

**Thetford Planning Commission  
December 18, 2012 – APPROVED Minutes**

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

Absent: Liz Ryan Cole

Guests: Wayne Parks (all: 7:17-8:55)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

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

2. Public Comment: None

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

The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard report: None

5. Town Plan (7:38)

a. Land Use – Future 2nd Read (Liora): Liora referred to the draft she had emailed on 12/17. She explained that, in order to remove the many change tracking comments and make the document easier to read, she had accepted all of the suggested changes from the previous discussions except one, which she felt needed more discussion. She has a hard copy of the draft, with the changes redlined in case anyone would like to refer to the change history. She said she also had provided copies with and without change tracking to Roberta Howard, who had asked at the last meeting to be kept updated. Wayne Parks had a copy printed from her email.

Liora reported that she had still not updated all of the data tables. She then went over the highlighted changes (other than copy editing) that she had made since the last discussion. The first major change was in the section on the Flood Hazard Area Bylaw, which she had updated with language from the current version of the bylaw.

The next major change, in the section on The Future: Land Capability, was the addition of stronger language regarding creation of new zoning districts, which now states: "...This plan does not endorse development of new zoning districts, rather, it recognizes the need for protection of special areas such as significant wildlife habitat and agricultural land based on defined standards." She explained that the change was based on discussions about creating new districts that happened during the drafting of the new Zoning Bylaw and the lack of any broad support for the idea from the townspeople. There was a long discussion of what standards would be used. Liora and Kevin explained that these would be the standards found in the new Zoning Bylaw and in the Subdivision Regulations currently being updated. Patricia asked how this would affect development of prime agricultural land, which she had seen broken up by

development in West Virginia. Wayne raised a concern about limiting a farmer's ability to subdivide his or her farm and sell it for the best value. The discussion compared creating a new district, which would outline specific areas on the town map and set specific limits on development within those areas, with using standards within a single Rural Residential district, which allowed more flexibility and less arbitrariness regarding the extremely varied soil types and topography in our town. Liora described it as the difference between the stick (district, with hard-and-fast limits in a fixed area) and the carrot (standards, which are more flexible and provide developers with incentives to increase density by leaving open space, etc.). Dean suggested changing the word "development" to "create" or "designate" (as in "... does not endorse creation of new zoning districts...") in order to avoid confusion with the more common meaning of "development of land by building on it."

Wayne asked where the definition of the Rural Residential District had come from. Liora explained it was taken verbatim from the current Zoning Bylaw. Wayne expressed disapproval with the phrase "...with clusters of high density..." Liora pointed out that the definition specifies "average low density...primarily a district of open space, farms, residences and woodlands..." Dean noted that the zoning standards for planned unit developments provide density incentives for leaving open space by clustering homes a little closer together. Kevin added that this was already the reality of development in the Rural Residential district.

Wayne asked about the final recommendation at the end of the chapter: 5. Revise village district boundary for Thetford Hill to exclude the Interstate intersection. He thought that the boundary didn't reach that far now. Liora explained that it did go to the entrance/exit on the west side of I-91, which would allow village type development density there. There was a discussion of the vocal opposition to development there during the drafting of the current Town Plan, which resulted in some of the land around the intersection being put into conservation easements. Moving the boundary back up the hill would help avoid development.

Wayne provided Liora with 2011 data for the housing chapter tables, which he had received from the zoning administrator's assistant. Michael will also be able to use it.

Liora pointed out a new paragraph on Energy, which she had added after hearing a presentation about new energy conservation programs in Germany. She said it made her realize that energy use was also a land use issue, affecting both natural resource use and business development, and should be mentioned. She also noted that she had added a mention in the Business Development Plan section of the significant recent growth in employment opportunities due to the rising demand for locally grown and processed food.

Wayne suggested that there be a statement encouraging the growth of home businesses. Patricia added that high speed internet access was an issue for many home businesses and was needed to attract young people to stay in the town. Michael suggested that integrating small home businesses into the villages should be incorporated into one of the Goals in the chapter.

Michael also suggested that Recommendation 3 be altered to include all natural resources, not just wildlife, and that the information collected be used to create detailed resource maps of the town, which would be very helpful to the Development Review Board in making decisions about the best places to build or not build. This ties with section 6.04 in the Zoning Bylaw, which encourages protection of habitat, forest resources, and agricultural land.

Patricia noted that Goal 3 speaks of preserving Thetford's villages, and suggested that Liora change that to "...preserve and enliven..." There was a brief discussion about the need to attract young people and sustain a multi-generational population, not only to preserve a historical development pattern.

Wayne asked about Recommendation 4: Do not improve or create roads that open up inaccessible parts of the Town. He worried that this would discourage the road crew from normal maintenance, particularly of ditches and culverts, so that roadside property and wetlands did not become eroded or silted up. Liora replied that it was intended to deter the town from upgrading existing roads to a higher classification and from creating new roads, so that inaccessible areas would be preserved.

b. Energy Chapter - Review (Michael, 8:45): Michael said he had met with the Energy Committee to present this draft of the chapter for review. He asked them to look at ways to reduce the length of the chapter and also to endorse the chapter, since it contains their goals and data. He gave them a deadline of mid January (their next meeting). Dean raised a concern that there was too much educational material about energy issues rather than focussing on issues specific to the town's use of energy. He said he was also concerned that the Energy Committee might be upset if the chapter was edited after they had endorsed it. Kevin said he wasn't concerned about editing it further. The sense of the meeting was that the educational material did need to be reduced, though with references to outside sources that readers could use to get more information.

Michael said that he had given the committee the definitions of Goal, Policy, and Recommendation that were being used in drafting the chapters, and that the committee members were very pleased about the way that these were actionable items with a clear indication of which town bodies were responsible for each item. The Energy Committee asked to see the drafts of the other chapters in the Town Plan so they could check the cross references. However, the planning commission members felt that many of the chapters were not far enough along in the rewrite process for public viewing yet. They would prefer to wait until a complete draft Town Plan was ready. Meanwhile, Michael should tell the Energy Committee members to feel free to ask address questions to the Planning Commissioners about specific cross references.

Wayne Parks left the meeting (9:55).

Patricia started a discussion about how acronyms should be defined and listed in the Town Plan, which led to a brief discussion of formatting standards in general. As with the Zoning Bylaw, the Planning Commission will probably use a professional editor to copy edit and format the final draft and insure consistency in such matters. Meanwhile, Patricia said she would keep a list of style issues that will need to be addressed (along with a list of acronyms).

Patricia told Michael that Thetford Elementary School was considering the feasibility of installing a solar array. He said he would contact them for more information. Michael collected other comments about cross references, footnotes, and wording that needed clarification.

6. Old Business (9:17)

a. Meeting at Post Mills Church on 1/29/13 to discuss the recommendation from the Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission to make the Post Mills Village District smaller - Kevin reported that TRORC had first indicated it was willing to come to the meeting and explain their position to residents, but then sent a second message saying they would rather meet and discuss all of their recommendations with the Planning Commission and Selectboard before holding any community meeting. The commissioners agreed that it was important to have a TRORC representative at the Post Mills meeting not only to explain their position but also to hear the reactions from the residents. Kevin will contact TRORC and the members of the Selectboard to see if they can attend the next Planning Commission meeting, on 1/15.

7. New Business (9:27)

a. Annual Report - Kevin reported he had received a memo from the Town Clerk requesting a report for the Town Report by January 7. Dean said he would write a draft, send it to the members for comment, and then incorporate their comments into a final draft to send to the Town Clerk.

b. Kevin went over the timeline for the chapters to discuss at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission