

DRAFT Proposed Select Board Response to Planning Commission -- February 2016 -- Ron Pilette

There are two types of failure in the Town Plan submitted to the Select Board in late 2015. The first is that the submitted plan fails as an updated coherent planning document. The second is that it fails to address the by far single most important issue to arise since the current plan was adopted eight years ago.

1. Almost every number is out of date both in the main document itself and the appendices. Whether dates or values there are dozens and they must be updated. The percentages given for slopes on page 11 imply that there is no land with slopes between 8 and 15%. We have a new Town Garage, Vermont Yankee is long gone, global oil depletion is not a threat, and there is plenty of natural gas in the U. S. The list of recently reconstructed roads and the discussion on Communications need to be updated. Chapters 7 and 10 addressing Housing and Flood Resilience respectively are best thought of as background documents that can perform the task of helping guide the actual drafting of relevant chapters in a planning document. By themselves they are incoherent and, in the case of Chapter 10, completely out of format. Addressing these issues is best done by appointing specific Planning Commission members to take responsibility for particular items. All the updated numbers and dates should be passed by the staff of the Windham Regional Planning Commission.
2. Easily the most important new issue to arise in the past eight years is that of renewable energy, both solar and wind. By failing to update its discussion, the implication is that anything goes. Would 1,000 solar panels in the fields at Grafton Ponds be ok? Would 60 600 foot wind turbines on the ridges of Grafton Ponds be ok? If not, the Plan has to have some stance on what type of renewable energy development makes sense and what does not make sense. We might start off with what would be generally agreed upon, namely, that Act 248 should be appropriately referred to on pages 4, 6, 34 and that any such renewable energy development is to be subject to property tax contrary to the current Plan's suggested policy. Also, that renewable energy resources, both solar and wind, be considered as an Earth Resource with respect to the discussion and policies for Chapter 3. Although the Chapter on Energy implies that there are few, if any, constraints on renewable energy development, the current Plan as a whole would imply that there is much to consider: page 3 Policy 6, page 7 Recommendation 2, page 8 Policy 3, page 10 Goal 1, page 11 noting the importance of rugged scenic land to the economy, and page 52 Goal 1. There are also statements acknowledging the importance to Grafton residents of the natural beauty of our landscape, the importance of our ridges to a sense of who we are, and the importance of tourism and second homeowners to our local economy.

Can we agree that solar development intended solely for private use should be encouraged? That such development should be on rooftops rather than open fields where feasible? That commercial solar development should be restricted to rooftops such as the Cambridgeport industrial building but discouraged in open fields? That a community shared solar project should be pursued?

Can we get to the point where our sole disagreement concerns a project such as the proposed Iberdrola/MTL project? The majority of the Planning Commission has a right to take whatever position it chooses for such a project but it at least should make the case straightforwardly in a planning document and not, by implication, by saying nothing.