

Thetford Planning Commission
April 17, 2012 – APPROVED Minutes

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

Absent: Patricia Norton

Guests: Rick Howard (7:24- 7:56); Michael Keiss and Bob Walker (8:05-8:27)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items)

1. Kevin O'Hara called the meeting to order at 7:17 p.m.

2. Public Comment - None.

3. Review of the Minutes of 4/3/12

The minutes were accepted with corrections.

4. Selectboard report - None.

5. Town Plan (7:24)

Rick Howard joined the meeting.

a. Reports from commissioners regarding progress made with their chapters

Land Use - Liora reported on the workgroup meeting the previous week. Wayne Parks was not able to attend. She and Rick gave the chapter a cursory review to determine how to approach changes. They will retain and update the tables, which they believe contain useful and interesting information. They will make changes to wording in order to bring the plan in line with new statutes and town bylaws (floodplain, zoning, subdivision, etc.) As far as changes to future land use, Liora said she and Rick did not see that any major changes were needed, based on their experience with the planning process and the results of the public forums (recent zoning hearings and more recent planning open houses). However, there were areas that needed to be considered by the planning commission. Those included the addition of new districts or overlays and changes to minimum lot sizes. There was no evidence from the open houses of wide-spread support or sound rationale for either of these ideas; however, they did come up and need to be considered. She said she and Rick felt that, as far as maintaining the town's rural character was concerned, there was no better alternative to what we have now in the new zoning bylaws and in-process subdivision regulations. She enumerated the protections provided by the new zoning standards and said it would be difficult to find a planning basis that didn't mimic the zoning standards, but more crudely.

Regarding overlays, Liora said she and Rick felt the language in the plan referring to them should be removed, also because the issues they are meant to address are handled better in the new zoning bylaw. She also said it was her view that proposing new overlays or districts would

create a great deal of anxiety in the town and would be viewed by some residents as a taking of property rights. She also said that, in light of comments made at the informal planning discussion in East Thetford, the commission should consider removing all language that supported increased business development around the I-91/Route 113 interchange. Rick added that anything not addressed in the zoning bylaw should be removed from the plan because there was not enough demand for changes. Liora described these comments as their "first principles" in rewriting the plan and asked if they should go ahead and create a red-lined draft with their proposed changes.

Michael started a discussion about the preference of a designer/developer to have overlays and districts, so there would be clear lines on a map to follow. The alternative method, which the current zoning provides, is a clear set of standards by which the developer (with help from the zoning administrator and Development Review Board) can determine what the specific lines are in each case. This provides flexibility in cases where a particular wetland (for example) might not be on a map.

Patrick pointed out a comment in the plan draft created by Sally Hull of the Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC), which had specific comments and changes indicated. Liora said the workgroup must also review the chapter very carefully with regard to first principles expressed in the introductory material. There was a brief discussion of the TRORC comments, and the probable need to ask them for clarification. Michael pointed out that Land Use would be a good place to start getting the clarifications. There was also discussion of the need to get some solid examples of Terry's proposed system of Goals/Objectives, and on how to get more town input on new drafts as they are completed.

Liora said she will be away during the May 15 meeting so will present a first draft of changes at the first meeting in June (6/5).

Rich Howard left the meeting.

Michael Kiess and Bob Walker of the Energy Committee joined the meeting (8:05)

Energy Chapter and (c) Energy Open House - Michael Kiess said that 3 or 4 Energy Committee members will attend the open house during the May 1 meeting. They will arrive ahead of the warned Open House segment in order to help set up. There was a discussion of how the open house would proceed and what material would be needed. Michael K. presented a draft hand-out sheet that had 4 basic questions about energy issues to put before the gathering as a way to spark discussion. The back side of the sheet gave a brief "Citizen's Summary" to the current Energy chapter in the plan. After some discussion, the sense of the meeting was that it would be better not to compare drafts of the plan but simply to present the 4 questions and get as much fresh input as possible. There followed a discussion of how to publicize the event. Michael S. will create a flyer. Bob will send an email to the Thetford residents on the Sustainable Energy Resource Group mailing list. The open house will begin at 7:30 and run until 9 or until the comments stop coming, whichever happens first. Note that there will be refreshments.

Michael Kiess and Bob Walker left the meeting. (8:27)

Transportation - Patrick reported that he is still waiting to hear back from the Road Commissioner Doug Stone and will contact him before the next meeting. He is awaiting the use of Google Docs before starting any major revisions. Terry reported that he has set up the Google

Docs work area, uploaded some documents, and granted access permissions. He encouraged everyone to try it.

Housing - Michael wondered if some of the many tables were no longer relevant, sparking a short discussion. He wants to see what information about houses is still being kept and will check with the Listers and TRORC (for comparisons with other towns). The consensus of the meeting was that such comparisons were good to have.

Historical and Education - Terry reported that he had made an initial contact with the Historical Society to get their help updating the information. Before the next meeting, he plans to contact Thetford Elementary and the Academy to get updated information for the various tables in the Education chapter.

Utilities and Facilities - Kevin reported that Chris Sargent of TRORC, after meeting with two Selectboard members, had written a draft chapter and sent it via email this evening. Kevin has not reviewed it yet. He has begun his own changes to the introductory material and has some questions regarding references to other chapters. He is using change tracking in Word to highlight his suggested deletions and inserts. He is still waiting for some details from the Fire Chief. He asked for contacts regarding the cemeteries, Legion Hall, and Recreation facilities.

There was a discussion of the process for presenting suggested changes and a review of the process used to draft the zoning bylaw (characterization of issues, first draft reading, second draft reading, final draft review and vote, submit to TRORC and Selectboard for external review) and how this did or did not mesh with the Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) implementation plan. Kevin reported that TRORC had not requested an extension to the MPG timeline. The draft being submitted is very rough and should be considered as early input plus an update of statistics.

c. Review of Energy Open House details: the meeting will start at 6:45 so some regular business can be conducted before the Open House begins at 7:30. Patrick said he will be late, and Dean said he will be out of town.

b. Outreach - Patrick reported that John and Pril Hall in Post Mills will host a planning discussion with their neighbors on Monday, April 23 at 7 p.m. He will post directions to their house. Several members said they would be able to attend. Patrick had no news on a Senior and Affordable Housing open house.

d. Grant Update - Kevin noted the clarification from TRORC about the MPG implementation plan (see above). There will not be a hearing on their draft.

e. Timeline - Kevin reported that he and Michael have blocked out a template and will meet to fill in more detail before the next meeting.

6. Regional Plan (9:05)

Kevin noted the email from TRORC in reply to emailed comments from Tara Bamford about the upcoming hearing on sections of the proposed new regional plan. TRORC has posted only the chapters that are being changed, not the entire plan. Hearing dates are on the TRORC web site. (May 2 in Randolph and June 11 in Sharon.) Liora said she will review the plan's implementation chapter to see if it affected the Thetford plan. Kevin said he would put it on the agenda for the first June meeting (6/5) in case the commissioners have comments they want to submit to TRORC.

7. Old Business. (9:12)

The selectboard has appointed Patricia Norton and Dean Whitlock to serve on the commission. (Congratulations were tendered by all.) Terry will update the town web site to list the new commissioners.

8. New Business - None.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission