

Thetford Planning Commission
October 2, 2012 – APPROVED Minutes

Present: Kevin O'Hara, Patrick Kearney, Liora Alschuler, Liz Ryan Cole, Dean Whitlock
(Recording Clerk)

Absent: Patricia Norton, Michael Schunk

Guests: None

(Numbers below refer to agenda items)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:21 p.m.

2. Public Comment: None

3. Review of the Minutes of 9/18/12

Liz began a discussion about the length of the minutes, concerned that people reading the Thetford listserv would skip over long minutes. She said they were the most detailed minutes she had seen from any organization that she had belonged to. The clerk noted that, at the request of the previous commissioners, he was already summarizing much more than he had been when he first took on the job. He had received one or two emails from people who read the minutes online but had no idea how many actually did. Kevin said he had received a few similar comments. The sense of the meeting was that the minutes being recorded did a good job of capturing the business discussed at each meeting, and that it was easy enough to scroll past them on the listserv.

Kevin O'Hara proposed one substantial change to the draft minutes, regarding a comment he had made. There was a brief discussion of the extent of the change, and he explained how it was a better description of his meaning in the longer conversation that had taken place. The others who had been present then agreed. The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard report - None

5. Discussion – Comment Capture Documents: where, who, access

Dean reported that he had sent pdf copies of all available capture documents to Tig Tillinghast, and had then met with Tig on 10/1 to learn how to post them on the town web site. This included comments from the 2007 Town Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, the Communications Bylaw, the Flood Plain Regulation, and the four open houses: general issues, village future, rural residential, and energy. These are now all listed on the Planning section of the web site (and could show up automatically on the Documents page if we wanted). Dean noted that the minutes could also be listed there, if the commissioners felt it would help get more people to read them. Liz asked Dean to please post the original .doc versions of the open house comments to the Planning Commission listserv. She also asked Kevin to send her a .doc version of the 2007 Town

Plan. There was a brief discussion of file formats and versions of MS Word. Kevin said he would check to see if the town had a group license for Word.

6. Town Plan

a. Regional Relationships and Implementation – First Read (Patrick): Patrick referred to the draft Regional Relationships chapter he had emailed on 9/28. He went over the few changes in formatting and language he had made since the characterization draft. He reported he had also read over the current Lyme Town Master Plan, but still needed to check with the regional planning commission (TRORC) about the appropriateness of including out-of-state relationships. He had also added a reference to the regional plan and the statement that their recommendations regarding the 2007 Thetford Town Plan would be considered for inclusion. There was a long discussion about how best to describe any conflicts between the regional plan and Thetford's Town Plan. Dean noted that any final wording in this chapter would depend on which TRORC recommendations had been included in the final drafts of all the other chapters. Patrick noted that the current statement regarding the general agreement of Thetford's Town Plan with those of the abutting towns might be too general. For example, the new Norwich Town Plan designates their portion of Union Village as a Hamlet, a land-use district created in the most recent regional plan and being recommended by TRORC. Thetford's portion of Union Village is designated as a Village, and the commission, as discussed in previous meetings, does not intend to adopt the use of the Hamlet district definition. Kevin noted that we need to determine how Norwich defines the Hamlet district to see if there is actually a conflict. There could be differences, but they do not necessarily indicate a conflict.

Switching to the Implementation Chapter, Patrick pointed out that he had added a paragraph about Act 250, using language directly from the UVM Extension Service. Liz asked how Thetford's Master Plan is viewed and used when people interpret the Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulation. Kevin pointed out the state law requires zoning to be brought into accordance with the Town Plan. There was a discussion of legal tests where lack of clarity in zoning regulations might cause people to look to the Town Plan for clarification; for example, the opposed subdivision on Gary Road a few years past. Liz asked how content the commission and townspeople were with the current Town Plan: Are we considering major changes, or just tinkering with a few details? Kevin said there were several issues not addressed in the new Zoning Bylaw because they hadn't been addressed in the 2007 Town Plan. The same was true for the Telecommunications Bylaw and Flood Plain Regulations. These will now be addressed in the rewrite of the plan, so there will be some noticeable changes. There was further discussion of the process of hearings and adoption by the Selectboard (rather than hearings followed by a town-wide vote) and of the petition process citizens can take to ask the Selectboard to reconsider specific items in the Zoning Bylaw.

b. (8:50) Scenic Resources - First Read (Liora): Liora said she wasn't ready to present yet. She said she was under a great deal of time pressure at work, which everyone acknowledged. Patrick volunteered to take on the Scenic Resources Chapter, since his other chapters were relatively short and very close to final drafts. Liora said she would be able to continue with the Land Use Chapter. There was a brief discussion of the continuing need to recruit new members.

c. (8:55) Natural Resources – Second Read (Patricia): In Patricia’s absence, Patrick reminded everyone to send her comments on the current draft. Kevin reported that he had discussed the length of the chapter with Patricia, and they both felt the current draft was too long. Their feeling was that the text tried too much to educate people about natural resource issues, rather than focusing on issues specific to Thetford. Patricia will be looking at a number of specific areas that Kevin suggested could be trimmed. She will be present at the next meeting, hopefully with a shorter draft, but everyone should make an effort to send their comments to her.

7. Old Business (9:00)

a. The election of a Vice Chairperson was postponed until the next meeting due to the absence of two potential candidates. Kevin overruled certain members who felt a quick nomination and election in absentia would be the most efficient course.

b. Patricia has arranged for the 11/6 meeting to take place downstairs at Latham Library. Please remember to vote before coming to the meeting.

The 10/16 meeting will take place at the Town Hall, but in the Vault. Liora and Dean both reported that they will be absent from that meeting.

c. Kevin reviewed the timeline. Liz reported that she had received all of Terry Longo’s information for the Historical Resources Chapter, which is on the timeline for the next meeting. The Education Chapter was moved back by one meeting.

d. Liora expressed concern that the commission had been lacking any formal contact with the Selectboard for several months. She felt the commission should work with them to redevelop more regular contact. Kevin noted that Donn Downey, our liaison, has said he would rather be asked to attend specific meetings when there are issues that need Selectboard input, rather than come to all meetings. Kevin will ask Donn if he is available to attend the 11/20 meeting.

8. New Business (9:21)

Kevin asked the commissioners to let him know if they were interested in attending any of the workshops/seminars being offered by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. December 5 is planning oriented. He also brought up a possible meeting/presentation with the Passive House Alliance, which sent a flyer offering to meeting with town groups. The commissioners expressed interest in joining with other town committees for such an event. Kevin will look into it.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission