

**Thetford Planning Commission**  
**April 15, 2014 – APPROVED Minutes**

Present: Kevin O’Hara, Patricia Norton, Michael Schunk, Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: Liz Ryan Cole

Guests: Tara Bamford (7:15 - 8:15), Jessica Eaton (7:20 - 9:07)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

2. Public Comment: None

3. Regional Plan Changes

Tara Bamford reported that she had only minor comments on the current draft chapters for the regional plan but, as Thetford’s board representative for the regional planning commission, wanted to make us aware of the changes and also wanted to know if we have any comments to add.

Jessica Eaton, Selectboard liaison, joined the meeting.

a. Flood Resilience chapter: Tara noted that Thetford’s rivers run into Long Island Sound via the Connecticut River so new regulations regarding pollution load due to storm water runoff will affect Thetford, even though all of the current studies on which the regulations are based were undertaken on Lake Champlain. Tara recommended that the commissioners check the regional plan’s goals, policies, and recommendations closely to be sure that our new plan won’t be immediately out of compliance due to changes in the regional plan.

There was a discussion of the lag between creation of flood plain maps and FEMA regulations, which result in discrepancies with town ordinances. The differences between river corridors versus fluvial erosion and flood plains versus hazard areas were discussed briefly. Patricia noted that Thetford has many residences and businesses in villages that are also in designated flood plain areas. This seems to contradict the policies and recommendations that encourage more development in village areas. The discussion also covered mitigation and the problem of waste treatment plants being located in flood plains.

b. Child Care chapter: Tara noted that this was the first time that Child Care stood alone as a separate chapter, done to bring more attention to the issue. Patricia suggested that communities should do more to encourage on-going training of childcare providers, including stay-at-home parents, in order to avoid burnout, which has been shown to cause negative effects that the children carry with them through their entire school careers.

Kevin noted the recommendation about creating a directory of childcare providers in the region, to be developed by Dartmouth College. He asked how Dartmouth came to be chosen for this project.

Patricia noted recommendation number 4: to conduct a childcare needs assessment. She asked who would be responsible for doing this: the towns or the regional planning commission?

c. Housing chapter: Tara noted that the easiest way for a town to encourage more workforce-friendly housing was to be lenient on the size allowed for accessory dwelling units (ADU). It is her opinion that the state is too restrictive (size limited to 30% of primary dwelling unit). There was an initial discussion of what constituted a “workforce.” The contemporary definition includes professional occupations as well as blue-collar and low-wage occupations.

There was a lengthy discussion of the differences between a duplex, which is permitted in all districts in Thetford, and an accessory dwelling unit, which is subordinate to the primary dwelling unit. An included or attached ADU is permitted in all districts in Thetford, while a detached ADU is a conditional use. Thetford’s current Zoning Bylaw states, “The floor area of the accessory dwelling unit shall not exceed 30% of the habitable floor area of the principle dwelling unit, or 500 square feet, whichever is greater.” Patricia observed that this wording is confusing and recommended that it be changed in the next revision of the bylaw.

Tara said that the regional commission hopes to finalize and pass the new regional plan by June of this year. This will likely happen before Thetford’s Town Plan will be completed and approved, so we will need to apply changes in the regional plan to our plan’s final draft. Kevin noted that the regional commission will review our draft and tell us where we diverge. Tara pointed out that we could also show them where we disagree with their plan.

d. Relationship to Surrounding Regions chapter: There were few comments.

e. Definitions: Tara said there were a few items they would need to discuss, particularly as regards the definition of workforce housing and ADUs.

Tara left the meeting at 8:15.

#### 4. Review of Minutes from the 4/2 meeting.

There were a few typographical changes noted. The minutes were accepted as amended.

#### 5. Selectboard Report: None.

#### 6. Town Plan (8:20)

a. Education - Liz was out of town. The members agreed to defer this item to the next meeting that she would be able to attend.

b. Energy - Michael went over the newest version, which had been made much shorter by Patricia. The commissioners read through it quickly, noting only a couple of additional changes (e.g., that natural gas and propane are no longer considered to be as desirable an energy source as was previously thought). They also reviewed the newly added policies and recommendations, noting a few changes. Kevin suggested that, in all chapters, the term “recommendations” be changed to “recommendations for actions.” Dean suggested that Michael make the few minor changes suggested and that the draft chapter then be posted for public review. Patricia will prepare the file and Dean will post it on the the listserv and Planning Commission web page.

c. Forward - Dean reported that he had not heard from Patrick but was ready to take over completing this first draft of the section. Kevin said he would contact Patrick in order to facilitate the transition.

## 6. Other Business

a. Kevin reported that the Selectboard had inquired about Dean's status as both a paid recording clerk and a voting member of the commission. This is the only case where a member of a volunteer committee is also on the town payroll. Dean and Kevin reviewed the circumstances under which Dean agreed to be a voting member, after already being the paid recording clerk for over two years. The reason was an insufficient number of volunteer members to achieve a quorum, a situation that has not changed. Dean noted that he did not enter hours for time spent reading, reviewing, or any other activities not directly related to taking and posting minutes. He said he would be agreeable to continuing as recording clerk without being a voting member. Kevin said he would follow up on this with the Selectboard.

b. The commissioners elected officers for the coming year.

Patricia nominated Kevin for Chair; Michael seconded; the vote unanimous in favor.

Michael nominated Patricia for Vice Chair; Kevin seconded; the vote was unanimous in favor.

Michael nominated Liz for Clerk; Patricia seconded; the vote was unanimous in favor.

c. Dean reported that he had heard back from Chris Sargent of the regional planning commission about the reporting requirements when changes are made to land use areas. The immediate answer is that the report does need detail as outlined by the statute but that some of the headings don't apply in our case. Chris' reply also brought up two issues that were more important to him than the report: 1) the difference between "land use area" and "land use district" and 2) the lack of specifics regarding the changes we are recommending.

1) By statute, the Town Plan must refer to "land use areas", while the Zoning Bylaw must refer to "land use districts." There was a brief discussion of how the two terms differ, but it is mainly a matter of terminology as specified in the statutes. Our Town Plan uses "district" when it should be using "area".

2) The Town Plan must be very specific about any recommended changes to land use areas. For example, our recommendation to add a new type of land use area in Post Mills, with characteristics between those of Village Residential and Rural Residential, should specify clearly what those characteristics should be and where the boundaries of all changed areas should be. The details should be worked out in the planning process, not in the process of revising the Zoning Bylaw. Zoning should implement precisely what is specified in the Town Plan, so the Town Plan must be more precise to begin with.

Jessica Eaton left the meeting at 9:07.

d. Dean reported that Stuart Blood had emailed zip files containing the approved minutes for many more meetings, reaching back to 2006. Dean asked how far back the online archive should go. All agreed that it should include all available minutes.

e. Kevin referred the commissioners to some comments that Libby Chapin and Stuart Blood had sent to the commissioners in the past couple of days. There was a discussion of how best to record and maintain comments to make sure they are addressed and that the commenters have been responded to. Patricia volunteered to create a table in a Word document, as has been done in the past. She will present a mock-up at the next meeting.

f. Kevin quickly ran down the topics that will most likely be addressed at the next meeting. This includes a quick primer on the Subdivision Regulation.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dean Whitlock, Recording Clerk, Thetford Planning Commission