

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

Planning Commissioners Present: Liisa Kissel, Dave Culver, Chris Wallace, Matt Siano, Kim Record, Valerie Rooney. Absent: Eric Stevens. Staff present: Chuck Wise. Community Members Present: Sam Battaglinio.

Meeting called to order: 6:30PM

Agenda approval

Change next meeting to January 8, 2018. No other changes.

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve October 9, 2018 as corrected (Val, 2nd Kim) PASSED

Motion to approve November 7, 2018 as corrected (Chris, 2nd Liisa) PASSED (3 Abstentions)

Chuck mentioned an oversight in that he did not forward these minutes to Bill Kearns but will do so after this meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Discussion: Clarification of roles and responsibilities of the Planning Commission vs the new Development Review Board

Dave passed out a copy of the "Roles and Responsibilities of local officials with respect to land use regulations" which is a document prepared by the Vermont Secretary of State.

Chuck provided a single page hand out of the roles and responsibilities of the Planning Commission and Development Review Board.

Chuck stated the separation means the Planning Commission will be planning only which includes updating the town plan, the subdivision and flood zoning regulations. The new board members have only known the town plan update and that is only one responsibility of the Planning Commission. Chuck emphasized the need to do special projects and to assist the Selectboard on projects such as the septic pumping ordinance.

Chuck stated that a high priority project is the update of the flood zoning regulations. The state incentivizes the adoption of river corridor standards with preferential local matches during publicly declared disasters. In an Irene scale event, this match difference could mean multiple thousands of dollars in money that comes back to the town. On the other end, we have learned that adopting those standards in Rockingham will result in significant impacts to landowners who may want to develop their property. We should assume a similar magnitude of impact in Grafton and we need to be careful adopting standards before understanding

those impacts. In any scenario, what the Planning Commission chooses to do or not do will have real budget consequences for the town in the event of a flood disaster declaration.

The DRB has a very narrow range of responsibilities which includes floodplain development review, subdivisions, and appeals of the zoning administrator. They can only approve development that is based on the land use regulations written by the Planning Commission.

Dave asked about the deadlines for a Planning Commission – what are the projects that need to be completed? Chuck stated the only deadline for a Planning Commission is an update of the town plan which is every 8 years. There is no deadline for updating flood regulations or subdivision regulations – a Planning Commission could leave them as is permanently.

Chuck asks the Rockingham Planning Commission to do a work plan each year. Chris asked about creating a long-range plan of work projects. Dave stated that is his interest and he is interested in rewriting sections of the town plan to avoid having to update all of it under deadline.

Chuck indicated the Commissioners should also consider smaller working groups that meet for the purpose of doing a small project and then presenting that project for Planning Commission review and approval.

Chuck mentioned that the Planning Commission will still have party status on regionally significant development projects and energy/communications projects. In those instances, we are included as an interested party in the state's permitting processes.

Chuck stressed that we need to keep an active connection between the DRB and this Commission. Dave stated we need to keep a liaison between the two boards and just have this on the agenda each month. Chris agreed to provide the Commission with updates.

Liisa stated that the planning grants for projects is something the Planning Commission can more actively pursue.

Unfinished Business

Matt asked about securing the river corridor mapping data for the Saxtons River. We cannot lose that information. Fitzgerald Environmental Associates developed river corridor mapping based on the actual river channel channel. Dave stated the river corridors that were developed by ANR can be altered based on this data which would make the river corridor maps more accurate. Dave stated the mapping is still available at the consultant's website but Matt expressed reservations about long-term storage of this data set. Chuck stated that WRC is the central repository for GIS mapping and we should confirm with Jeff Nugent that they have received this data. Dave agreed to contact Jeff to confirm they have the Fitzgerald work and to ensure Grafton can maintain their access to this data. Dave asked about a future project – do we want to dissect the Fitzgerald data so that we can present this information to ANR for

changes to the river corridor mapping? Chuck stated that is an excellent idea and would go a long way to addressing people's concerns about river corridors being inaccurate.

Windham Regional Commission Update

Liisa stated that all committee meetings were cancelled this month. No updates to report.

Discussion: Town Plan

Dave reviewed the Town Plan maps. He presented the maps in his order of preference to Commissioners for feedback. Liisa concurred the map order makes sense.

Dave explained the mapping process that Jeff followed in producing the maps. Jeff knows a great deal about our community and used his local knowledge to produce our future land use map.

Discussion followed about the structures identified on the map. The structures shown on the map may not be fully accurate. Commissioners found errors with some road names, bridge names, and place names – none of these errors met a threshold for being changed with the exception of a notation on the future land use map. The future land use map needs to clearly state that this map is for planning purposes only (not for zoning). Dave said he would take responsibility for contacting Jeff and asking for this map to be amended with that language.

Dave talked about making updates to the Town Plan which includes a few changes to the maps and the addition of the chapter on "Response to Vermont's planning goals." He hopes to have a draft ready for a public hearing in January. Discussion followed concerning the warning of a public hearing and scheduling.

Motion to accept the draft town plan with additions to the maps and Chapter 12 (Response to Vermont's planning goals). (Liisa, 2nd Val) PASSED

Discussion followed about preparing for the public hearing and making sure that Commissioners are ready to present the draft Town Plan to citizens.

Motion to hold the public hearing to review the Town Plan draft on January 15th. (Liisa, 2nd Chris) PASSED

Discussion followed about the Town Plan process after the Planning Commission's public hearing. Dave agreed to work with Bill and get the Town Plan on the Selectboard's agenda for the 21st. Dave wanted to make sure the Selectboard gets the PDF copies of the plan as soon as possible. Dave stated that bottom line, after the plan leaves the Commission's hands it is no longer our responsibility.

Future Commission Timeline Discussion

Dave indicated we need to start thinking about our future work projects. Dave said that this Commission has been exclusively focused on the town plan update and that is coming to an

end. We have subdivision regulations (link on the website) and flood zoning regulations (broken link on the website) and that is our job to update these documents.

Kim stated the septic pumping ordinance can be updated. Chuck stated this ordinance should be updated to more accurately target the property owners that need to pump their tanks versus those who do not. The ordinance requires some people to pump their septic when it is not clear why. Liisa stated she is a really unusual case in that she is in the middle of nowhere and does not have any neighbors and still is required to pump her septic system every three years. Chuck indicated this is the perfect example of where the ordinance language was written too broadly.

Liisa stated the wastewater work is a long-term discussion and includes updating the two studies. This is a big project and will require lots of citizen input and work with the Selectboard.

Kim stated that we need to keep track of certain local projects and issues such as the solar project in Cambridgeport and the town-wide water testing. Chuck volunteered Eric for keeping track of the solar project. Kim mentioned we need to follow the school consolidation and to make sure our Town Plan is updated to reflect all these changes in school organization.

Dave emphasized the need to collect more data from citizens. We need to know what the Town thinks about many of the planning issues covered in the Town Plan. We should also use the state's municipal planning guide more closely. Chuck mentioned the survey in Rockingham and we not only received good data but also were able to make citizens aware of what the Planning Commission does.

Chuck said the town plan amendment process does not need to be overwhelming. It is not a big deal to update the town plan every year or every two years. Chuck also stressed that this process can be an update 1 chapter at a time or it can be the entire plan but doing strategic updates to reflect survey feedback.

Liisa talked about the village center designation and getting a map approved. This is all contingent on having an approved town plan. Liisa indicated we have a basic idea of how the map for the village center should look like but this is a process that starts here and is then influenced by the WRC (John Bennett) and Vermont Agency of Community Development (Richard Amore). Dave asked if we could have a draft map for the Planning Commission meeting in February and Liisa agreed this is possible.

Adjournment

8:31 PM

Next regular meeting:

January 8, 2018

Next special meeting:

January 15, 2018