

**Thetford Planning Commission**  
**August 20, 2013 – APPROVED Minutes**

Present: Kevin O’Hara, Patrick Kearney, Patricia Norton, Liz Ryan Cole (7:27), Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: Michael Schunk

Guests: Stuart Rogers (7:29)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.
2. Public Comment: None
3. Review of the Minutes of 8/6/13: The minutes were accepted as amended.
4. Selectboard report: None
5. Town Plan
  - a. Response to published chapters - None of the members has received any comments yet. Dean said he will check with Scott Hesser about getting reports on page hits and downloads.
  - b. Historic Resources - Skipped until Liz’s arrival.
  - c. Land Use - Patricia emailed the latest revision on August 8/19. She reported that she had incorporated all of the changes suggested at the previous meeting, along with new data and narrative she had found or written based on the suggestions. The commissioners proceeded to review the changes. Some were accepted as is. There were several points of new or continued discussion:

There was a long discussion about the census graphs, which show how Thetford’s population has grown in relation to neighboring towns and Orange County as a whole. The members agreed that it was a useful addition, as was Patricia’s narrative analysis of the growth trends.

Liz and Stuart joined the meeting.

Patricia reported that she was still waiting to hear from the Listers regarding the data in Table 1, Taxable Property by Type, which shows a striking shift from Vacation to Residential properties between 1997 and 2007. This is partly due to a change in VT law redefining what can be called a vacation home. She wants to confirm her analysis of this change. There was a long
  - d. Utilities/Facilities/Services - Kevin reported that he had not yet received a reply from the cemetery commissioners so had nothing new to report on this chapter.

discussion of the data and analysis for this table and for Tables 2 and 3 (Approved Subdivisions and Zoning Permits, respectively).

There was a discussion of how the development review process functions at the local level, as expressed in the second paragraph under Natural Resources and Open Space Protection, which acknowledges that our land use tools, both local and state, provide limited protection from development in environmentally sensitive areas, either due to the scope of the tools (our developments tend to be too small to fall under the state's Act 250 regulations) or due to a lack of resources to monitor and enforce all of the regulations. We put great trust in the good intentions of the landowners and developers, who generally act in accordance with that trust. The new wording was considered to be an appropriate description of the situation.

Liz raised a question regarding the trend statewide to encourage mixed use development for reasons that included concentrating development so people would be able to walk to work and shop. Dean said that the current version of the Zoning Bylaw encourages mixed use in the Village and Community Business districts.

The new section introducing Energy issues and cross-referencing the Energy Chapter was accepted as is.

Patricia reported that, according to the regional planning commission, an economic development plan was a required component of the Town Plan, and the Business Development Plan serves that purpose. With that settled, she had added some ideas for future direction along those lines. The members suggested a few changes, and Kevin suggested that she contact Niko Horster of the Pompanoosuc Agricultural Society, which is promoting development of local, agricultural based businesses in the region.

The review moved to the Goals, Policies, and Recommendations, which all agreed were in much better shape. There was a long discussion about encouraging the creation of jobs that pay a living wage that would allow the workers to live in Thetford. In Vermont, calculations of living wage are made at the county level, which results in a lower than needed wage for Thetford.

Two policies regarding environmental impact of business development were combined into a single statement.

There was a brief discussion of the town's role in supporting the expansion of broadband service throughout the town. Stuart noted that, in Vermont, towns are not allowed to serve as utilities, so the town cannot provide broadband service itself.

Liz asked about language encouraging the concentration of development in the villages in order to encourage "walkability". She suggested it say "in or near village districts," generating a brief discussion of the lot size allowed in villages and if the villages were close to being built out. Dean noted that the current zoning allowed a duplex, each with an accessory dwelling unit, on every village lot (approximately 1/2 acre) so, technically at least, there was room for quite a few more residents in every village.

There was renewed discussion about the new maps showing population growth. The Orange County line on the graph showing population growth in absolute numbers led to some confusion because not all of the towns in Orange County are on the graph, while several towns not in Orange County are. Patricia will remove it on this graph; however, it was appropriate to include on the graph showing growth as a percentage, which more clearly showed how Thetford's population surged in the 1960s and '70s relative to Orange County.

b. Historical Resources (8:47) - Liz emailed the latest revision earlier on the 20th. She noted that there was a new quote at the start of the chapter and that she had amassed other candidates for that spot. There were only a few changes to discuss, most of which were modified slightly or accepted as is.

There was a long discussion of the role of the Town Plan in guiding zoning to protect the Thetford Hill Historic District, centered around the appearance of the new gym at Thetford Academy. This included a short but related discussion of one of the recommendations, which suggested that similar design districts be considered (or reconsidered) for Thetford Center and Post Mills. Dean noted that there hadn't been much support for this idea when it was attempted in Thetford Center five or ten years ago.

There was also a discussion of how or whether a complete survey of the significant historic structures in the town would be useful. Dean suggested Liz speak with Martha Howard of the Historical Society to make sure such a list didn't already exist. The question remained, how would such a list be used?

Kevin went over the schedule of chapters to review for the next two meetings. It was generally agreed that both Land Use and Historic Resources were very close to being ready to add to the list of public documents ready for review on the Planning website page.

6. Old Business - None

7. New Business: None

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission