

Thetford Planning Commission
August 19, 2014 – APPROVED Minutes

Present: Kevin O’Hara, Patricia Norton, Michael Schunk, Liz Ryan Cole (arr: 7:52), Dean Whitlock (Recording Clerk)

Absent: None

Guests: None

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:18 p.m.

2. Public Comment: None

3. Review of Minutes from the 8/5 meeting.
The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard Report: None

5. Town Plan

a. Discuss Comments - Dispose of Same

Patricia Norton had reviewed many of the comments for the Natural Resources Chapter and went over them. Regarding setbacks on Lake Fairlee, she is still waiting to hear back from the Development Review Board. Kevin pointed out that the new state regulations could take care of many of the issues that have arisen in the past.

There was a long discussion of a comment about structures beside rivers that are damaged by floods: Should the owner be allowed to rebuild on the same location or be required to move to be best location to survive a flood. Does the town have the right to disallow rebuilding on the same footprint? Would our regulations be overruled by FEMA and state regulations now being considered? It was decided to defer this question to the next Town Plan cycle, at which time the state regulations will have been finalized.

Liz joined the meeting.

A similar comment suggested that the town plan alternative routes for the roads that are close to rivers (e.g., Route 132 between Thetford and Strafford) so that the old roads could quickly be rerouted after the next Irene-like storm. Decided to combine with previous comment and defer to next Town Plan cycle.

A comment stated that there was potentially a greater threat of drought and wildfire than of flooding as climate change proceeds. After a short discussion, Patricia said she would check with the Emergency Planning Committee on this issue.

A comment asked if the Town Plan could more strongly encourage the Development Review Board to seek advice from the Conservation Commission. It was decided to incorporate

this suggestion into a recommendation.

A comment suggested that Thetford join with Fairlee to build a boat washing station between Lake Fairlee and Lake Morey, since the boat landings are not large enough to accommodate washing stations and necessary parking for boaters' vehicles and trailers. The sense of the meeting was that a washing station that far away wouldn't be used. Patricia noted that the recommendation to create a washing station had been in the Town Plan for some time. It was decided to leave it there in hopes that a solution would arise in the future.

A comment questioned the effectiveness of the recommendation about stabilizing taxes for farmers enrolled in the Current Use program. Patricia had checked with the Listers and discovered that, in Vermont at least, removing development rights from property did not result in a reduction in the market value of the property. Buying development rights does provide an effective incentive for keeping farmland intact. After a long discussion, Patricia recommended reconsidering and possibly removing the recommendations that were not as effective as the Current Use program.

There was a long discussion of the effectiveness of recommending both incentives and deterrents in regulations. Deterrents require enforcement, which raises the questions of who will play the role of police and at what cost. Kevin said that, during the rewriting of the Zoning Bylaw, the impression received was that the majority of residents prefers the carrot to the stick, which is the status quo in the town regulations now.

There was a related but specific discussion related to a comment regarding buildings that had degraded in upkeep to the point that they were unsightly or unsafe or both; for example, the brown building on Route 113 in Post Mills across from the old Elks hall. Aesthetics are not under town control (except, to some extent, in the Thetford Hill Historical Preservation District), and the commissioners questioned whether there were regulations or enforcement mechanisms that would require an owner to remove or repair such a public health/safety hazard. Kevin said we must find out if the regulations and mechanisms do exist, and if so, encourage their use. If not, we must write a recommendation that the town create them.

There was a final discussion of a comment that section 6.09b in the new Zoning Bylaw was poorly worded and allows too many waivers. Patricia volunteered to draft new working.

b. Take time to mark up the maps (8:50)

Using the large zoning map from the Zoning Administrator's office, Dean led the group in a discussion of the changes being considered to the Thetford Hill and Post Mills districts.

Thetford Hill - It has been recommended that the eastern boundary of the district along Route 113 be shortened so that the area immediately around the I-91 exit is all in the Rural Residential district. The recommendation is that the boundary be brought back up the hill as far as Garey Road. This is already the boundary of the Thetford Hill Preservation Overlay. After a brief discussion, the members agreed that the district boundary line should follow the path of the west side of Garey Road, along the overlay boundary, and continue in a straight line to the existing southerly boundary of the district paralleling Route 113.

Post Mills - The Two Rivers Regional Planning Commission originally made the recommendation to greatly reduce the size of the Post Mills Village Residential District in order to reduce the possibility of sprawl development along routes 113 and 244. At two public forums

with Post Mills residents, the Planning Commission received good suggestions from the local residents and, in follow-up meetings, came up with a four-part plan: 1) Create a new type of Zoning Area called the Village Core, which would have most of the characteristics of the current Village Residential area; 2) Redefine the Village Residential area to have a mix of Village and Residential area characteristics; 3) Establish boundaries for the new Post Mills Village Core area and Village Residential area; 4) Assign those parts of the current Post Mills Village Residential District that are outside the new boundaries to be Rural Residential. The opinion gleaned from the forums was that the Village Core should extend as far as the west boundary of the Post Mills Church property and perhaps include the airport. The south end of the Village Core was not determined and could match the current district boundary, which extends to the south boundary of the Braley property on Route 113 and a similar distance up Barker Road. The north end of the Village Core was also not determined, after some discussion, it was decided that the commissioners would go together to Post Mills to view the stretch of Route 113 between Route 244 and the West Fairlee Road to see if there was an obvious cut-off point for the Village Core. The visit will take place at 6:16 - 7:15 on September 2, which is the next regular meeting date for the commission. A decision would be made during the warned meeting.

Dean noted that, in addition, a recommendation had been made to change one particular triangle of land to be Rural Residential. This triangle is bounded by the West Fairlee border, Lake Fairlee (Rte 244), and the West Fairlee Road (also known as Crossroad Street) up to where it meets the West Fairlee Border. This triangle had been Rural Residential until it was changed to Village Residential during the last update of the Zoning Bylaw. For several reasons, it made sense to change it back.

Kevin then laid out a course of action for further review of these changes, which would include a well advertised public meeting, preceded by an announcement sent to all property owners living within the triangle that would be changed back to Rural Residential, and early publication of altered maps and new district definitions for Village Core and Village Residential.

6. Subdivision - Deferred until the next meeting.

7. New members - recruitment plan

A couple of names were mentioned but not discussed. Patricia volunteered to write an member-wanted advertisement to post on the town listserve.

8. Other business

Dean noted that he was making progress on converting all of the old minutes back to 2006 to PDF format and uploading them to the archive on the town's web domain, where they are available from the Planning page.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

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