

Thetford Planning Commission
April 19, 2011 – APPROVED Minutes

Present: Kevin O’Hara, Michael Schunk, Mike Fernandez, Terry Longo (dep. 7:49), Rick Howard (arr. 7:21), Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: None.

Guests: Sally Hull (7:38-8:26)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items)

1. Meeting called to order by Kevin O’Hara at 7:16 PM

Kevin O’Hara briefly introduced the new members and explained the procedure.

2. Public Comment: None

4. Welcome new members, Brief Orientation (7:18)

Item 3, approval of minutes, was skipped until Rick Howard’s arrival.

Kevin O’Hara referred to the welcome email and attachments he had sent to the new members, confirming they had received it. He said that they would have a “baptism by fire,” with all of them starting a new project--the town plan rewrite--together. Each of the members then introduced themselves and presented a brief background sketch.

Rick Howard joined the meeting at 7:21, in time to introduce himself.

Kevin discussed the current projects, which include reviewing and updating the town plan, updating the subdivision regulations, and perhaps responding to questions about the draft zoning bylaw when the selectboard holds its hearings. He briefly described the process that would be used to draft new language for the town plan, discuss the drafts, and vote to approve or reject. His duty would be to keep discussions on point, but he invited all members to help with that. Terry Longo asked what the schedule and time period would be for the projects. Kevin said a new town plan needed to be approved by next Town Meeting and explained the decision to readopt the current plan quickly to provide more time for a thorough review, using the full time frame of the municipal planning grant, but not the full 5 years allowed. Kevin then gave a brief review of the status of the subdivision regulation update: the working group includes himself, Stuart Blood, and two members of the Development Review Board (DRB), Sean Mullen and Bill Bridge. They have had a few meetings but are not ready to bring anything to the commission for discussion yet. That process will run in parallel, so the planning commission can focus on the town plan. Michael Schunk asked what the time frame was for the subdivision reg. Rick Howard replied that it has already been 3-4 years, with the interruption required to complete the zoning bylaw; however, that also included the completion of floodplain regulations and telecommunications regulations.

Sally Hull of the Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) joined the meeting (7:38) and was introduced to the new members.

5. Town Plan Rewrite (7:41)

To accommodate Sally's schedule, the commission skipped to item 5.

Sally distributed copies of the state law governing town plans, zoning, subdivisions, etc. (Title 24, chapter 117). She also handed out a checklist for town plan development based on Chapter 117, and a draft schedule for readopting the current town plan and then moving ahead with the review and revision to adopt a new version. This schedule will be posted in digital format on the planning commission listserv archive before the next meeting. Sally and the commission members discussed the items on the schedule.

Step 1: Readopting current plan - completed by spring/summer of 2011. Kevin asked if it needed updating before readopting. Sally replied no, except perhaps for some recommended items from the previous town plan review. There was a discussion of the extent of changes that would be needed, apart from census data. The re Adoption process will require a warned hearing, with a report and maps.

Terry Longo left the meeting at 7:49.

Sally will complete a full review of the current town plan and present it to the commission at the next meeting (May 3). Mike Fernandez asked why it was necessary to re Adopt. Sally explained that having a current town plan affected the town's ability to get grants for certain types of projects; otherwise, it would not have any major effect. She added that, in September, a new regulation would go into effect requiring that subdivision regulations and zoning bylaws be fully compliant with the town plan. There was a general agreement that the best course was to make the minor updates necessary and re Adopt as quickly as possible. At this time, the minor updates could consist of simply changing the date on the cover.

Step 2: Overall review of town plan - by June 2011. Sally will have her review completed by May 3. She will also collect in one document a summary of the current comments, recommendations, and suggestions collected during the previous town plan review and during the zoning bylaw process. She will email these to the commission before the next meeting so they can be discussed then.

Step 2a: Newsletter articles - ongoing. This was a step in the grant application. The planning commission will publish (by some method and frequency to be determined) a series of articles about the items being discussed in order to keep citizens informed and hopefully draw them into the discussion.

Step 2b: Open house - July/August 2011. This would be 1 or 2 public gatherings to solicit comments and address summary issues. They could be timed to mesh with 250th-anniversary events.

Step 3: Energy and climate change issues - July & Sept 2011. This and the following topics will be addressed separately, in parallel with the general discussion. The energy topics will include consultation with the energy committee and the Sustainable Energy Resource Group (SERG). SERG has separate funding available to conduct research on this topic. Sally and TRORC will develop a summary of all recommended updates by July. A public forum held in partnership with SERG will take place in September.

Step 4: Village center designation - Sept./Oct. 2011. Affects ability of local businesses to apply for grants. Sally recommended that this be completed by the end of October so that public discussions/forums won't conflict with the holiday season.

Step 5: Infrastructure review - by end of October 2011. Entails listing the town's physical facilities (municipal buildings, schools, roads, equipment, etc.) and creating a long-term maintenance and growth plan to keep pace with town growth. TRORC will conduct the initial review and develop a summary of recommended updates.

Step 6: Resource inventories - by March 2012. Refers to natural resources (forests, wetlands, agricultural land, etc.). The selectboard and conservation commission will be very involved here, in a working group with the planning commission and TRORC representative. These inventories will be used as a basis for future town regulations, but the working group will determine immediate goals. The town wetland maps will be brought up to date using separate funding. Will run concurrently with Step 5.

Step 7: Hearing - spring/summer 2012. The grant cycle ends in May, and a draft must be submitted to the state then. All steps up to the actual hearing must be completed by then. This includes the warning, report, maps, and clean draft of the new town plan. The hearings and final revisions can take place afterward. TRORC will provide support through the end of the hearing process.

Sally will check with Tig Tillinghast regarding some questions she still has about the steps as specified in the grant application. (Tig was the author of the grant.) She will bring answers to the next meeting.

Sally next presented the most current census data available and went over it with the commission. Dean Whitlock noted that the town's population had gone down by 1.1%, but the number of housing units had gone up by 8%. He guessed that either the average household size had dropped or the town had more second homes (probably both). More updates should be available in the coming months. She explained that the latest 10-year census did not ask as many questions as before; however, the longer questionnaire is now sent to fewer people more frequently, with updates every few years. Some state data is also available (resident/non-resident census, current use data, etc.), which she will collect for the next meeting.

Sally left the meeting at 8:26.

4. New member orientation (continued)

Kevin pointed out the committee handbook. He said he would arrange with the town clerk to have copies of the town plan and other documents available for the new members to pick up, and would also arrange to have digital copies sent, if available.

3. Review of minutes of April 5 (8:28)

The members discussed comments that had been emailed by Liora Alschuler and Tig Tillinghast. The minutes were then approved as amended.

6. Rules and Procedures (8:36)

Kevin noted that there was a change to Section IV in the Rules and Procedures document that he had sent out to the new members. The first sentence now reads, "The Planning

Commission shall consist of Commissioners appointed by the selectboard.” This removes reference to any specific number of Commissioners, which could change from time to time. Otherwise, the document is up to date.

7. Reports - None

8. Old Business - None

9. New Business - None

Kevin quickly reviewed the next steps in the town plan review and what would be discussed at the May 3 meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission