

Thetford Planning Commission
Minutes – Meeting December 19, 2006

Present: Liora Alschuler, Stuart S. Blood, Hayden Brownell, Heather Carlos, Dennis A. Donahue, Donn E. Downey, Rick Howard, Wayne Parks (Chair)

Absent: Lori Howard

Guests: None

1. Meeting called to order at 7:21
2. No members of the public were present for comment.
3. Minutes were reviewed, amended and approved as corrected. 7:29
4. LA presented a report itemizing various issues deferred from the draft 2006 Town Plan and stressing the need to maintain communication with the Select Board (SB) through the remainder of the approval process. She handed out to those present an itemized list of these issues, categorized as follows: Waste management; Business development/village centers; Environmental; Energy; Land use; Recreation, and Miscellaneous. She advised that a modus operandi be established for ongoing coordination between the PC and the SB.

WP suggested that a commission member record comments at the January 8th SB meeting. HC volunteered to do so. Other suggestions for maintaining a smooth flow of information between the SB and the PC were put forward by DAD: that the PC clerk might attend the Jan. 8th meeting to record the proceedings in detail; or that PC members attend that and subsequent SB meetings in rotation until the final version of the Plan is approved. LA affirmed that the goal is to capture comments and dispositions in one standard format agreed upon by both the SB and PC for ease and consistency of review. She undertook to contact the SB to suggest these options and report back to the PC.

5. Discussion moved on to consideration of the next cycle of planning; an objective should be to put a “Plan for the Plan” in place before the next Town Meeting. Questions were raised about establishing a timeline and process for dealing with the issues raised in LA’s report and other issues not included in Plan. Would it be more effective to deal with the current draft Plan’s inconsistencies and omissions by starting work immediately on a new Plan, or making work on the ordinances and bylaws the first priority?

WP suggested working on zoning bylaws before starting the process of working on a new Town Plan. SSB suggested a parallel process to allow for both working on ordinances and bylaws and keeping longer-term goals in view; a series of forums could be set up specifically to work out details on ordinances and bylaws, along with a similar series for working on longer-term goals (10-20 years out).

WP recommended a survey of town residents prior to any work on the next Plan to avoid the criticism directed at previous plans that insufficient input had been solicited from the community.

HB identified four layers of depth in the process: 1-ensure conformity with State law; 2-change language to deal with issues of fairness; 3- deal with substantive issues amenable to quick consensus; 4- deal with longer-term issues requiring more community feedback. Agreement emerged on the need to concentrate on issues that can be taken care of relatively quickly. WP pointed out that once the SB adopts the Plan, it will be final; ordinances and bylaws will need to be brought into compliance with the Plan, and not the reverse. LA proposed a timeline allowing for the next 6 months to draft 2nd-3rd order changes to bylaws to ensure a swift adoption process. Issues in the current Plan and revision of zoning that need more consideration can then be identified, to feed into future planning and zoning. Concurrently, a plan can be outlined for soliciting the needed discussion at the beginning of the next cycle in 2008, to develop a consensus about more difficult issues. These issues will be discussed further at the next meeting.

6. SSB reported on his meeting with Chris Sargent of the Two-Rivers Ottaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC); they agreed that Chris will work on Chapter 117 changes to bring the zoning ordinance into conformance with the law. Chris will work on the zoning ordinances, making necessary changes to wording and flagging potentially problematic issues to bring to the PC's attention. DAD and SSB agreed to work on the subdivision regulations and expect to have a draft by 16th January. They agreed on the need to engage the Development Review Board (DRB) in the process. DAD proposed inviting a DRB representative to PC meetings or sending a PC representative to DRB meetings. HC suggested having a member of DRB join the bylaws working group. DAD mentioned that this group needs a 4th member. HB volunteered to join; his membership was confirmed. LA suggested inviting the DRB to the PC meeting on Jan 16th and setting aside 45 minutes of the agenda to coordinating the process. A formal procedure for ongoing communication between the two groups could be worked out at this meeting.

Regarding the needed changes to the language of the ordinances, SSB proposed that each PC member rotate attendance of hearings to observe and learn from actual cases. DAD agreed that if each member attends every 2&1/2 months there would be a lot of positive outcomes. WP pointed out that joint meetings need prior notice and preparation. SSB will contact DRB to plain a liaison. Some discussion ensued on scheduling guests from DRB and TRORC at future PC meetings. No specific dates were set.

The bylaws on Telecommunications and Flood Hazard Areas were brought up. They are based on out-of-date models and will be replaced by the models published by the Vermont League of Cities & Towns. Some questions arose about the specific differences between the older and newer versions and how the

- new language meshes with the Plan. WP noted that PC members will need to study the newer versions to be able to answer questions from the community. LA requested that the working group report to the PC on the substance of these changes. Questions were raised about terminology; DAD clarified that legally both the terms “ordinance” and “bylaw” are acceptable and interchangeable.
7. Old Business: WP passed out a draft one-page report of the PC’s activities since its establishment as a separate entity in early 2006. The report was amended; WP will incorporate the changes and submit the report to the town clerk.
 8. New Business: WP received a letter from a resident regarding location of telephone poles. Is the PC in a position to respond? RH pointed out that this issue belongs under the SB’s jurisdiction.
 9. Meeting adjourned at 8:54.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Jabareen
(PC clerk)