

Thetford Planning Commission
June 4, 2013 – APPROVED Minutes

Present: Kevin O’Hara, Patrick Kearney, Patricia Norton, Liz Ryan Cole (7:22), Michael Schunk, Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: None

Guests: Stuart Rogers

(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 5/21/13

The minutes were accepted as corrected.

4. Selectboard report: Stuart Rogers joined the meeting. He had nothing new to report from the Selectboard regarding planning. He was present in his role as liaison to listen and take part.

5. Town Plan

a. Land Use. Patricia reported that she and Liora were not able to meet to discuss the chapter, so there was nothing new to report.

b. Utilities, Facilities, and Services (7:20). Kevin handed out hard copies of the new revision to those who needed them. He had emailed the file earlier in the day. He said he wanted to focus on the Goals, Policies, and Recommendations, but first asked if anyone had items in the narrative sections that they wished to discuss. Patricia brought up the change in the name of the Highway Department to be the Public Works Department. She commented that this was more than a name change; the department had also been restructured. She also reported that the North Thetford Library had been reopened, with hours on one day of the week.

Liz joined the meeting.

Kevin noted that he was still working on the list of cemeteries and that it was supposed to be a list of all cemeteries in the town, not only those owned by the town. Stuart asked him to add Jackman Cemetery on Jackson Brook Road. There was a brief discussion of which cemeteries were owned by churches, by the town, and by private individuals.

Other items discussed included wording referring to the “small” size of the town (population or area?) when it might be better to refer to its rural character; medical centers in town, in neighboring towns, and in the region; cross references to the education chapter regarding daycare and preschool; the Emergency Management Director and the Fire Chief (no

longer the same person); the emergency shelter being a regional shelter; and removing statements of opinion inappropriately expressed as facts.

Arriving at the Goals, Policies, and Recommendations, Dean suggested that there be a cross reference to the Energy Chapter in the items relating to upgrading town facilities to meet the recommendations of the recently completed energy audits.

There was a discussion about setting target dates or priorities on the items relating to scheduled maintenance and the search for a new location for the town garage and recycling center. There was a suggestion to add more detail about these items in the narrative section, particularly regarding the need for moving the facilities and the idea of putting them in a single location. Stuart said he would ask the selectboard about the current priorities for these items and others that were important but perhaps not so urgent; for example, a town forestry plan.

The need to plan for cemetery expansion was discussed. The wording should reflect that the expansion is to ensure having adequate space for future burials. The cemetery list should indicate which are already full, as well as who owns them.

There was an extended discussion about the goals relating to water resources, which should be cross-referenced to the Natural Resources chapter. Here, the focus is on maintaining reliable sources of potable drinking water by not polluting the aquifers in the town, and also on maintaining reliable sources of water (quantity and quality) for agriculture, fire-fighting, and other community needs. How important is water conservation in our region? Droughts aren't frequent but do occur. There should be a recommendation to create a future water supply plan for each village.

There was a brief discussion of the possibility of allowing the installation of composting toilets in the town. Currently, every dwelling must have a complete septic system, even if the dwelling has a composting toilet. A gray-water system combined with composting toilet is not allowed. The state regulates and approves all septic systems, so the town probably cannot change the current situation.

There was a discussion of recommending a study of the feasibility of curbside pickup of recyclables and trash.

The recommendation in the current plan to locate suitable sites for land-based disposal of septage can be removed based on the letter from the Zoning Administrator regarding this topic.

The recommendation in the current plan regarding educational programs by the police emphasizing highway, pedestrian, and bicycle safety sparked a discussion about the need to push harder for adding bicycle lanes to all paved roads when they are repaved.

The recommendation about developing an emergency plan and shelter can be removed since that has been done.

There was a discussion about the need to readdress driveway standards at this time since the standards in the Zoning Bylaw do not comply with the recommendations of at least one of the emergency services leaders in town.

The remaining items will be discussed at a future meeting.

c. Introduction (9:10): Patrick said he wrote his proposed introduction to have its own voice. He said he would remove most of the current forward and incorporate the remaining parts (mostly acknowledgements) into the new introduction. He would also describe the process of

drafting and approving the Town Plan and would indicate where it could be found on the town's web site. The response to his draft was very positive, with a few minor suggestions. There was a brief discussion of the effect planning has on actual development, sparked by Liz who wondered what effect, if any, a Town Plan would have had on the Elizabeth Mine situation had there been planning back in the early 1800s. Dean said that question could be applied to more recent problems, such as the closing and capping of the Post Mills landfill. Liz said it is possible that a town plan can help minimize problems that could be avoided by planning and educating the residents about the plan.

d. Process for bringing draft chapters forward for wider review (9:20) - Due to the late hour, this item was tabled. Dean suggested making it the first item in the Town Plan discussion at the next meeting. There was a brief review of the items for the next agenda.

6. Old Business - None.

7. New Business - Kevin reported that the Vermont Land Trust had requested a letter from the Planning Commission in support of putting the Post Mills property of Tim and Janet Taylor (the Crossroad Farm property) into a conservation easement. For that to proceed, the VLT must have this letter. Dean volunteered to write the letter, with Patrick as his proofreader.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission