

Thetford Planning Commission
March 15, 2016 – APPROVED Minutes

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

Absent: Michael Schunk

Guests: Jessica Eaton

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:19 p.m.

2. Public Comment: None

3. Review of the minutes for the 3/1 meeting
The minutes were accepted as amended.

4. Selectboard Report:

Jessica said that the Selectboard had discussed again the current situation in which the Planning Commission’s recording clerk, Dean Whitlock, was also a voting member of the commission. This is not a common practice because it might give rise to the appearance of a conflict of interest. Dean noted that he always abstained from voting on budget issues. Kevin reiterated that the situation came about as a way to address the lack of commissioners. Originally, the Planning Commission was supposed to have 9 members. In recent years, it has been impossible to attract that many people, so the number was lowered to 7 and then to five. Until last fall, when Jason Crance and Jamie Thaxton joined the commission, a single absence at a meeting meant there would be no quorum. Dean’s vote was necessary to make consistent progress in the discussions. Now there are sufficient members, but several of them have already served past the end of their terms and are planning to retire after the new Town Plan has been approved. Kevin told Jessica that, if it was okay with the Selectboard, he would like to keep the situation as is for now and discuss the issue again whenever the membership changed. Jessica said she would relay that to the Selectboard. The members whose terms were up or would soon be are Kevin, Patricia, Michael, and Dean. Kevin said he was planning to remain until the Town Plan and Subdivision Regulations had been approved. Patricia said she planned to do the same. Dean said he would be happy either to continue as is or to switch back to being a non-voting recording clerk. Michael was absent. Given the number who would be leaving, Kevin said he hoped that the Selectboard would appoint more members sooner rather than later so there would be some overlap. He added that he was very happy with the contributions being made by Jamie and Jason.

5. Town Plan (7:40)

a. Maps update – Dean referred the members to the set of draft maps that had been delivered on March 3 by Pete Fellows of the Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Planning Commission (TRORC). The group reviewed the maps one by one while Dean took notes of

errors and comments to pass along to Pete. The members identified a number of universal formatting changes to be made, along with duplicated street names, misnamed mountains, and so on. Some of these were changes that were requested when the maps were first discussed but apparently overlooked during the editing, months later. Dean will prepare a clean list of the items and send it Pete Fellows, and also to the members for review.

b. Review the Town Plan Report (TRORC feedback) – Dean referred the members to the most recent email from Chris Sargent of TRORC, in which he suggested only one addition to the draft report prepared at the previous meeting. Otherwise, the report is fine. Kevin will make the addition. Dean pointed out that Chris did not say anything similar needed to be created for the other chapters. Kevin said he would send the next draft and clarify if this is all that is needed. Dean noted that the Land Use Chapter will need changes recommended by TRORC last month. Dean will make the changes and send the text to the copy editor.

c. Preliminary outline of changes in each chapter – Kevin said that the goal was to create an outline of the major changes made to each chapter so that residents would have a summary to review before the warned hearing. Patricia suggested creating a subcommittee to develop a plan for advertising the warned hearing. Kevin agreed. Patricia and Jason volunteered to be a working group to put together an advertising plan to discuss at a future meeting. Several suggestions were put forward, referencing what was done several years ago prior to the hearing on the Zoning Bylaw.

Kevin wrapped up the discussion with a review of the next steps to prepare the Town Plan, maps, and report for a warning of the hearing.

6. Subdivision (9:15)

Kevin reported that he had had a very productive discussion about the current Subdivision document with Development Review Board (DRB) member Tim Taylor and Zoning Administrator Mary Ellen Parkman. He said the two were very supportive of the current draft. The Planning Commission will need to discuss and approve these recent changes, and Tim said he would be willing to come to a meeting in order to answer questions. After that, the full DRB will need to review and accept the draft, after which it will come back to the Planning Commission for a final vote before being submitted to the Selectboard for their review and approval process.

Other Business (9:28):

Dean gave a quick update of the progress of S.241, the bill that would legalize commercial sale of recreational marijuana. It is now in the house and will soon be taken up by the house judicial committee. The bill would allow towns to regulate some aspects of legalization (e.g., how close to a school a marijuana store could be located). A town can refuse to allow marijuana establishments in its borders but the law is not clear whether planning/zoning or a Town Meeting vote is required. The law wouldn't provide any funds to the town to pay for additional police time spent enforcing the law or responding to traffic accidents or medical emergencies. Dean referred the members to a statement from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, which he forwarded to the planning listserv on March 2. The VLCT strongly opposes passage of the bill. Dean said that, if the bill passes, the Town Plan should have a recommendation, either in Land

Use or Economic Development, that would support any regulations or zoning rules the Town might come up with. He will continue to track the bill's progress and keep the Commissioners informed.

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

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