

Thetford Planning Commission
January 21, 2014 – APPROVED Minutes

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

Absent: None

Guests: Stuart Rogers (7:47-end)

(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 Minutes from the 1/7 meeting.
The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard Report: None.

5. Town Plan (7:24)

a. Foward - Patrick referred to the draft of the Forward that he had emailed to the group on 1/18. Kevin remarked that he thought what Patrick had done was nice and concise. The commissioners made numerous suggestions for changes in wording. There was a discussion about the change in terminology from Goals, Objectives, and Recommended Policies to Goals, Policies, and Recommendations. The sense of the meeting was that, with a slight change in wording, the reason given in the Forward would be sufficient to avoid confusion.

There was also a discussion of how best to represent the extent of the changes made to the Natural Resources chapter, since this was supposed to be very brief. The sense of the meeting was to include as little detail in the Forward as possible. The goal was to direct readers to the actual chapter.

Dean pointed out that it would be impossible to finalize the Forward until all of the chapters were in their final draft form. Kevin charged everyone with the task of rereading their chapters with an eye toward creating a summary of changes for the Forward. It will be on the agenda again at the end of February.

Stuart Rogers joined the meeting. He did not make a Selectboard Report.

b. Education (7:47) - Liz referred to the draft she had emailed earlier that evening. She recommended that the commissioners read over the marked changes, the Facilities section (which she felt needed to be shortened considerably), and the Goals, Policies, and Recommendations.

There was a lengthy discussion of the introductory historical paragraphs and the first part of the Pre-K section, some of which could be moved up to be in the introduction, with rewording to make it applicable to all early education as it was practiced during Thetford's early years and longer.

Liz noted the statement (from the previous Town Plan) that "Three percent (3%) of Thetford's population is under the age of five." She asked if anyone knew where that number had come from, so she could update it. Michael said the census information he had used for the Housing Chapter wasn't broken down by age that finely. Kevin suggested that she check with the regional commission.

There was a brief discussion about the number and location of the daycares and preschool programs in Thetford, and the current status of the new daycare proposed in Post Mills. Stuart reported that the Development Review Board had approved the application but that neighboring residents were challenging the decision in court.

There was a long discussion about a paragraph referring to the local reputation of Thetford Elementary School and its teachers and how a school's perceived quality affected tax rates and its attraction to newcomers with children. Dean wondered if the statements, while true, might be objected to as opinion rather than fact. There were suggestions for alternate wording.

There was general agreement that Liz should trim the long description of the recent renovations at Thetford Academy down to a minimum, to be in keeping with the description of the earlier renovations at Thetford Elementary School.

There was another long discussion about how realistic the Goals were regarding adult education and life long learning (with a subsidiary discussion about whether it should be referred to as Life Long Learning). There was some concern that the townspeople would not put much support behind creating local programs given that various opportunities for different forms of continuing education for Thetford residents already exist outside of Thetford.

The rest of the chapter will be discussed at the next meeting.

c. Housing - Michael referred to the draft he had emailed to the group on 1/20. There was general agreement that his changes to the introductory sections were very good. There was a brief discussion of the definition of the classification "Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use," which is used in the narrative and in Figure 2. Michael explained that this was an official Census classification and, as now indicated in the narrative, was an aggregation of all types of second homes, being used for only part of the time.

The paragraph on how "affordability" is determined by HUD as regards rents was much improved, but Dean and Patricia suggested some further rewording to one particular sentence.

The publication "Between a Rock and A Hard Place: Housing and Wages in Vermont," released annually by the Vermont Housing Council, was referred to in several locations but needs a footnote at the first instance indicating which issue was referenced and where it can be located.

There was a discussion of the six goals. Dean suggested that the first two were over-arching goals, while the other were supporting statements that should be considered either as policies or recommendations.

Michael initiated a lengthy discussion about goal 5, which encourages the use of more accessory dwelling units (also discussed in the narrative about Elder Housing). He wondered

how encouraging their use would ease the rental situation in town, since they were small and did not really constitute multi-unit rental apartments. It appears that, because of their very specific definition in state regulations, they could not be expanded to create a duplex out of the dwelling in which they were located. This discussion was not fully resolved due to the late time. This chapter will be on the agenda again soon.

6. Review Take/Away from the Land Use Workshop (9:15)

Kevin and Stuart had not been able to attend the workshop, so the other members very briefly described the content, audience, style of the presenter, and focus of the information. The presenter will be sending the PowerPoint slides to the commission so we can make use of some of the details. His knowledge of the issues made him a very good spokesperson for many of the goals, policies, and recommendations for land use and natural resource protection in the regional plan and, thus, for much of the same in our own plan.

7. Other Business (9:25)

Liz said that the Vermont Law School will be holding a planning-related lecture on 2/13 entitled “Co-Location, Co-Location, Co-Location: Land Use and Housing Priorities Reimagined.” She is planning to attend and hopes others will also. She will send the announcement via email.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission