

**Thetford Planning Commission
November 15, 2016 – APPROVED Minutes**

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

Absent: Michael Schunk

Guests: Jessica Eaton (7:27 – 8:10)

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:22 p.m. Due to a conflict with a special selectboard meeting, the Planning Commission met in the Town Clerk’s office.

2. Public Comment: None

3. Review of the minutes for the 10/4/16 meeting.

The minutes were accepted as amended.

The 10/18 and 11/1 meetings had to be cancelled due to lack of quorum.

4. Selectboard Report

Jessica Eaton was not yet present so the Selectboard Report was postponed till her arrival.

5. Town Plan (7:28)

Update and discussion – focus on Comment Resolution Document.

Jamie projected the Comments Resolution Document onto the wall so all present could follow along. The discussion began at the next comment in sequence (# 145), regarding the recommended area for buffers around a vernal pool. Three people at the hearing had commented on the text about this in the draft Town Plan. The text presents and explains the recommendation for a sizeable buffer, and the recommendation in the plan is that landowners be encouraged to follow the recommendation where possible, but that the decision was up to the landowner. There was a long discussion of the purpose and need for educational text in the Town Plan, which a couple of people at the hearing had argued should not be included at all. Jamie offered to rewrite the narrative to summarize the facts and to remove any implication that the educational text must be strictly applied. It was noted that the size range (.1 – 2 acres) for vernal pools given in the text on p. 64 might be a typo and should be checked to see if it should be .1 - .2 acres. The concern was expressed that too much trimming would result in not providing sufficient support for the recommendations to have them stand up in court. Another concern was raised that the narrative and recommendations in the draft are based on input from town committees and residents who attended open houses, forums, and regular meetings throughout the course of several years, a larger number in total than the number who made the comments at the hearing. The Planning Commission members need to determine which views are more representative of the majority of residents in the town.

Jessica Eaton joined the meeting.

4. Selectboard Report (7:50)

Jessica reported that the Selectboard was wondering if the Planning Commission would be advertising for new members. Kevin responded no, that appointing new members is a specified duty of the Selectboard. He also noted that some of the current members would be leaving the Planning Commission as soon as it had approved the draft Town Plan and passed it along to the Selectboard for their review. For that reason, the Selectboard should be looking for more new members than the 1 needed to reach the specified 7 members.

Jessica left the meeting.

5. Town Plan (continued)

There was a discussion of whether to include Fluvial Erosion Hazard Area (FEH) maps in the appendix. Liz noted that these maps are used by insurance companies to determine where they will not offer flood insurance and so would be useful information for landowners. Dean will contact the Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Planning Commission to see if they can supply these maps.

There was a discussion of finding correct citations for statements in the Natural Resources chapter regarding rare and endangered species (e.g., the dwarf wedge mussel). Jamie will check with Li Shen of the Conservation Commission. He noted that having an endangered specie in the town could lead to federal grants for conservation.

A comment asked why the Zoning Bylaws were referenced directly in the Town Plan in the context of recommendations including the term "should". Liz said that it was completely appropriate, since the Town Plan is intended to be a guiding source for change to the Zoning Bylaws. She noted that, in the legal sense employed in the Town Plan, "should" identifies a suggestion; it is not the same as the term "shall", which is prescriptive and identifies a requirement.

Several comments identified unclear language in the narrative and recommendations; for example, regarding the protection of aquifers, the creation of impervious surfaces, and tolerance for beavers and their habitat. Jamie will reword these.

There was a long discussion of the wording regarding development on steep and very steep slopes where there was "no viable alternative." (Narrative page 65, recommendation on page 82) A feasible conflict might arise in having to choose between development on a steep slope versus development on good farmland. Another case might involve choosing between a slope and a wetland buffer. Dean volunteered to rewrite the text to explain and clarify the issues. It was agreed that the erosion issues surrounding development on such slopes required extra care and extra cost in engineering and landscaping.

6. Budget for coming year (9:20)

Kevin reviewed the budget for last year and the proposed budget for next year. Dean, as a paid employee of the Town, recused himself from the discussion. Because the discussion of comments and approval by the Planning Commission would continue into 2017, it was decided to propose the same budget for 2017.

7. Other Business (9:25)

Kevin reported a communication from Priscilla Hall, noting that the Town now had a

Community Nurse so that section of the draft plan would need to be rewritten. He will contact her for appropriate language.

Dori Wolfe of Wolfe energy had sent an email on 11/10 regarding the language needed to satisfy changes in siting requirements for energy production facilities (solar, wind, etc.). Kevin noted that her comment and that of Priscilla Hall, as well as any other new comments that might be submitted, need to be entered into the Comments Resolution document. Jason attended to it.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

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