

## **Thetford Planning Commission**

### **October 4, 2011: Warned Meeting and Open House – APPROVED Minutes**

Present: Kevin O'Hara, Patrick Kearney, Michael Schunk, Terry Longo, Liora Alschuler, Rick Howard (6:54), Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: None

Guests: Emma Zavez (TRORC) (6:30 till end)

Attendees at Open House: John Bacon, Jim Masland, Dan Grossman, Jane Francisco, Dale Gephart, Clyde Cook, Wayne Parks, Sally Duston Whitlock, Barbara Klauff, Tara Bamford, Li Shen, Stuart Blood, Kate Cone, Bill Bridge, Gurmit Grewal, Roberta Howard, Melissa Malloy, Tig Tillinghast, Sandra Miller, Linda Matteson, Susan Rump, Paul Rump, Mike Pomeroy, Mary-Dan Pomeroy, Matthew Fiskens, Barbara DeFelice, JoAnn Berns, Diana Wright, Scott Hesser, Dennis Donahue

(Numbers below refer to agenda items)

1. The meeting was called to order by Kevin O'Hara at 6:30 PM

2. Public Comment:

Kevin presented a comment from Niko Horster of the Pompanoosuc Agricultural Society, inviting the commission to attend their meeting on 10/13. Patrick volunteered to attend.

3. Review of the Minutes of 9/20/11:

The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Set up for the open house.

The commission reviewed the slides Liora had prepared and made several suggestions, which she incorporated. Emma Zavez of Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) attended in Sally Hull's place. Her name was added to the slide of commission members. The group then went through the planned agenda. Liora set up her laptop and projector so that she could capture comments in a table that all could see. The refreshments were laid out and chairs set up.

5. Town Plan – First Open House (called to order at 7:34)

Kevin welcomed everyone and introduced the commissioners and Ms. Zavez. Patrick explained the town plan rationale and process. Kevin read down through the 5 contrasting statements that had been posted to the listserv and used on the flyer to generate interest and spark discussion. These were presented as examples of the type of issues that a town plan needed to address; they did not necessarily have to be addressed as written at this open house. Kevin then opened the meeting to questions, comments, and suggestions from the attendees. Liora recorded comments in the table on her computer. That document will serve as the complete

record of the comments and will be posted on the planning commission archive. The following record gives the gist of each comment but is not verbatim.

Li Shen, representing the Conservation Commission, presented a list of concerns and suggestions. (She provided a printed copy to Liora and will email the digital file later.) The areas she listed were 1. Rivers, including a. Cold-water fishery (primarily Ompompanoosuc R.), b. Restoration of the Ompy and its tributaries to original natural beds, c. Controlling e. coli by identifying sources and controlling runoff; 2. Forests, including a. preserving large forest blocks, b. recreational, aesthetic, and habitat uses, c. linkages between blocks; 3. Wetlands, preserving aesthetic, recreational, and educational character, b. linkages between wetlands; 4. Vernal pools, a special type of wetland; 5. Biodiversity, including smaller types of habitat; and 9. Controlling invasive species (related to biodiversity).

Dale Gephart, representing the Lake Fairlee Association (LFA), pointed out that 1/3 of Lake Fairlee is in Thetford. Two issues are the rising phosphate level, which risks making the lake eutropic, and the milfoil infestation, for which the LFA requires town help. Fairlee and West Fairlee are helping.

Tig Tillinghast spoke about Thetford's villages. He said outsiders marvel at their number and diversity. He said that we should encourage maintaining them as mixed-use concentrations of residences and businesses.

Tara Bamford said that the current Town Plan introduction indicates divisiveness. It is missing a mission statement to achieve consensus and guide implementation of the plan; for example, to reduce sprawl. She asked if there was a process to develop a mission statement. Kevin answered that the commission hoped to do that through open houses like this. Tara said a good type of question to ask would be, "What kind of development would make Thetford an even better place to live?"

Mike Pomeroy said the plan should encourage more businesses so people would not have to drive as far, saving gas. He said the plan should preserve the rights of landowners, keep the town affordable for its residents, and make it a destination rather than a pass-through town by marketing its attractions (e.g., trails, rivers, boat landings).

Dennis Donahue said there should be a major topic about affordable housing, specifically the needs of the elderly, and types of housing for villages and rural settings. We needed to keep ahead of growth. Dale Gephart responded as a member of the Senior and Affordable Housing Committee. He said the mandate that already exists in the plan is good for the committee in finding grants and setting policies, but he would be happy to see it expanded. He appreciated the density bonuses for affordable housing in the new zoning bylaw and will look to the new plan for guidance. Kevin said the Planning Commission was planning to hold followup meetings with specific groups (town committees, SERG, etc.), which would be announced and open to the public. The Senior and Affordable Housing Committee would be one of those meetings. Dale

Gephart mentioned a meeting scheduled for October 13 to discuss the formation of a new housing organization.

Paul Rump said that his neighborhood, Sawnee Bean, has gone through many changes since he arrived. The community had been broken up by development of McMansions, and yet the town has not consulted with the people in the district to find out what they are willing to live with. He said he hoped the commissioners would knock on doors and ask residents directly how they felt about development. Kevin said that the commission was planning open houses in villages and perhaps could expand that to districts. Paul replied that the people who had lived in the town for generations wouldn't come to the town hall; you had to go to them. He said if you screw with them you screw with the essential character of the town.

Mike Pomeroy said he liked having dirt roads and rural character. Narrow roads slow traffic; he didn't think you needed to widen them or plow them immediately after a storm.

Patrick, responding to Paul Rump, said that the Planning Commission was here to hear people's opinions, not to tell them how to build, but to try to encourage everyone to express their opinions. There are many diverse types of people in town. Paul expressed his fears that the area will be completely changed. Going out to talk to people would help a lot.

Mary-Dan Pomeroy said she disliked what a lot of the back roads were becoming: expanding wider and wider, straightening, constant development. She said she liked the idea of pathways connecting villages. She thought that conservation should be achieved through education, not prohibition.

Matt Fiskin spoke about the utility and telecomm lines going through the town. Some of the easements were maintained by CVPS and some by Fairpoint, with different policies on clearing vegetation. For example, Fairpoint won't clear branches that are on their wires unless the wire is actually broken. This makes them more susceptible to breaking in the next storm. He would like the town to encourage more proactive action. He said he would also like to see more public phones in town for emergencies; at least 1 per village, with free local calls and enclosed booths.

John Bacon said he'd like to see more mixed use in the villages; for example, businesses below, residences above. It would add character, and space is limited. He would also like to see more stability in the population, fewer transients.

Jim Masland spoke to the rural character. He said that a house on 10 acres is not good because it requires more driving and encourages sprawl. Grouping houses around the infrastructure would be better.

Diana Wright pointed out that damaged dirt roads were quickly reopened after Irene, as opposed to paved Rt. 132. Dirt roads were easier to maintain and repair, an advantage. She said Thetford could take a lesson from towns that were hit much harder by Irene but responded better, not just

in regard to culverts but in other areas such as businesses getting restarted. Speaking with those people would be a conversation worth having. We need to discover what would increase our resiliency; for example, having portable generators in small neighborhoods. John Bacon suggested she bring her ideas to the Emergency Planning Committee. Tig Tillinghast briefly described the long-term goals of that committee.

Paul Rump said the plan could nourish the sense of community with places that are centers, having essentials. The Village Store for example. The town could develop nodes or hubs as focal points for interaction and self-help. It needs to be locally networked village-type development.

Dennis Donahue: Communications (Internet etc.) should be a major point in the town plan to signal we are working toward town-wide connectivity. We should identify the barriers, such as the state plan and the way major suppliers are refusing to adapt to our topography. Susan Rump said she would like to see better town and state support of ECFibernet. She thought regional control would be better.

Matt Fiskin, responding to the Diana Wright about resiliency and power supplies, said solar trailers are available that can power 40 homes or so in emergencies.

Joann Burns, who identified herself as a newcomer, said the difficulties created by not being able to get high-speed internet access at her house had greatly affected her life. She loved the town listserv. It had been hard to meet neighbors due to the distances between houses, but the listserv helped. She said people would be more invested in the town if they could work at home. She also said she thought the town could do a better job of greeting new people better to let them know what was going on and get them involved. She also said she thought that the condition of Route 113 was an embarrassment and a bad introduction to the town.

Wayne Parks said he agreed with many of the comments: senior and affordable housing is a big issue, multi-use in villages to reduce need to drive and allow more residents, promotion of high-speed access and cell coverage (he knew of two house sales that were lost due to those lacks), but he urged the commission, "do consider the rights of the property owner."

Clyde Cook asked that the commission not create regulations that conflict with one another on achieving goals. He said remember the old-line families; don't make it too difficult for them to remain in town.

Dale Gephardt put in a plug for the elder network and said we need to keep seniors from getting isolated. Only 4 out of 50 seniors in the elder network is on the town listserv.

John Bacon said the old one-room schools were centers of their communities. Now the villages are getting more and more unique. He asked how we could bring them together to speak as one voice.

Jim Masland, speaking of the differences between paving and gravel, said that some towns had studied the cost differences and torn up old pavement rather than repair it. John Bacon said the town was already studying that possibility.

Sally Duston Whitlock said she would like to see new development right where it already is, in the villages. She said the rural character of the town was vital, as was promoting agriculture.

Scott Hesser said they were newcomers (only since May) and had selected Thetford for its schools, character, and rural setting, but that they didn't need a big lot. If there had been village lots available near the schools, they might have settled in a village. His priorities were proximity to the school, high-speed internet and cell coverage, and a paved road. Wayne Parks commented that this points out the diversity in the town: both types of people (paved vs unpaved) need to be taken into consideration.

Dan Grossman said he saw a common theme coming out, in that people were interested in the details, for this year and this decade, but that the plan will have an impact for many decades. The commission must keep that in mind and compare every detail for as many years into the future as they can so as not to reduce the ability of our descendants to enjoy the town in the future. Jim Masland agreed, saying it was harder to recover from a bad decision than to take the time to think through to a good decision in the first place.

John Bacon said that increased density in villages would mean having to think about water and sewage at some point in the future. Swamps should be preserved to become water supplies, and new technology to treat pollution at the source needs to be investigated. These issues must be considered in the plan.

Susan Rump said that there used to be many small dams and mills in the town and that the plan should look at ways to use hydropower for local power generation.

Tara Bamford said that the comments had given the commission many themes to create many mission statements to run by the townspeople. She added the theme of local agriculture to feed the town.

Kevin wrapped up the meeting by saying how thrilled he was at the turnout and participation. He recognized that there would be a challenge to reconciling some of the conflicting ideas, but he thanked everyone for expression their thoughts and opinions. He invited everyone to stay after the meeting for food and informal conversation.

The meeting and open house were adjourned at 8:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission