

Town of Grafton Planning Commission Minutes
Tuesday, September 11, 2018, Grafton Town Garage

Planning Commissioners Present: Eric Stevens, Liisa Kissel, Dave Culver, Kim Record, Chris Wallace, Chuck Wise. Community Members Present: Christine Tattersall, Sam Battaglino, Kath Martin.

Call to order: 6:34PM

Public Hearing: Acker Subdivision

Continued to the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Public Hearing: Turner Hill/Windham Foundation Subdivision

Chuck reviewed the hearing process which includes reviewing the proposed subdivision and draft decision. The subdivision plan meets all our criteria outlined in the Grafton Subdivision Regulations. The total acreage of the conservation land that falls within the Town of Grafton is 63.6 acres and it is proposed to have a 5 acre subdivision around the historic site. The conservation lands extend beyond the Town of Grafton but only those lands within our town are impacted by subdivision regulations. At the August 28th Planning Commission meeting, the Commissioners determined that this is a minor subdivision. We have discussed the fact that there is no development proposed. This is only subdividing 5 acres, transferring it to the Windham Foundation, for historic preservation purposes. The resource issues, water, wastewater, storm water, there are no impacts. The only focus for Commissioners is transportation and the potential for increased traffic and winter time snow maintenance of this Turner Hill Road. Chris asked about Turner Hill Road and if there is an easement on the remainder of the property to preserve access to the larger parcel. Kath stated that this is not being contemplated and that there will be no access easement in place. Chris asked if an access easement would be required. Kath did not believe that would be a requirement. Chuck stated that if this larger parcel was slated for development, then the decision would require that access be maintained. But this is a conservation parcel and so it is unlikely that access for development is required. Kath added there is additional access from the Windham Foundation. There used to be a track that ran from Turner Hill and directly to the house but that is all flooded now. Liisa asked about winter usage. Kath Martin is the surveyor of the project and is charged with preparing the plan and shepherding it through the subdivision process. In conversations with the State of Vermont, Kath stated there will be no activities there in the winter. What they hope to do is to transfer ownership to the Windham Foundation because the Foundation has volunteered to keep the structure from being vandalized and to stabilize it from additional deterioration. This is a significant historical structure and there is no intention of doing anything else beyond preservation. Liisa asked if there is no winter time access required. Kath stated the town plowing stops about a half mile away from the subdivision. Chuck stated that it had been plowed, but it was a dangerous route that was given up because it was hard to find people willing to risk getting a plow truck up there. Kath agreed this road would be a significant maintenance burden. Kim stated that plowing this road stopped about 10 years ago. Chuck reiterated that one of the findings in the decision states that this subdivision does not obligate the town to plow this road in the winter. This does not preclude the Windham Foundation from approaching the town for plowing in the future, but this does clarify the town's position as to its intent to not plow a dangerous section of road. Kath stated it is certainly understood by the State of Vermont that this is the

case. Dave asked who owns the property and Kath stated it is the State of Vermont. When the 5 acres is subdivided, then does that land stop being conservation land. Kath said she didn't know that answer specifically but the State of Vermont is conserved land, the adjacent Windham Foundation land is conserved, so if the 5 acres transfers to the Foundation it can be assumed that the land will remain in a conserved state. Kath explained the history of this land which was conserved as mitigation for negative environmental impacts caused by a project elsewhere. Chris asked what would happen if there was a fire at the structure in the winter time? Eric stated there would be no access, the truck could get there in the summer but certainly not the winter. Liisa asked the decision to be amended to just include the Commissioners who attended tonight's meeting.

Motion to approve the State of Vermont proposed subdivision located at Turner Hill Road and to approve the Administrator and Chair sign the September 11, 2018 Decision as corrected. (Liisa, Eric 2nd) PASSED.

Approval of Agenda

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve July 10th minutes as corrected. (Liisa 2nd Chris) PASSED.

Motion to approve July 24th minutes as corrected. (Liisa 2nd Kim) PASSED.

Motion to approve August 28th minutes as corrected. (Liisa 2nd Kim) PASSED.

Public Comment

None

Windham Regional Commission update

Liisa reported that she has nothing new to report.

Correspondence/Communications

Dave discussed training opportunities this fall. He stated that the town will not pay for the conference, Kim said that we can pay for training using our existing budget. We have also have a line item for training in the town's budget.

Dave mentioned that the subdivision for Middletown Road, Windham Foundation gravel pit is still not done. The proposal is on hold until further historic preservation/archeological work is completed at the site.

Dave discussed the Button up Vermont program and education on how to save energy with our houses. There is no cost to the community. They give away promotional materials. Dave said that from his perspective, the town plan focuses on energy production and yet the best strategies involve energy conservation. Eric stated that the town has done 2 button up sessions in the past and they were well attended. The core work was carried by 5 residents (not associated with the Planning Commission). There is a lot of work involved and it can be overwhelming. The last issue was our original focus was helping people that could not help themselves and often our focus was helping people that could probably help themselves. Liisa stated that since this is a recurring program and because we are fully engaged in the Town Plan, then maybe this can be pursued next year.

Unfinished business

Liisa stated the big question at the last meeting was about starting the work on village center designation prior to the Town Plan's adoption. The answer is yes, that we can and should be working on defining the village center and moving forward with developing our application to the State of Vermont. Liisa has conferred with Richard Amore (Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development), John Bennett and Jeff Nugent (Windham Regional Commission) and have gotten good advice on how to proceed. The big issue is understanding if the language in the draft Town Plan is adequate. Richard gave feedback saying the language is perfect, just remove the reference to the particular Legislative Act because those numbers keep changing. The mapping can get started, Jeff returns from vacation on October 1st and Liisa will work with him when he returns. Liisa stated that we have to photo document the village showing the buildings and the context of those buildings (such as street scenes). Dave stated that Liisa knows that the program is looking for and it will be good if she takes the pictures. Jeff will integrate the photographs with the map which is a requirement of the application. The application has questions that are mostly self-explanatory. John has provided some general advice and in his experience he believes we need to make the village designation very compact. Draw the village too large and it will likely be rejected by the Board that reviews these applications. Liisa will keep working with Richard as the application gets developed. Eric talked about the parcel maps and there was question if those maps would be digitally available.

Chris asked Chuck about the process of designating Cambridgeport as a village center. Chuck stated he investigated the program and that Cambridgeport meets the minimum standards required for village center designation. Chuck has solicited input from two active Cambridgeport citizens and they are investigating if the benefits offered by village center designation would be applicable to Cambridgeport. The majority of Cambridgeport falls within the Town of Rockingham, if Grafton wants to be supportive of village center designation then a simple reference in the Town Plan should suffice. Grafton would not have to go into much detail because this would be covered in an update of the Rockingham Town Plan. Chuck emphasized Eric's early comments about village center designation Creating the designation is a town task and cost, but the benefits are conferred to business owners within the designated village. For business owners, this can be a huge benefit and the difference between operating at a profit versus operating at a loss.

Dave updated everyone about the consortium municipal planning grant for water and wastewater treatment. There is little interested in using Municipal Planning Grant funds at this time. The preference is to proceed with ANR grant funds that allow for all the planning and that the grant transitions to a loan that pays for the facility if you proceed to build. If you do not build, the grant does not need to be paid back. If you build, you pay back the construction loan. Dave let WRC and the Selectboard know that the municipal planning grant option won't be going forward. The Selectboard's focus right now is updating the studies and better understanding existing conditions. They want a better definition of the problem before proceeding with developing solutions.

FY20 Planning Commission budget development

Kim provided an overview of the budget. We have \$2,500 budgeted. There is a \$2,050 balance and the only expenses have been Chuck's hours. Dave asked about Chuck's hours. Kim stated

all of Chuck's hours come from the planning line item unless he is doing flood zoning related work. Dave asked about forecasting Chuck's hours for the remainder of the fiscal year and using the current billing burn rate as a way to project forward. Chuck said that was a reasonable forecast, but that his time has been extremely limited because Dave has shouldered the full burden of updating the Town Plan. Whereas in previous years, Chuck had to spend more time working with the Town Plan and Commissioners, this task has largely been shouldered by Dave. Chuck indicated that if anything, hours should decrease once we finish the Town Plan and stop having longer meetings, special meetings.

Kim talked about lowering costs with the Town Plan – maybe doing black and white copies versus color. Chuck indicated that the Town Clerk has the authority to charge for copies of the Town Plan so we do not need to budget for that expense. Liisa suggested that the majority of people probably want electronic copies and Kim agreed this is the case. Liisa ask about copies of the Plan for the public hearing. Chuck stated that as of July 1, 2018, we can email abutting towns a copy of the plan and do not have to send certified mail and printed copies. Kim stated this will save the town a good amount of money. Dave asked the Commissioners to consider costs this fiscal year and anticipated expenses we should build into next year's budget. Dave asked Chuck to provide a summary of his hours, expenses. Kim stated the Selectboard wants to prepare budgets in October. Dave wants a finalized consensus from the Commissioners in terms of next year's budget. Please think of travel and conferences, printing, Chuck's time, WRC mapping (WRC services), and local grant matches. Sam asked about FactTV expenses and the Town of Grafton pays to have these meetings covered. Dave asked if this should be included in the Planning Commission budget, Kim stated this does not need to be broken down in such detail.

Town Plan:

Chuck discussed the town plan public hearing process (Appended to Minutes).

Dave outlined the process for continuing the update of the town plan. Liisa stated it makes total sense to go in the order of the chapters. Discussion followed about the various updates to the Town Plan. Commissioners covered edits on Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

(NOTE: Edits discussed and agreed upon by the Commissioners went into a revised Town Plan that was posted on the Town's website. These minutes do not document all the various grammatical, spelling, formatting changes and factual updates. Notes are made if a substantive change was made or a revision required a vote of the Planning Commission).

Chris asked if we can muster a quorum to have another special meeting. Dave explained the agenda for the next couple of meetings. Commissioners discussed scheduling an additional meeting. Dave stated he would entertain consensus on having a meeting on September 18, 2018.

Motion to hold a special meeting on September 18, 2018. (Liisa 2nd Chris) PASSED. Eric abstains.

Adjournment

8:46 PM

Next regular meeting:
October 9, 2018

Next special meeting:
September 18, 2018