

Thetford Planning Commission
March 2, 2010 – Approved Minutes

Present: Wayne Parks (chair), Stuart Blood, Kevin O’Hara, Lori Howard, Dean Whitlock (Clerk)

Absent: Rick Howard, Liora Alschuler

Guests: Dan and Dana Grossman (7:20-9:05); Bill Bridge (7:20-9:05); Donn Downey (7:20-9:30); Sean Mullen (7:30-9:00)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items)

1. Meeting called to order at 7:20 PM by Wayne Parks (Meeting held in Latham Library due to voting at Town Hall.)

2. Public Comment: None

3. Review of Minutes (7:22)

Feb. 16, 2010 - Corrections offered by Stuart Blood. Approved as amended. Comments also offered that the amount of detail was “a two-edged sword,” and that a more general outline of events was appropriate.

4. Review of Tracking Document (7:30) - Postponed till next meeting

5. Review of Zoning Draft (7:31)

Stuart Blood reviewed the most recent set of changes. There were no corrections offered and the changes were accepted. Stuart Blood will finalize the changes in the master document and send copies to DRB, selectboard, and other appropriate bodies.

6. PUD Discussion (7:35)

Stuart Blood introduced draft language for PUDs. Much of it is based on Norwich’s set, altered to suit Thetford’s situation. He pointed out Section D, Standards, as the area that needed more consideration. D.4 discusses density bonuses in reference to the values specified in the town plan (affordable housing, energy-efficient building, wildlife habitat, forest resources, and ag. land). Density bonuses would be allowed to a developer if the project enhanced or protected any of the values. What is needed are specific definitions of the values that allow the DRB to calculate what constitutes protection and enhancement. Stuart Blood proposed various layers of bonus ranging from 25% to 50% to 75% increase in density, depending on which value was being addressed. Kevin O’Hara read a definition previous provided by Liora Alschuler of affordable housing based on Orange County averages for cost and income. Efficiency values could be based on a national energy index. (That would be the baseline: exceeding the codes would result in bonuses. Owner-built houses would be exempt.) Natural resource protection/

enhancement would be based on comparison to the general standards in the zoning draft. It was agreed that this was a good starting point and would be discussed more fully later.

At this time, the commission shifted to a discussion of District Definitions. First, Dan and Dana Grossman reviewed their document (assigned in the previous meeting and delivered via email of 2/26/10), which provided a scheme to differentiate areas of the Rural Residential District based on different characteristics, all rural but none-the-less distinct. Their plan differentiates 6 types of Rural Residential area based on the type of road on which a property is located. The areas were distinguished by natural characteristics, lifestyle characteristics, and character of existing structures. Road ranged through State Highway, Main Town Road, Back Road, Dirt Road, Inaccessible, and New Cul de Sac road. They provided a list of roads for each type. There was considerable discussion as to whether 6 types was too many. Sean Mullen thought that many would make the process unwieldy. Dana Grossman explained that they tried to create definitions that were distinct enough that there would be little confusion.

Sean Mullen then put forward his first drafts of the Purpose statements for the district definitions. He pointed out that the original definition of Rural Residential might conflict with PUDs, and he was trying to create language that wouldn't. He felt that the RR areas presented by the Grossmans was helpful in trying to determine which parts of the RR districts were suited to PUDs. He wasn't sure if their definitions were more appropriate in the district definitions or the sub-division regulations; however, he felt that the district Purpose statements needed to be updated first. There was general agreement that the purpose statements and district definitions needed to be as clear and concrete as possible to avoid challenges and encourage thoughtful development that protected the values in the town plan.

This brought the discussion back to the RR areas/types proposed by the Grossmans. Sean Mullen said they were a good starting point, but said he didn't think they were totally correct. Bill Bridge pointed out places where he felt the system broke down and one road might shift into a different type; for example, along Route 5. Dean Whitlock asked if the 6 types couldn't be collapsed into fewer, to be more manageable; for example, putting State Highway and Main Town Road into a single category. Dan Grossman wondered if, instead of creating separate zones, they could list the types of development appropriate for certain road types or specific named roads. This wouldn't require creating detailed maps, and everything in town is accessed by roads, either existing ones or new ones such as the Cul de Sacs. Stuart Blood pointed out that, at some distance from each road, the characteristics no longer applied.

Sean Mullen said he thought the roads were a good starting point; then you would consider services and access; then consider the proposed use; then apply the values/goals. But first you need the district purpose and goals. Kevin O'Hara asked if he could make progress on those definitions without first clearly defining the traditional patterns of development. Sean Mullen replied that we must acknowledge traditions and use them to inform future growth, but that traditions change and we must allow reasonable change in the definitions, except perhaps in an historic district. There followed a long discussion of traditional patterns of development and how that affected the district purpose language and definitions. It was differentiated from traditional patterns of land use and also character of neighborhood.

In the end, it was decided that Stuart Blood and Bill Bridge would pick up Sean Mullen's first drafts of the district purposes and continue to work on them. The rest in attendance were to

send them comments, and they would get feedback from Two Rivers on the Grossman's plan. A new draft would be presented at the next meeting. The Grossman's were invited back to continue to take part in the discussion.

Sean Mullen, Bill Bridge, and the Grossmans left the meeting.

12. New Business (9:08)

Due to the time, the discussion jumped ahead to New Business:

A. Discuss the possibility of applying for Municipal Planning Grants. Refer to the grant description forwarded by Stuart Blood via email on 3/1/10. The grant application process begins on March 15, includes training sessions on the application system, and the application is due April 30. Grants would be awarded in late May. Maximum amount per town would be \$15,000, to be used in FY2011. Local matching is not required. Two Rivers could be the consultant or could at least help with the application process.

Stuart Blood suggested that the grant could be used to engage professional help while drafting the subdivision regulations. There was discussion of whether the grant period would fit the current planning timeline. Donn Downy asked if the grant could be used for the Zoning draft, but we have already received a grant for that.

Wayne Parks will check with the grant contact person regarding timing, the funding cycle, and whether we could apply in a new grant cycle at the end of this year. There was additional discussion about readopting the old town plan while the new subdivision regulations were being developed. The consensus was that this should be discussed with the selectboard.

B. Stuart Blood said that preparation of the final draft of the Zoning document will require some professional help for editing, proofing, layout, etc. This wasn't discussed at budget time, and he doesn't know the possible cost. This needs to be discussed with the selectboard.

Donn Downy left the meeting.

7. Site Plan Review 1st Draft (9:30)

Refer to emails from Kevin O'Hara on 2/15/10 and 3/2/10.

Kevin O'Hara introduced the document, which includes changes from comments by Kevin Geiger of Two Rivers. There was a discussion of whether the lighting standards should go into the general standards, as with air and noise standards, or remain in the Site Plan Review language. The consensus was that it was specific to Site Plan Review.

The fire chief needs to be consulted regarding issues of fire and public safety. Kevin O'Hara reported that he is also waiting for further replies from Two Rivers. There was also a brief discussion of plantings and invasive species that would require input from Liora Alschuler. Kevin O'Hara will incorporate the new information and present another draft - hopefully final - at the next meeting.

8. Affordable Housing 1st Draft (10:05)

Stuart Blood pointed out that it will be dealt with in PUDs. He reviewed the language. All agreed it was very important to get the definition of “affordable” right so density bonuses could be set properly. (Density Bonuses could be cumulative; that is, bonuses for different value enhancements, such as affordable housing and ag. land protection, could be added into a project total.) This topic will be carried over to the next meeting.

9. Time Line Review (10:10)

Kevin O’Hara briefly went over the current maze of the time line.

10. Reports (10:13)

There was a brief discussion of the vacancy on the Planning Commission.

11. Old Business (10:15)

Wayne Parks reviewed the list of topics to be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

Stuart Blood moved to adjourn; 2nd by Wayne Parks. Meeting Adjourned at 10:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission