

Thetford Planning Commission
November 19, 2013 – APPROVED Minutes

Present: Kevin O’Hara, Patrick Kearney, Michael Schunk, Patricia Norton, Liz Ryan Cole (7:34), Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: None

Guests: None

(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 Minutes from the 11/5 meeting.
The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard Report: None

5. TRORC Workshop Possibilities (7:29)

Kevin reported that the Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) has agreed to hold a workshop about planning for natural resources on January 14 in Thetford. They would invite interested people from neighboring towns as well. TRORC would like us to submit details about location and time. That night is a regular meeting night for the Conservation Committee. Kevin will discuss the workshop with the chair, Li Shen, to see if they would like to host the workshop in lieu of their meeting. He will then work out the details with TRORC.

6. Town Plan (7:32)

a. Housing - Michael referred the commissioners to the revision that he had emailed earlier that evening. He noted that the text for the section on rentals still needed work. He had made some other changes suggested via email by Liz and also incorporated the comments from the previous meeting.

Liz Ryan Cole joined the meeting.

The commissioners went down through the chapter to review Michael’s changes and the surrounding text. Michael noted that he still needed to fill in the comparative percentages for housing types in neighboring towns. There was a long discussion of the rental statistics and their implications in terms of availability and affordability of rental housing in Thetford. Michael will rewrite the section to make its assumptions and conclusions more clear.

Dean suggested that the charts and graphs for each section be moved below the first paragraph (at least) in each section so the context for the data will be more obvious to the reader.

There was a discussion about the categories of nursing and residential care facilities for elders - how they were broken down into sub-types and which were available in neighboring towns. Michael said he has been referred to two different experts on the topic and will be consulting with them soon, after which he'll rewrite that section.

Liz suggested a new goal related to encouraging the development of alternative models for housing (for example, co-housing, shared ownership, etc.). After a brief discussion of possible wording, Patrick pointed out that there should be a discussion of the topic in the narrative, which would help to explain the goal. Liz said she would draft a paragraph.

There was a discussion of accessory dwelling units. Kevin looked up and read the zoning standards, which are based on the state regulations but allow for a larger unit (up to 30% of the size of the primary residence). He noted that the state regulations require that towns allow accessory units. The sense of the meeting was that the plan should explicitly encourage their use as a way to increase the diversity of housing options. Patricia suggested changing the the goals section to be one goal specifically about encouraging diversity of housing options and then revise the other goals, about encouraging different types of housing, into policies or recommendations, as appropriate. Michael will revise with this in mind.

There was a discussion about the "undue burden on services" clause applied to rentals. It was agreed that this applied to all types of new housing development.

Patricia and Dean suggested the addition of a recommendation to encourage renovation of existing housing to meet current energy standards. There are already programs about this being run by the Energy Committee, but they felt it was important to make this explicitly a part of the Town Plan.

b. Facilities, Utilities, Services - Kevin referred the members to version 10 of the chapter, which he had emailed before the previous meeting. He noted that he had made adjustments to the sections on health services based on the commission's discussion with the Thetford Elder Network about a Community Nurse. He also submitted new language for the section on septage, authored primarily by the zoning administrator, and made a few minor changes based on comments from the last time the chapter was discussed during a meeting.

Patrick suggested moving the septage section to follow the sewage section, since they were directly related, while moving solid waste into its own section. There was a discussion about housing density in relation to a sewage treatment plant - how much density would be needed to require a plant. The general opinion was that the cost of such a plant was so high that it would take a very high density, not likely to be reached in our villages since, in all cases so far, there were ways to deal with each dwelling's sewage in an individual field or mound system.

Kevin raised a question regarding projects that were ongoing as the plan was being drafted. Patricia suggested the wording "as of now."

There was a discussion of breaking out the goals, policies, and recommendations into sections that paralleled the three main topics of the chapter (Facilities, Utilities, Services). The sense of the meeting was that such a division would be better.

The rest of the goals, policies, and recommendations will be discussed at the next meeting.

7. Old Business: None.

8. New Business: None

The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission