

**Thetford Planning Commission
December 20, 2011 – APPROVED Minutes**

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

Absent: Terry Longo

Guests: Donn Downey

(Numbers below refer to agenda items)

1. The meeting was called to order by Kevin O'Hara at 7:18 p.m.

2. Public Comment:

None

3. Review of the Minutes of 12/6/11:

The minutes were accepted with changes.

4. Town Report: None (see New Business)

5. Town Plan

a. Town Plan Readoption - Kevin went over the reasoning for readopting the current town plan, which is to provide more time to develop the new town plan. (The current deadline does not allow sufficient time for careful consideration of all issues.) The date needs to be updated; otherwise, the current plan will be readopted exactly as is. Kevin will work with Chris Sargent of Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) to get a draft ready for approval by the Jan. 17 meeting. He will also work with Chris to make sure the warning and accompanying report are correctly handled so neighboring towns, as well as Thetford residents, understand that nothing except the date is changing at this point. Assuming the draft is approved by the PC on the 17th, a hearing will be warned for February 21. Assuming there is no major objection to this time-buying strategy, the approved draft can be forwarded that very evening to the selectboard for adoption. There was a brief discussion about trying to get the draft ready by Jan. 3rd, but the holiday and Chris' schedule did not permit such alacrity.

b. Open House on Villages; Review and Respond - Patrick said he felt this gathering was more stilted than the first and that it stalled a couple of times. He noted that this was the second instance where someone had suggested the members go door-to-door to get comments, which he felt indicated that residents did not fully understand the time commitment already involved to plan and run the open houses and move the planning processing forward. Liora said it reinforced the need to get to as many people as possible. She agreed that going door-to-door was not

reasonable or feasible, but that the members could meet residents halfway by meeting in other locations. (The discussion of outreach was deferred till item 5C.)

Looking for new ideas and suggestions from this open house, Patrick noted that there had been a suggestion to confine village development to one or two of the villages. Rick said the sense of the meeting seemed to be to leave the villages alone. This sparked a discussion of the difference between this group and the first open house on this point. The people at the first open house seemed more interested in mixed use and development to make the villages more self-sustaining (e.g., add a bakery and maintain general stores so people would not have to leave the village to find these types of goods/services). Dean noted that the second group weren't against mixed use and development as long as it fit in with the "character" of the village (hours of operation, noise, traffic, and visual harmony seemed to be primary concerns). Dean added that a town plan can encourage that type of development, but that actual policies/incentives would have to come from the selectboard and voters. Liora said that the different villages do have different characters, and that many seemed to see East Thetford as the most appropriate site for more development. Rick said that the newly adopted zoning regulations already address a lot of what we are hearing in the open houses.

Liora remarked that we have many comments now to build on but there will be many more to come in at future open houses and meetings. She would like to see Rural Residential areas be discussed next, because she thinks that would bring in many more comments.

c. Next Open House - Liora's suggestion of discussing Rural Residential issues next led to a discussion of the Municipal Planning Grant's original implementation plan and the partial timeline drafted by Sally Hull. Those specify meetings with the Energy Committee and Conservation Commission (natural resources). Donn asked what the timeline was now, given the plan to readopt the current town plan. Kevin explained: collect more input roughly through March/April; create a draft through May/June/July; refine the draft to be ready for hearings in late fall. Rick added that the grant due dates require a draft by May, but all felt it would be a very rough one in order to meet the grant commitments. Until Chris Sargent can meet with the commission and go over the grant timeline again, it was difficult to know exactly what would be required.

Moving back to planning the next open house, Liora suggested an open house that combined Energy and Natural Resources would meet the grant requirements in a shorter period of time. There was a brief discussion, but the topic was dealt with in more detail later. The discussion of outreach became the next focus of the meeting. Donn said that moving the location would be beneficial not only to reach different people, but also to change the dynamics of the meeting. He worried that presenting the previously collected comments would inhibit the attendees from presenting different ideas, and wondered if it would be better to completely toss out the presentation at the start of the open houses and simply ask, "what do you want to see?" After some spirited give and take, the members pointed out the differences in comments collected at each of the two open houses so far, and also that the turn-out had been good in both cases. This implies that the method of presented contrasting viewpoints attracted people's interest and got them thinking about what they wanted to see in Thetford in the future. Donn also suggested that the group go through the grand list and choose a random selection of households

to visit. This led to another long discussion of the pros and cons, the time involved, and ways to make the gatherings more attractive (e.g., as part of a snowmobile event or ice cream social). Liora said that she had polled some neighbors in East Thetford and that they had been enthusiastic about having a meeting right there in the village. She suggested that one or two commission members could meet with small, local groups like this neighborhood, not in a warned meeting, but in a more informal setting for open discussion. She mentioned the Elder Network as another group that could be met with this way. Other suggestions included church groups and library groups. There was a discussion of where these meetings could take place. Patrick suggested asking to use the Pompanoosuc Mills meeting room for a discussion about business development in town. Michael noted that having a strong focus seemed to help generate more discussion. Someone suggested the meeting room at Longwind Farms and the North Thetford library or church hall. Patrick will draft an invitation to post on the list serve (and deliver by mail or by hand to people not on the list). This post would invite groups in town to invite the planning commission to their neighborhoods for small group meetings at mutually convenient times. Liora will approach the Elder Network.

Donn left the meeting at 8:50.

The discussion moved back to the next open house, about the future of the Rural Residential areas. There was a discussion about how to attract comment. Everyone felt that using contrasting statements worked well and should continue being used. Patrick suggested inviting someone with a direct interest in those areas, such as a forester, logger, or game warden, to make a brief presentation about their viewpoint and vision for these areas, followed by open discussion. Dean suggested presenting facts and maps that show how the town has changed in the past 30 or 40 years. Rick commented on his own realizations about growth in his life here (42 years!), listing the number of houses that have gone in on just one stretch of Latham Road. It was noted that the type of development common in Thetford occurs on a house-by-house basis, not in large developments of multiple houses; however, this slow growth has led to many more houses tucked into the woods. The group didn't come to a definite decision on the best conversation-starter, but Kevin said he would put it on the agenda for future meetings. A date was set: Jan. 31 (the fifth Tuesday, not a usual meeting day). This will not conflict with the readoption process. Before the Jan. 3 meeting, the members are to think of contrasting statements and Rural Residential development and/or names of potential "viewpoint" speakers.

There was a final discussion of how to meet with the Energy Committee and Conservation Commission. Liora presented a third option, which was to hold a separate warned meeting with each group, inviting the general public to attend. The meeting would start with a presentation by the committee/commission on their view of town's future in that area. The commission would then hold an open discussion, inviting the public to join in. These meetings will be scheduled to follow the next open house.

d. Timeline - deferred to the next meeting.

6. Old Business

Liora reported on the Conservation Commission meeting that she attended. She filled them in on the town plan process and status, and explained the relationship between the town plan (guidance, vision) and the zoning bylaw (policy, regulation). They have documents ready

describing their goals the future of the town's natural resources, which involve education and research as well as zoning. Chris Sargent will attend their next meeting, in mid January, and Liora plans to attend. She will discuss the planning commissions plans for a public meeting with them.

Kevin noted the receipt of an email from Tara Bamford, which he had forwarded to the commission listserv that day. It concerns natural resources, and he plans to put it on the agenda when that topic comes up

Kevin also noted the email from Terry Longo regarding the change in his work schedule that precludes his being able to attend meetings until mid February at least. Liora will follow up with Terry about the information he was going to post to the town web site.

7. New Business

Kevin presented a mailing from the town clerk requesting a Planning Commission report for inclusion in the Town Report. The length is limited to 200-300 words and the deadline is January 2. After everyone had a chance to turn down the honor, Dean offered to write a draft for everyone to review, if the members felt it wouldn't bust the budget. The suggestion was accepted by acclamation, and there followed a very brief discussion of what to include and not to include.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission