

**Thetford Planning Commission  
October 20, 2015 – APPROVED Minutes**

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

Absent: None

Guests: Stuart Rogers (Selectboard Chairman), Mary Ellen Parkman (Zoning Administrator), Jessica Eaton (Selectboard Liaison)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:17 p.m.
2. Public Comment: None
3. Review of the minutes for the 10/6 meeting  
The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard Report

Most of the commission had attended the selectboard meeting on the previous evening, during which there was a discussion of the current draft of the Town Plan. The members of the selectboard had made many comments and suggestions on the first few chapters. Due to time constraints the rest of the draft will be discussed at a future meeting. The consensus was that the discussion had gone well. Stuart Rogers thanked the commissioners for their work and said that the selectboard would attend a future Planning Commission meeting in order to discuss the remaining chapters. Kevin thanked Stuart and the other selectboard members for their comments and said the dialog had been very helpful. For Stuart’s benefit, Kevin described the next steps in the process leading up to the Planning Commission submitting an approved draft of the Town Plan to the selectboard for their final review and approval, which could include another warned hearing if they thought it was necessary. Stuart asked about the timing. Kevin explained that the commissioners would now have to prepare another revision based on the comments from the selectboard and the regional planning commission (which had just arrived). Then there would be the 30-day warning, the hearing, and the preparation of the final revision based on the comments received at the hearing. He said the commissioners would move as fast as possible to incorporate the selectboard and regional commission comments by the second meeting in November, which would be the 17<sup>th</sup>.

Stuart reminded Kevin to submit the Planning Commission budget request for the next fiscal year, and Kevin asked him to send the actual budget and expenses for the current year as a reference.

Stuart Rogers left the meeting.

## 5. Subdivision Review (7:43)

Patricia referred the group to version 9.7 of the regulations, which she had emailed on October 8. This version contains comments inserted by Zoning Administrator Mary Ellen Parkman. Before going over the specific comments, Mary Ellen explained that a major change to the regulations was the removal of the separate classifications for “major” and “minor” subdivisions. This means that the regulations need strong language clarifying that the Development Review Board (DRB) can waive various subdivision requirements to suit the nature of each subdivision application. The regulations also need to be very clear about how the waiver process will work. She was also concerned about costs of the application, since very few applications are for large subdivisions and often people are hoping for a quick turn-around because they need to subdivide in order to sell a piece of property to meet financial needs.

Mary Ellen then started going through the regulations, comment by comment. Patricia recorded changes in language or places where changes were needed for the next revision. There was a brief discussion of the difference between boundary line adjustments and annexations. Thetford has tended to use annexations in the past, whereas boundary line adjustments are the standard process used in most towns. In terms of process, the zoning administrator would review and approve a boundary line adjustment, while the chair of the DRB can approve annexations.

There was a long discussion of waivers. Mary Ellen explained that most of the applicants were very uninformed about subdivision regulations and processes and are not aware that they must apply for waivers of any of the required components in the application. Also it is not always possible to anticipate every situation. The language implies that all waivers must be in writing, in advance of the hearing; however, that would often lead to the need for a second warned hearing and greatly lengthen the time and cost before approval. The language should be clear that, during the initial hearing, the DRB has the authority to review the application, point out which waivers would be appropriate, and then grant waivers immediately, as long as all of the conditions for each waiver are already being met. This language also needs to tie into the table of plat requirements (discussed later).

There was a discussion of requiring a certificate of compliance “if required by the DRB.” The term “certificate of compliance” will need to be added to the definitions section.

A meeting with the Zoning Administrator is not actually required, but the language should recommend that the applicant make contact to discuss the process and application requirements ahead of time.

The regulations describe a two-step process, but in some cases the steps can be consolidated into one hearing, which reduces the time and cost of the process. This should be made clear, along with a description of how to request consolidation. Mary Ellen will submit alternative language for the process of consolidating the steps.

Jessica Eaton left the meeting (8:38).

There was a lengthy discussion of Table 2.2, which lists the plat requirements. State statute allows the waiver of almost every item. There were several suggestions about how to indicate clearly that waivers were possible, which items were always required, and which could be waived at the DRB’s discretion. Mary Ellen will provide a list of the ones that cannot be waived.

Mary Ellen Parkman left the meeting.

## 6. Town Plan -

Kevin referred the members to the comments received from the regional planning commission. Due to a problem with the Planning listserv, few of the commissioners had received these comments prior to the selectboard meeting the previous evening. They were a bit confusing to read due to the way they were formatted. Patricia emailed a version in which all of the comments were formatted the same way. Kevin remarked that the comments were not bad, though that they gave the commissioners some work to do. Each commissioner will review the comments specific to their chapters and come to the next meeting with new language ready to discuss.

There was further discussion of the comments received from the selectboard. The purpose of the Town Plan needs to be explained more clearly in the Forward or Introduction. Jason's metaphor of a "ten-thousand-foot view" appealed to everyone. The selectboard also suggested that the goals, policies, and recommendations be moved from the end of each chapter to the front, following a brief introduction about the theme and topics of each chapter, with the narrative coming later for people who wanted to look more deeply into the reasoning behind each goal, policy, and recommendation. There was a long discussion of how to implement this and how much detail the introductory paragraphs would need. Jason described the process in the Fairlee Planning Commission and said they had directly incorporated the wording of many of the suggestions from the regional planning commission. He said that, in Fairlee's case, the stand-alone goals, policies, and recommendations were presented as a sort of "Cliff's Notes" to the Town Plan. He and Patricia will work on combining the Forward and Introduction, including a description of the purpose of the Town Plan, with an introductory paragraph and goals for each chapter. Jason will email a copy of the Fairlee plan.

Kevin noted other items that had to be incorporated are an economic development plan and a flood resiliency plan.

## 7. Other Business - None

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

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