, and that the Selectboard would make the decision.

9:10: Old Business None.

9:11: New Business: None

9:11: Upcoming agendas: April 7: Outstanding reports, including Site Plan Review language, Wetlands report; May 5: presentation by Mille Archer, VLCT

9:25: The Planning Commission discussed the candidates for the Planning Commission vacancy.

9:31: Motion by Kevin O'Hara to adjourn, seconded by Stuart Blood. The vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Fenton

Recording Clerk
Thetford Planning Commission