

Thetford Planning Commission
November 4, 2014 – APPROVED Minutes

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

Absent: None

Guests: None

(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 10/21/14 meeting.
The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard Report: None

5. Town Plan (7:25)

a. Review Comments - act on same: The review started with the comments on the Education Chapter. Liz led the discussion; Patricia recorded the responses in the comment spreadsheet on Google Drive.

There was a long discussion on governance and budgeting issues raised by two commenters. The issues were centered on the lack of public representation on the board of Thetford Academy and the nature of the partnership agreement between the academy and the town, including the cases when parents believe their child would be served better at a different high school. The regional planning commission had replied to Liz that the Town Plan was an appropriate place to address governance issues. Dean noted that these issues had come up several times since his first attendance at Thetford School District meetings in the mid 1970s, but that there had never been enough public support to cause major changes to the current governance structure, and he didn’t know if there was more support now. Liz said she would review school board minutes relating to their review of the Thetford Academy strategic plan and draft additional language in the Education Chapter narrative to more clearly explain the relationship between the Thetford School Board and the Thetford Academy Board of Directors. She will also draft a paragraph that describes the concerns that exist in the town about the partnership agreement.

There was a comment about pre-school education to be funded solely by grants. Liz explained that a new law, Act 166, requires towns to provide pre-school education. Funding is left up to the towns, but it will have to happen even if grants aren’t sufficient. She has drafted new language about this in the next revision.

There were other comments that indicated a need for wording changes to better explain the recent building projects at Thetford Academy, the way school budgets are voted upon, census figures that predict a drop in school enrollment, a confusion between “post-secondary education” versus “continuing education”, and other points of style and grammar.

There was a middling discussion of a comment to include “affordability” in the goals or in the section on challenges to education in Thetford. Liz pointed out that she had already addressed this in her latest revision.

b. Michael: Energy Chapter etc. - Deferred to next meeting.

6. Subdivision (9:12)

a. Kevin: Update Utilities Standards – Kevin referred the group to a new draft that he had emailed on 10/31. It contains new language for Section 3.8 on Utilities. He said he had reviewed the subdivision regulations for Norwich and Windsor and discovered that their utilities sections were identical and seemed appropriate for Thetford, so he copied the language as is into this new draft. After reviewing the language, the commissioners agreed that it was appropriate.

b. Michael reported that he had reviewed the language in Section 3.11, Open Space and Common Land, comparing it to the same sections in several other towns’ subdivision regulations. In this case, he found that they were very similar, but that the current Thetford subdivision language had apparently been carefully reworded to be very specific to Thetford. It provides more leeway to developers and more flexibility to the Development Review Board in deciding how much open space, if any, to require. It also specifies a smaller maximum acreage that can be required as open space (15% in Thetford as opposed to as much as 35% elsewhere). He recommended that the language be accepted as is. Kevin noted a few changes that needed to be made to make the language consistent (e.g., Town Plan vs Municipal Plan) and will make those in his draft version.

c. Patricia reported that she had made a number of changes to the Definitions section. She will send her new version of the section to Kevin to be incorporated into the next draft. Kevin will create a new, clean draft for final review.

7. Town Nurse Discussion (9:30)

Patricia briefly reviewed discussions she had had with Sarah Jo Brown and Fire Chief Mariah Whitcomb about the Town Nurse. The committee developing the proposal for a Town Nurse has decided to take another six months to a year to determine what specific needs a Thetford Town Nurse would address. The situations they have studied in neighboring towns are informative but not exact parallels to Thetford. A key consideration is how the Town Nurse would interact with, support, and be supported by the large body of trained volunteers who already serve the town through the FAST squad on the Fire Department. Patricia has drafted new language describing the Town Nurse proposal, which will be reviewed at the next meeting.

8. Other business

a. Dean reported that he had contacted Bob Walker about the ownership status of the Post Mills Landfill site and progress on the possible solar array project to be located there. Bob

replied that the ownership situation was still being addressed and that the site was still being considered as a possible location for a solar array, though technical details needed to be worked out. He will notify Dean of changes.

b. Dean reported that Duncan Nichols had queried him about the best way to express concern to the Planning Commission about an issue in Thetford. Dean had explained the meeting process and public comment period and also the possibility of having a specific agenda item for his issue. Dean copied Kevin on the reply.

c. Liz asked if the Planning Commission should address the issue of the lease on the shooting range in town. There was a brief discussion of the Selectboard's proceedings on the matter.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

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