

**Thetford Planning Commission  
July 17, 2018 – DRAFT Minutes**

Present: Jamie Thaxton, (Acting Chair), David Forbes, Liz Ryan Cole, Dean Whitlock  
(Recording Clerk)

Absent: Jason Crance

Guests: Scott Hesser

(Numbers below refer to agenda items.)

1. Jamie called the meeting to order at 7:18 p.m.

2. Public Comment

Scott Hesser, a member of the Thetford Senior and Affordable Housing Committee (SAHC), gave a report on the committee's current activities and a forecast of when they would have more information for the Planning Commission. He said that the initial mission and goal of the SAHC was to get senior and affordable housing built in Thetford. They have continually run into three major headwinds: money, an appropriate site, political will/support. They have never had all three come together at the same time. Based on the results of a recent community forum, they have decided to expand their goal and over the next few months will conduct a housing needs assessment for Thetford. They will have help from the regional planning commission (TRORC) and hope to have the needs assessment completed by December or January. After that, their next step will be to define action steps to meet the needs. David told Scott about the recent research he had conducted to update the Housing Chapter in the draft Town Plan and said he would email the information to Scott. He asked Scott what types of housing they expected to build, and Scott replied that it would be multi-unit buildings with rents at affordable rates based on income and supported by tax credits. However, they are not in a position to build anything right now. If and when the three factors come together, the project would be tailored to the needs of the housing market in Thetford.

David asked if existing buildings might be renovated, but Scott explained that the local funding/planning organization for this type of development, Twin Pines, shied away from renovations because they invariably result in large budget overruns. They have found it better to start with a clean slate. Currently, they are developing the region's first net-zero energy project for affordable housing, located in West Lebanon. But there has been a recent pull-back in Federal funding for such projects, and rural towns like Thetford don't score high in funding requests compared to more urban settings like White River Junction and Lebanon. For example, rural towns lack many services and are farther from medical centers.

Scott said that, in their recent forum in Thetford, the attendees expressed more concern for having affordable housing for their children than for seniors. Also, the types of services that should be near such a development (proximity to transportation and employment also) pointed to East Thetford as the best location; however, East Thetford does not have an available site that is sufficiently level, can handle a large septic system, has the right shape, and isn't prime

agricultural land. Twin Pines is now pursuing the idea of a combined project for Fairlee, Thetford, and Norwich. The funding, planning, and development would all be done as one project, but separate small developments would be built in each town, 6 units in Fairlee, 10 in Thetford, and 12 in Norwich.

Scott said the SAHC should be getting back in touch with the Planning Commission in November. Jamie reiterated the Commission's current focus and schedule, to finish revising the draft Town Plan before then, so the new information would probably go into the next version of the Plan.

Scott Hesser left the meeting

### 3. Review of the minutes from the 7/03/18 meeting.

The minutes were accepted as amended.

There was a brief discussion of the proposal to schedule an extra meeting in July to make up for the missed meeting in June. Jamie said that he would not be available on the 24<sup>th</sup>, so the 31<sup>st</sup> would be a better date for him.

### 4. Selectboard Report - None

### 5. Review and modify Town Plan draft based on Selectboard and TRORC comments

Dean noted that the Selectboard's comments and requested changes only cover the first few sections of Chapter 5, Natural Resources, ending at the start of the section on Wetlands. That was as far as the Planning Commission had gotten in its review of the Chapter 5 narrative during its last meeting. The chapter's Goals, Policies, and Recommendations were divided into matching sections, which the Selectboard had edited at the same time as the narrative. The evening's review started with re-reading the narrative, going over what had been changed to see how those changes would affect the Selectboard's requested changes to the matching Goals, Policies, and Recommendations.

In the section on Lakes and Ponds, Dean noted a statement cross-referencing setbacks specified in the Zoning Bylaw. These setbacks would no longer be valid due to the recent passage of the State's new Shoreline Protection Act. The reference was deleted and a note made to change the Zoning Bylaw. Jamie noted that the status report on the Wilder Dam had been submitted by the dam's owners, and that it said there was no evidence the dam was a cause of erosion. According to a news article, several Towns and organizations, including TRORC, had quickly questioned the reliability of that finding. Jason was going to follow up with TRORC about this report.

Liz Ryan Cole joined the meeting.

The review moved on to the Goals, Policies, and Recommendations. In the first policy (under All Natural Resources), the Selectboard had requested deleting "construction" from the list of activities related to Town roads. After a long discussion of whether the Town would be

constructing any new roads in Thetford (more likely, they would be asked to take over roads constructed by developers of multi-lot projects), Liz suggested using the word “planning” to cover either situation. The change was made.

There was a long discussion of the suggested change to Recommendation 2, replacing “direct Town boards and encourage landowners to consult with the Conservation Commission” with “encourage involvement of the Conservation Commission”. Liz noted that the recommendation refers to situations “that might significantly affect an important natural resource and there are no clear existing guidelines.” She argued that such a situation would be serious enough to require clear guidance, so Town bodies should not simply be encouraged but directed to get guidance. Landowners are a different matter and can only be encouraged to protect natural resources. The others agreed and the original text was left as is. The phrase “, and reduce fluvial erosion” was deleted as being out of place (to be addressed under Running Waters).

The review ended at this point. Jamie noted that he was still planning to follow up with former Selectboard members on the status of the Town-wide Trail project. David said he still needed to find out the status of the Montague Dam in Post Mills. Dean said he was waiting to hear back from Li Shen about there being three Mud Ponds in Thetford.

#### 6. Discuss Town Plan revision schedule

Jaimie repeated that he wouldn't be able to attend a make-up meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Liz said she would have to be late on either the 24<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup>. David and Dean said they could make either date. Dean said he would notify Jason that the 31<sup>st</sup> was the better date for the most members.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 p.m.

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