

**Thetford Planning Commission**  
**January 7, 2014 – APPROVED Minutes**

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

Absent: None

Guests: Jessica Eaton, Wayne Parks (7:18), Li Shen (7:22), Rick Howard and Roberta Howard (7:30), Ken Gulick (7:44)

(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 Minutes from the 12/17 meeting.  
The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard Report: None.

5. Town Plan (7:20)

a. Facilities, Services, Utilities - Kevin referred the members to Revision 12, which he had emailed on 1/4. He noted that he had incorporated all of the changes discussed the last time the chapter was on the agenda. He also noted the answer he had received from Don Fifield, former fire chief, about a plan to install a fire hydrant system in East Thetford (his reply has been incorporated into the chapter).

Li Shen joined the meeting.

Kevin asked the members to look at the recommendation regarding police department facilities on page 20. Patricia suggested a helpful rephrasing.

Kevin then noted the answer he had received from John Bacon, the town health officer, about who checks wells to see if they are located too close to pollution sources (the state health department, not the town health officer).

Rick Howard and Roberta Howard joined the meeting.

Patricia pointed out two more minor copy changes to make. Kevin said he will incorporate these final changes and send the draft to Patricia for formatting. Patricia will forward the formatted draft to Dean to post on the Planning web page and announce on the listserv.

Liz brought up a new question regarding curbside pickup of trash and recycling: should we address the new Vermont requirement for composting (removing all organic matter from the waste stream), which will start going into effect in the next year. There was a rambling discussion of the state of that program. A quick web search indicated that the law will be implemented in stages running from 2015-2017. Dean noted that there had been a discussion on

Vermont Edition in the past couple of months. Many of the details about who will be responsible for composting or collecting are still being worked out. There may be a need for a centralized composting facility in town to handle leaves, garden compost, and food waste, including meat products. The sense of the meeting was that it would be best to wait until more details are forthcoming from the state.

b. Natural Resources (7:38) - Patricia noted that the version of the Natural Resources chapter that she had emailed on 1/4 was no longer the latest version. She began by describing the two new changes made since then. One related to the Shoreland Protections Act and the other, under Agricultural Land, to potable water, where she had added new language from the state standards.

Ken Gulick joined the meeting.

There was a brief discussion of the state standards for wells on land that abutted farmland and concentrated livestock holding areas. Wayne Parks wondered how the large setbacks would affect someone with a small lot. Patricia replied that, since these are state standards, the landowner would have to apply to the state for a variance. Because well location in this situation is controlled by state standards, recommendation #8 under Agricultural Land no longer applies and was deleted.

Patricia then went through the most recent changes one by one. There was a discussion of several comments that had been made by naturalist Ted Levin. One issue was the definitions of “pond” and lake.” Patricia noted that there were several ways to define each and that names on local bodies of water were somewhat arbitrary in using pond and lake. There was general agreement that the important point is to develop a working definition and apply it consistently in our policies and recommendations. Patricia will move her definition to the start of the section.

There was another long discussion of vernal pools and the salamander habitat area surrounding them. Rick Howard pointed out that the habitat area is large, about 25-35 acres, depending on the size of the vernal pool. At issue was how the language in the narrative and the recommendations might be interpreted by a particular town board when deciding where a landowner could site a driveway (for example). Wayne Parks was concerned that, as written, Recommendation 2 for vernal pools could be taken to mean that the Zoning Administrator and Development Review Board must require landowners to avoid any changes in the habitat area. Patricia explained that the intent was to indicate that they can suggest alternatives but not mandate actions. Li Shen supported clarifying the language in the narrative regarding education of landowners about vernal pools and removing the recommendation. Jessica Eaton suggested new language that was acceptable to everyone and will be incorporated. It was also suggested that recommendation 1, to continue the inventory of vernal pools, be expanded.

The next issue discussed was language in the narrative, under Agricultural Land, stating that the town should help farmers directly in conserving prime agricultural soils. Ken Gulick, himself a farmer, said that the town needed more businesses, not more farms, in order to keep young people in the town. He said that businesses provide more jobs and better paying jobs than farms, so farmland that wasn't being used should be made available for business development. Jessica Eaton warned against taking too much land off the tax rolls by placing it into

conservation easements. Patrick Kearney said that recent trends toward sustainability and local foods needed to be taken into consideration.

The next discussion involved disturbances to wildlife caused by pets. Patricia had added a statement about “uncontrolled pets,” adding, “The town has chosen not to allow the roaming of dogs or other pet animals in Thetford.” It was noted that this included cats, though many people still let their cats roam and the animal officer was seldom called to enforce the ordinance. Patricia had also mentioned the damage caused by mountain bikes. The guests approved of these additions.

Recommendation #10 on page 16, relating to a testing program for E.Coli in the Ompompanoosuc River, was deleted as being overly expensive to implement.

There were also discussions of recommendations involving impervious surfaces, conservation efforts on lake shores, and the effect of conservation on the Town’s tax income. Regarding the tax issue, Li Shen pointed out that, though the taxes on conserved land tend to go down, the value of neighboring properties tends to go up, providing some balance to the equation.

Patricia will incorporate the changes discussed this evening, format the new draft for public review, and forward it to Dean to post on the web site and announce on the town listserve. Dean noted that the drafts are also available from the Town Clerk.

All of the guests except Li Shen left the meeting.

#### 6. Old Business (9:15):

Kevin started a review of the arrangements for the workshop on Planning for Natural Resources, to be hosted by the Planning Commission and led by the Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission. It is scheduled for Tuesday, January 14, from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. at the Community Center in Thetford Center. The workshop is free and open to all interested persons from Thetford and neighboring towns. There will be refreshments available. Kevin displayed the poster for the event, which he will email in digital form to everyone to put up. Dean will post announcements on the town listserve.

#### 7. New Business (9:25):

There was a brief discussion of a letter the Zoning Administrator had drafted regarding the Shoreland Protections Bill. Several residents had complained that they had not received adequate notification about the possible effects of the act on their property rights. The letter, with attachments about the bill, will go to property owners within 250 feet of a water body 10 acres or larger. The Zoning Administrator had requested that the commissioners review and approve the letter and attachments. Kevin said he thought they looked fine and asked the other commissioners to review them and respond directly to the Zoning Administrator before January 15th if they noticed anything amiss.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission