

**Thetford Planning Commission
October 15, 2013 – APPROVED Minutes**

Present: Kevin O’Hara, Patricia Norton, Liz Ryan Cole (7:30), Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: Patrick Kearney, Michael Schunk

Guests: Dale Gephart (7:26-8:35), Didi Pershouse (7:28-8:35)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:26 p.m. There was no quorum so the items were open only for discussion, not for voting.

2. Public Comment: None

5. Community Health Needs Discussion with Dale Gephart

There being no other members of the public in attendance, Kevin moved immediately to this item so that Dale Gephart would not have to stay any later than necessary.

Dale explained that the Thetford Elder Network (TEN) and Ompompanoosuc Community Trust (OCT) had been researching the pros, cons, and models for a Community Nurse (or Town Nurse) for about a year. Several neighboring and regional towns have them, providing good examples of how the position is funded, administered, etc. and what sort of services the nurses offer. Dale said he wasn’t sure how the Planning Commission and Town Plan might be involved in the process but wanted to make sure the group was fully informed. He referred to some files and links he had sent in an email on October 12.

He said that data from Thetford regarding healthcare needs was difficult to obtain since residents went several different directions to find providers and those providers are not quick to provide data about who comes to them from Thetford. [Didi Pershouse joined the meeting both as a local healthcare provider and as a representative of the OCT.] Dale said that TEN has taken two relatively recent surveys (4 years ago and 1 year ago) and has data from a third, earlier survey. [Liz joined the meeting, creating a quorum.] When the data from the surveys are combined, they indicate that senior housing is a concern among the respondents. Being able to live independently was ranked as the highest need for just over half the respondents. Lack of transportation to healthcare and other services was identified as a problem. The monthly senior luncheon was identified as perhaps TEN’s most successful function. They use it for educational presentations as well as socializing and entertainment.

Dale briefly went over the current efforts of the Senior and Affordable Housing Committee to develop units and a senior center in East Thetford. They have applied for a grant and are trying to negotiate a price on an existing apartment house. To be eligible for grant funding, the apartment house would have to be priced at its appraised or assessed value. The plan would be to develop 12-15 units, depending on density bonuses available for energy efficiency, affordability, and conserving part of the land.

TEN works directly with seniors and the Town Nurse (or Community Nurse) project is under their direction. There are several different models in place in Lyme, Norwich, Strafford, and other towns in our immediate region. TEN is not itself a certified agent to provide post-treatment care to residents who come home after surgery, chemotherapy, etc., so a hospital would not notify TEN when a patient is sent home, whereas they would notify a Community Nurse. Dale stressed that the Community Nurse would serve all residents, not just seniors.

The third town organization dealing with seniors and related issues is OCT, which serves as a fiscal agent to apply for and administer grants.

One Community Nurse model is the Parish Nurse, as in Norwich and Lyme. A Parish Nurse is affiliated with a church rather than a healthcare clinic. In Norwich, this nurse serves only members of the congregation, which is large. In Lyme, the nurse serves the entire community. The parish provides an initial network of volunteers by which the nurse reaches out to townspeople. Another Community Nurse model is the Upper Valley Community Nursing Project (UVCNP). In this case, the nurse is paid not by the parish but by the community, and the network of volunteers is drawn from the entire community. Post Mills Church was planning to test the parish nurse idea but that has stalled with the death of the minister. However, given the structure of the town with its small, separate villages and multiple churches, the idea of a town-supported Community Nurse seems more appropriate.

Another model is SASH (Seniors Aging Safely at Home). This is being developed under the Affordable Care Act, through the existing Blueprint for Health in Vermont, which was originally an outreach and support program for people dealing with diabetes and other chronic diseases. With the expansion of funding and people, it is expanding its reach to more basic healthcare issues. It is based on the concept of a Medical Home for each person, where in addition to their primary care doctor, they are supported by nurse practitioners and social workers focused on prevention and follow-through. Unfortunately, there is very little communication between healthcare providers in Vermont and New Hampshire, so many Thetford residents who cross the river for healthcare would not be properly supported. A Community Nurse can provide a lot of that same type of support.

One final situation discussed was the nurse in Strafford, where the school nurse is also available to town residents free of charge for the same types of services as the students receive. She operates out of her school office for a limited number of hours each week.

Kevin said that one place in the Town Plan to discuss and make recommendations about a Community Nurse Program was Chapter 3 (Facilities, Services, and Utilities), where there was already a brief discussion of existing healthcare facilities in town and locally. He said he had marked a space to add information based on this discussion.

Didi mentioned that there were broader issues like climate change and energy sources that also affected transportation and residents' ability to get to healthcare. In some cases, a Community Nurse would connect people needing help of any kind with those who could provide it. Dale referred everyone to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (a link in his email), which listed steps towns could take to deal with these issues. He said it would be a great reference to include in the Town Plan.

Dale and Didi left the meeting.

3. Review of the Minutes of 10/1/13: The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard report: None

6. Town Plan

a. Historic Resources - Liz had emailed that evening the latest revision of the Historic Resources chapter. The group reviewed the text, making suggestions about wording, layout, and the formatting of the section on Goals, Policies, and Recommendations. It was decided to add headings, but otherwise to leave her formatting as is and resolve the differences with the other chapters after all had reached the same stage of development. Dean noted that there was no narrative in the Future section to support the Goals and suggested adding text about the pressures that new development would put on altering or removing potentially historic structures. After further consideration, Patricia recommended removing the divisions (Past, Present, Future) since the chapter was so short and the didn't support the divisions. There were additional suggestions for rearranging the paragraphs to keep discussion of structures separate from discussion of archival materials and activities of the Thetford Historical Society. Liz said she will make those changes, improve the narrative style, and provide the next revision by the next meeting.

b. Facilities, Utilities, Services (9:30) - Kevin gave a quick review of the recent changes and those still to be made. He said he will send the next revision, containing new language about septage and the Community Nurse project, by the next meeting.

7. Old Business - None.

8. New Business:

Kevin presented information about a planning seminar being offered by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns on November 19. Members who want more information should contact him before then.

There was a brief discussion of which topics would be on the next agenda: Historic Resources, Housing, and Facilities, Utilities, and Services.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission