

Thetford Planning Commission
February 21, 2012 – APPROVED Minutes

Present: Patrick Kearney, Michael Schunk, Rick Howard, Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: Kevin O'Hara, Liora Alschuler, Terry Longo

NOTE: There was not a quorum of members present. The notes represent items discussed, but no items were voted on.

Guests: None.

(Numbers below refer to agenda items)

1. Patrick Kearney open the meeting to discussion at 7:35 p.m.

2. Public Comment - none.

3. Review of the Minutes of 2/7/12

The minutes were adopted with corrections.

4. Selectboard report - none

5. Flood Plain Map Review

The map was not available so this item was skipped.

6. Discussion of E-mailed Comments from Li Shen

This item was passed over due to the lack of a quorum.

7. Review of Town Plan Draft Requirements

Chris Sargent of Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission was not present so this item was skipped.

8. Review of Feb. 7 Open House and report on Feb. 15 Meeting in North Thetford.

Patrick and Rick reported that the North Thetford meeting was very well attended, with 35-40 people there. Kevin attended as well. The discussion did not lead to any definite actions, and many of the items discussed did not concern the Town Plan. The attendees were concerned about traffic through the village, both the increased volume and the speed. There was a discussion about putting in a sidewalk, though the sense of the meeting was that funds for new infrastructure would be hard to get in this economy. The sense of the meeting was that the attendees would like to maintain the residential quality of the village, much as it was, though there was interest in mixed use and increasing the number of services available right in the

villages (store, gas, etc.). The post office building is being renovated with hopes that it will become an unofficial community gathering place. Patrick noted that the attendees at the open houses were usually 60% newcomers (not born in Thetford), but at this North Thetford meeting, almost everyone had been born in the town. Patrick and Rick said they would write up their notes, and that Kevin had also taken notes.

Feb. 7 Open House discussion - Michael said it would be good to follow up on Beth Young's suggestion to get a good, large map of the town, with districts clearly marked, and have it available during any meetings. He also mentioned the article in the Feb. 21 Valley News about disappearing parcels of large tracts of land (which has been brought up at an open house) and what some Upper Valley towns were doing about it, particularly Norwich. Rick said that the people who owned large tracts, like his family, didn't want to break them up but often had to - it cost too much each year just to own them (due to taxes primarily). Even if you sell the development rights and put the land into a conservation trust, you still owe taxes on it. There was a discussion of the article and different tax structures that might alleviate this problem, but no sense that there was a solution at hand.

The next open house would be the meeting with the Energy Committee, but they had not come p with a date yet. Michael suggested having a discussion on the topic of housing, coordinated with the Senior and Affordable Housing Group. Rick thought that, due to time constraints, it might be best to ease up on open houses unless another group comes forward. The informal meetings, like East Thetford and North Thetford, do better than the open houses. They are informal, a more comfortable atmosphere, and you see many different faces. The open houses at the town hall always draw the same faces.

9. Re-assignment of responsibility for Town Plan Land Use and Transportation chapters

Since Rick is retiring from the commission when his current term expires in March, we need to reassign these chapters to different members. Rick noted that Land Use is a huge chapter, but a ton of it probably belonged in other chapters. Michael said the Liora had gone through her chapter to note which parts should be moved and which rewritten, and that would be a good strategy for everyone to follow. Rick said that the main issues of Land Use, particularly lot sizes, need to be resolved before any rewriting starts. Mike said perhaps the specific land use issues could be discussed in an open house. There was a brief discussion of what went wrong in 2005 that caused the proposed Town Plan to be rejected. Rick said that lot size in rural residential was a major factor: the plan that failed would have increased the minimum lot size.

Back to reassignment, Rick said that, if Liora was willing to take on the Land Use chapter, he would work on it with her as a member of a working group. He will ask her about this before the next meeting. He apologized for having taken on such a big chapter when he'd known he would be leaving, but he thought the process would be farther along by now. Patrick said he would take on the Transportation chapter since his bicycling habit gives him a unique perspective on it.

10. Town Plan Time Line - assign first chapters to be written

There was a brief discussion of the overall timeline process. Michael again suggested that everyone follow Liora's practice in reading through and marking up their chapters to indicate where changes were needed. The sense of the group was that this would be a good idea. Rick pointed out there was still an issue with the goal/objective/policy/procedure terminology and format. No one knew if Terry had made any progress on this. Michael pointed out that the chapters could still be marked up, since this formatting didn't have to take place until later in the rewrite.

11. Energy Workgroup Report

Michael said there was nothing new to report. He will contact Bob Walker (chair) to get notes on their most recent meeting.

12. Old Business - none

13. New Business

Patrick reminded everyone to read the Valley News article so it could be discussed by all in a future meeting.

Michael said he would be gone the next two meetings. Rick pointed out that the next meeting was March 6, Town Meeting Day, so the town hall would be used for voting. The Planning Commission will need to meet across the street in the Community Center building. Rick said he would stay on the commission until March 20th to attend the warned hearing to readopt the current town plan. That would be his final meeting as a commissioner.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission