

Thetford Planning Commission
July 31, 2012 – APPROVED Minutes

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

Absent: Patricia Norton, Terry Longo

Guests: None

(Numbers below refer to agenda items)

1. Kevin O'Hara called the meeting to order at 7:22 p.m.

2. Public Comment - None

4. Review of the Minutes of 6/19/12

The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard report - None

5. Process Discussion (7:29)

Kevin raised two issues. First, he was concerned that, after the wide-ranging discussion of the first reading of the Energy Chapter at the last meeting, Michael was not left with good direction on what course to take. Second, given the proportion of that discussion involved with what was or was not appropriate to include in the Town Plan, he thought it would be good for the commission to discuss the sequence of review for each chapter (Characterize, 1st Reading, 2nd Reading, and so on).

Michael said he was indeed a bit confused at the end of the meeting, and that it helped to read the draft minutes afterward, but that he would also appreciate having written comments from Liora and Terry, who had made the most comments and suggested the biggest changes to his draft. Written comments would help him undertake his rewrite. He didn't need to have every copy edit specified, only the major points. Michael said he thought that having comments in writing would be very useful for all of the chapters. Liora said that we shouldn't favor written comments in lieu of discussion. There was a discussion about open meeting laws, but Dean pointed out that this would be a presentation of comments that had already been discussed, and that no votes or approvals were being made about the written set of comments. They were similar to having a phone conversation to get clarification of something said at a previous meeting and to the work that a working group performs when they hash out language to present to the next meeting. Kevin suggested that anyone who felt they needed written comments should ask for them by the end of the meeting, rather than assume the speaker would automatically send all comments in writing.

Regarding Kevin's second concern, it was the sense of the meeting that Michael had inadvertently missed the first step, Characterization. Liora said this was similar to an outlining step and that once these points had been agreed upon, the rest was a matter of filling in details - sometimes difficult details to work out to everyone's approval, but still much easier to achieve since the group already had an idea of what was going to happen. Kevin agreed that the Characterization stage was the conceptualization stage for what needed changing: table data, sections to update, delete, or add, references to other chapters, and so on. It answers the question, "In principle, what needs to change here?"

6. Town Plan (7:55)

a. Land Use Partial (2nd read) Liora - Liora handed out printed copy of the draft sections she had sent via email on 7/17, then went through the highlighted areas to explain what had been changed and what still needed changing. An important note was that she will need to review the land use text beside the other chapters to make sure they were in sync. That review would have to wait until the other chapters were completed. The table data still wasn't fully updated and she would do that by the next reading.

The district descriptions had been updated to match what was in the new Zoning Bylaw; however, she is now asking if they are still correct. They reflect the current state, but do they reflect our forward thinking for the future? Based on the feedback received at the open houses, she sees no reason to change. Dean asked about multi-unit dwellings (such as apartment buildings) and whether they might be something we need to permit more easily in order to accommodate a growing population without losing open space or creating a sprawl of individual dwellings. Liora remarked that the current Town Plan and Zoning Bylaw don't encourage multi-unit dwellings, and Michael wondered if that sentiment was changing, based on the report of the Thetford Senior and Affordable Housing Committee. Kevin pointed out that multi-unit dwellings [note: these are dwellings with three or more units] are a conditional use in all districts; they must meet density requirements, but are also eligible for density bonuses under the Planned Unit Development process. There was a brief discussion of how planning or zoning could streamline the process for multi-unit dwellings, if that was a desire of the town. Michael suggested that large, older homes could be remodeled to be more energy efficient and include several units, instead of breaking up the original lot and building separate dwellings.

Liora said she would work on changes to the Residential Development Plan section in the second half of the chapter ("The Future"). The other sections of "The Future" include Land Capability, Natural Resource and Open Space Protection Plan, and Business Development Plan, and they must wait until their related chapters are farther along. Kevin asked about the suggestions made by the Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) in their review of the plan; specifically, their suggestion that all land use areas be named and described. He said he didn't think it made sense for Thetford. Liora suggested that everyone read that document to review TRORC's suggestions for all chapters and be ready to discuss them. Kevin said he would resend the digital document to make sure everyone had it.

Dean brought up the suggestion from TRORC that some areas of town be designated as "hamlets" instead of Village or Rural Residential. There was a long discussion about whether such a designation was needed in Thetford. It would permit a middle level of development: areas

where the density was similar to a village district but with business/commercial development more similar to our rural district. Dean wondered if this would be another way to allow population growth in controlled areas without creating sprawl in the rest of the town. Kevin noted that TRORC was recommending that Union Village and North Thetford be re-designated as hamlets, since they no longer have stores, schools, and other village-type assets. The sense of the meeting was that Thetford would be better served by encouraging regrowth in these shrinking villages, giving service business an excuse to move back in, rather than creating other density pockets without services scattered throughout the town.

Liora asked if the Thetford Hill village district should be adjusted so that the interstate exit is no longer in the village. This would discourage commercial development around the exit, which town sentiment seems definitely against. The boundary would be moved West on Route 113, putting the entire exit in the Rural Residential district. She will put this into the next draft for review. Such suggestions would go into the Recommendations table at the end of the chapter.

Michael started a brief discussion of GIS mapping systems, which the Selectboard have mentioned as a tool that might be useful to the Zoning Administrator and Development Review Board. Michael said that it could clarify details such as slope and wet areas on a lot being considered for development. Liora said such a system could be used as a tool for inventorying natural resources and areas such as wetlands. There was no clear sense that they needed to be mentioned in the Town Plan.

b. Education (Characterize) Terry - Terry was absent so this was skipped.

c. Transportation (2nd Read) Patrick (8:56) - Patrick reported that he had had a very difficult time finding all of the data for the tables, mainly because many of the items were reported differently in each year's Town Report. The good news is that he has managed to get the data; the bad news is that he wasn't able to complete his 2nd draft. He will continue to work on the Goals, Policies, and Recommendations and will have the draft ready to distribute by the weekend, to discuss at the next meeting (8/7).

7. Old Business (8:59)

Tara Bamford made a request for a correction to the minutes of the June 5 meeting. She did not send Kevin a memo regarding nominations for a Thetford resident to join the Upper Valley River Subcommittee of the regional commission. Kevin confirmed that that memo came directly from the regional commission. Because this is not a substantive point of information, the commissioners agreed that it was not necessary to reopen, change, and re-approve the minutes for the 6/5 meeting. Instead, this note in the 7/31 minutes will serve as the correction.

8. New Business (9:05)

a. Kevin reported that Terry would not be able to take on the task of consolidating and maintaining the database of comments collected at open houses, hearings, via email, etc. After some discussion, Dean said he would take it on as part of his recording duties. It doesn't seem like it would take up a lot of time after the initial set up. If it does start to strain the budget, we will reconsider the problem. Approved by acclamation.

b. Kevin asked everyone to be careful to stick to the approved terminology of Goals, Policies, and Recommendations

c. Kevin said he will not be in town for the next meeting, which is on Tuesday, August 7. Patrick will chair the meeting; Kevin will distribute the agenda and the revised timeline. Kevin will give the key to Patrick at the end of this meeting, to avoid a repeat of the scramble the last time Kevin was away.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission