

Thetford Planning Commission
February 4, 2014 – APPROVED Minutes

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

Absent: Patrick Kearney, Michael Schunk

Guests: None

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

2. Public Comment: None

3. Review of Minutes from the 1/21 meeting.
The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard Report: None.

5. Town Plan (7:34)

a. Education - Liz referred to the version she had emailed to the group that evening. She had incorporated the changes suggested at the previous meeting and went down through the text to discuss each one as needed. She pointed out that there had been an increase since the last census in the population of children under five, from 3% of the town population to 5%, noting that this could affect the schools in the future.

There was a long discussion of the best wording for the Thetford school board’s relationship with Thetford Academy. Liz will continue to work on it.

There was also a discussion of the boarding of Thetford Academy students, which had been discontinued in 1952, and how it differed from the current policy of providing homestays for international students. The current program was started as a way to increase enrollment and tuition income so the cost per pupil would decrease.

There was a discussion of the decreasing trend in enrollments in the context of the aging population in Thetford, Vermont, and New England in general. Despite the recent increase in Thetford’s under-five population (small enough that the addition of a single child would be a significant change), all predictions are that the population of school-age children will decrease. There are not enough young families moving into Thetford to counter this trend. Liz will find official projections to reference in the chapter. Kevin suggested she check with the Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission.

The section on post-secondary education options states that there are no options in Thetford itself, though some are available nearby (e.g., Vermont Community College, Lebanon College, River Bend Tech Center at Oxbow in Bradford, Iliad at Dartmouth). All of these have some cost

associated with them. There are also online colleges, which require broadband Internet connections.

There was also discussion of the challenges in funding our schools through the current system of public (town and state level) funding. Liz noted that there is a flaw in the current common level of appraisal that works to Thetford's disadvantage. The question came up, is there an optimal size of school population that the town can afford to support? If so, how do we calculate what it is? How do we attract young families to maintain that size? What level of policy can we recommend in the Town Plan? How do we balance those recommendations with the other chapters in the plan?

b. Housing - Michael was not present to lead the discussion, so this item was postponed.

c. Other TP Pieces (9:30) - Kevin briefly listed the other sections of the plan, such as the Purpose statement, the Appendix (tools), the photos, cover, and maps. There was a brief discussion of how these would be dealt with, along with the final copy editing and formatting.

6. Other Business (9:25)

March 4th is voting day, which conflicts with the first Planning Commission meeting in March. We will meet either in the Thetford Center Community Center or at the Latham Library.

Kevin reminded everyone to send Patrick the major changes in the chapters, to be included in the Forward.

Liz suggested that Dean create a list of action points drawn from the draft minutes to highlight for the others to find more easily.

With Patrick leaving after Town Meeting, we will need to recruit new members.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dean Whitlock, Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission