

Thetford Planning Commission
October 1, 2013 – APPROVED Minutes

Present: Kevin O’Hara, Patrick Kearney, Patricia Norton, Liz Ryan Cole (7:45), Michael Schunk, Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: None

Guests: Stuart Rogers, Mark McMahon (7:38-8:42)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m.
2. Public Comment: None
3. Review of the Minutes of 9/17/13: The minutes were accepted as amended.
4. Selectboard report: None

5. Town Plan

(Because Liz was running late, item b was taken up first.)

b. Housing – Michael handed out hard copies of the new revision of the Housing Chapter. He reported that the new revision involved a reorganization of the chapter narrative according to type of house: Single-family homes, rental housing, and Elderly housing. He said he thinks the demographic data may need more expansion regarding the issues of affordability and incomes. He called attention to an addition on page 1 describing two community objectives. There was a long discussion of how these objectives should be worded.

Mark McMahon joined the meeting and took part in the discussion.

Michael pointed out the pie chart types of housing in the town, which showed that only 1% of housing available in town is rental housing. (16% of housing is occupied rentals.) This is a very small proportion and greatly limits the amount of affordable housing available in the town.

Liz joined the meeting.

Mark McMahon, representing the Senior and Affordable Housing Committee (SAHC), reviewed the current process underway to obtain sponsorship and funding for a Senior and Affordable Housing project in East Thetford. SAHC is working with the Twin Pines Housing Trust to secure funding. Mark said that the density bonuses for affordable housing that were adding to the current Zoning Bylaw were a terrific help in making the project possible.

Michael asked the commissioners to review the chapter closely and provide comments. He will send a new revision via the listserv and will also get copies to the SAHC. He asked them to focus on recommendations, where he thought there were many opportunities to make additions.

Patricia asked Mark if, during SAHCs review of other senior/affordable housing projects around the state, they saw any towns that were good examples for Thetford to follow by studying

their town plans and zoning. Mark replied that Wells River and Norwich were both good examples. Mark explained that SAHC was looking first at senior housing and then at affordability, so that some units would be priced at market value in order to support a few units priced according to the affordability formula (percent of income). These would be open to young people and young families, too, supporting diversity and the schools in town. SAHC is also looking at designs for smaller, more efficient units that can be built for less money. He said he would provide information to Michael about the Wells River project and others.

Before leaving, Mark shifted the topic to cemeteries and reported to Kevin, for the Facilities Chapter, that the Evergreen Cemetery Commission (which maintains the Thetford Center cemetery behind the church and town hall) had approached the town to request that it take over ownership and operation of the cemetery. The town is short of public cemetery space, so this was seen as a positive move.

Mark left the meeting.

a. Historic Resources (8:42) – Liz referred to the new revision, which she had emailed to the listserv just prior to the meeting. She started with a question about illustrations, wondering how much effort to put into finding photos, graphs, etc. There was a discussion of how that would effect printing costs. Dean point out that, since this was being printed digitally, any color printing would cost more, even if it was just one graphic. In the current Town Plan, all of the pages were printed in black and white except the cover and the maps at the end. If the new Town Plan is printed the same way, the number of photos etc. won't affect the cost.

Liz went through the current narrative and goals, policies, and recommendations collecting comments. There was a discussion of priorities; for example, encouraging residents to renovate an 1820 house instead of replacing it with a newly built house that was more energy efficient or with a multi-unit dwelling that included affordable housing. The builders and architect in the group felt that an 1820 home could be altered to be as energy efficient as a newly built home, but it would be more of a challenge. The sense of the meeting was that such decisions would have to be made on a case-by-case basis. Most houses in the town are not exceptional examples of older housing styles nor do they have historic significance. Some that are significant are already protected by being listed in a national or state registry or are located in the Thetford Hill Historic Preservation District. Other structures (for example the covered bridges in town or the childhood home of Henry Wells, founder of Wells Fargo) were eligible for some form of protection. The Thetford Historical Society has suggested a short list, which is included in the recommendations. Decisions will have to be based on the Zoning Bylaws and an informed Development Review Board.

One recommendation was to create one or more Thetford Historic Quests as part of the Valley Quest. Patricia pointed out that TA teachers Joe Deffner and Steve Niederhauser had both involved their classes in creating such quests. The recommendation should be reworded to show continued support for such activities.

Other recommendations were briefly discussed. Liz said she will incorporate all of the suggested changes and then present the new revision for a final review before it is posted for broad public comment.

6. Old Business (9:16)

a. Flood resiliency. Patrick reported that he had attended the September 30 conference on climate change (Building Climate Resilient Communities in the Upper Valley, sponsored by the Upper Valley Adaptation Workgroup) and said it was one of the best run events he had ever been to. There was a great deal of information about climate change solutions being implemented in New Hampshire. He had learned a lot to incorporate into the new section on resiliency now required for town plans. He said he will type up his notes and send them via the listserv. There is another workshop scheduled in Winter 2014.

7. New Business:

Kevin reported that Dale Gephart, representing the Thetford Elder Network, would be coming to the 10/15 meeting to discuss the initiative to have a community nurse in Thetford.

The next agenda was discussed briefly. Michael reported that he had still received no response from the Energy Committee regarding their producing a shorter version of the chapter as they had suggested several months ago. After a brief discussion, Michael said he would make a few final changes to the current revision and send it around for final review.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission