

Thetford Planning Commission
September 3, 2013 – APPROVED Minutes

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

Absent: Michael Schunk

Guests: Stuart Rogers, Dale Gephart (7:35)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:18 p.m.
2. Public Comment: None
3. Review of the Minutes of 8/20/13: The minutes were accepted as amended.
4. Selectboard report (and 5a.)

Stuart reported that the select board members were wondering if there would be a cover page for each of the draft chapters or the entire draft plan that listed all of the major changes that had been made. There was a long discussion of how that might be done. Dean asked if the report prepared for the draft Zoning Bylaw was the type of thing they needed, but Kevin said it is not required for the Town Plan to have such a report. Patrick remarked that there had been so many changes it would be like writing the Town Plan twice. All agreed that it would be hard to decide which changes to consider as “major” and which to leave out, since it would depend on each person’s major concerns. There was also general agreement that people should look at this as the plan going forward and not be so concerned with comparing it to the old plan, much of which had been implemented or found to be no longer applicable due to changing laws, new knowledge, etc. Liz suggested that there be an introductory statement directing readers to look first at the Goals, Policies, and Recommendations at the end of each chapter and then read the narrative for any items that raised concern. All agreed that the narrative was necessary to understand the reasoning behind each of the Goals, Policies, and Recommendations. Liz will prepare a statement for the introduction. When the text is ready, Dean will put it on the web page as part of the introduction to the list of draft chapters that can be downloaded. Dean will also make it clear on the web page that the current plan, adopted in 2012, is the 2007 plan readopted as is to allow more time to complete the next plan.

Stuart asked if the commission had a deadline for completing the draft plan. Kevin explained that our expectation was to have all chapters available for review by the end of this Fall and to have a second revision ready in the Spring for the next review.

Dale Gephart joined the meeting

5. Town Plan

a. See above.

b. Energy Chapter - postponed due to absence of Michael Schunk.

c. Housing Chapter - Dale Gephart had come to represent the Senior and Affordable Housing Committee (SAH) during this part of the meeting, and also to discuss the Community Nurse Project being developed by the Thetford Elder Network (TEN). Michael, lead member on the Housing chapter, was absent, so Kevin invited Dale to discuss the Community Nurse Project. Dale wondered if the commissioners thought it was an appropriate topic for the Town Plan, and all agreed that it would be, in the Utilities, Facilities, and Services chapter. Patricia asked if having the project be a goal in the Town Plan would make it easier for TEN to get grant funding for the project, and Dale replied yes, but first TEN needed to discuss the idea more fully with townspeople to determine the actual need. He listed some local towns, including Lyme, that had a Community Nurse or Town Nurse. These are not connected with a larger health clinic outside the town and not necessarily maintained by a local church, although churches sometimes do supply part of the funding and space for an office. He said there are various funding organizations that will fund Town Nurses. The plan for Thetford would be for a part-time nurse at 1/3 FTP (full time position). Kevin noted that there would also be a tie-in to the Energy chapter, since townspeople would not be driving out of town to visit a nurse, and also because the nurse would be visiting people in their homes. It would also apply to the Transportation chapter and the senior/affordable housing project, since having a local nurse available would be part of that overall plan.

Dale reported that the senior/affordable housing project was moving ahead in East Thetford, to be situated on property West of Route 5 behind the dentist's office and the rental home across from Hugget's. He said that funding was falling into place, and that the density bonus in the new Zoning Bylaw had been a big help in making the project economically attractive to developers. The affordable housing would be priced at 1/3 of income, following state guidelines, and there would be 12 units to start. Dale will get in contact with Michael to bring him up to date on this project. Kevin will notify Dale when Housing is again on the agenda.

Dale left the meeting.

d. Utilities/Facilities/Services (7:58)- Kevin reported that he had received the information he needed to complete the cemetery table. He had also incorporated all of the suggested changes from the last discussion of the chapter. The commissioners went over the chapter again to review the current revision. Patricia suggested that the title of the chapter be changed so that the order of topics matched the order in which they were presented in the narrative: Facilities, Services, and Utilities. She also suggested a number of small copy edits to clarify the text and remove redundancies.

There was a discussion over this statement in the section on churches: "Development in Thetford's village areas should be sensitive, so as not to visually compromise the setting of

Thetford's churches.” There was a general consensus that this belonged either in the Land Use, Historic Resources, or Scenic Resources chapter (if not all three) in the context of protecting the character of the villages. Liz referred to a book about Vermont Townscapes, in the Latham Library, that addressed the issue and also had a photo of Thetford Hill as a prime example of a classic Vermont villagescape. She will see about rewording the statement as a policy for one of her chapters.

Liz wondered if, given that the town’s cemeteries were all full or running out of room, the Town Plan shouldn’t encourage people to consider burial on their own land. This led to a long discussion about whether that was still legal. Patricia found the applicable statute online and reported that, yes, it was legal to bury relatives on one’s own land as long as it wouldn’t cause public health issues. Towns have the right to pass ordinances controlling the practice but could not outlaw it. Zoning standards such as setbacks, for example, could apply. In the end, the members agreed that, since the statute protected private burial, there was no need to mention it in the Town Plan.

The section on Public Gathering Places has a list of historic buildings that have been and are still being used as such. Liz suggested that the language there on using but not visually altering the buildings be adapted into a policy.

The utilities section mentions that there are three water districts in North Thetford. Some clarification is needed about one district being split into two districts (North Village and South Village) in 1995. Is the historical reference needed? Do we need to clarify where the dividing lines are between the districts?

Dean asked if the dam on Lake Fairlee should be mentioned in this chapter. Although it is a private dam, Thetford is involved in a project to repair and maintain it in conjunction with the state and the other two towns bordering Lake Fairlee. Patricia said it was in the Natural Resources chapter and that she would look into the current status of that project.

There were brief discussions of the number of full-time officers on the police force; septage disposal by ground spraying versus hauling to Hanover; and the status of the Thetford Hill State Park.

Returning briefly to the topic of a Town Nurse, Kevin said he will not add any language yet; instead, he’ll wait to get more information from Dale Gephart and TEN as the project moves ahead. All agreed that this chapter would be the right place to discuss it and to support it with a goal and recommendation.

6. Old Business

a. Dean read a notice in the regional planning commission newsletter regarding newly passed Act 16, the Municipal and Regional Flood Resilience Plan Legislation 2013. It requires towns to include a section on flood resiliency in any Town Plans adopted after July 1, 2014. Patrick said he would take a stab at writing the first draft of a section or to include in the plan. There is already narrative on flood plains and alluvial erosion in the Natural Resources chapter. He will contact the regional commission and get copies of what other towns have written. Stuart said he would help.

b. Dean also had a memo from the regional commission about a public meeting of the newly formed Vermont Lake Shoreland Protection Commission, to take place the Lake Morey

Inn on Thursday, September 12 at 6:00 p.m. Patrick said Li Shen, chair of the Conservation Commission, had received the memo and was hoping to attend.

7. New Business: None

The meeting was adjourned at 9:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission