

Grafton Planning Commission

Regular Monthly Meeting

Tuesday August 9, 2022 7:00 PM

Grafton Town Hall 2nd Floor

(Not ADA Compliant Please provide notice should access or assistance to the meeting be required.)

August 9 2022 Minutes

Members present: Eric Stevens, Matt Siano, Ron Pilette, Seth Pajcic, Lester Schwalb

1. Call to order at 7:04.
2. Approval of the agenda.
3. Approval of the minutes.
4. Seth reports that T&B wastewater project preliminary report, due July 7th has not been delivered as of 8/9. Erin Moore is the T & B contact and Matt will reach out to her. Bill Kearns is retiring by the end of the year. He will continue in some roles, and will continue with the flood administrator work. He plans to put an ad out for a Town Administrator. The position requires VT town knowledge, zoning knowledge, could come from the regional commission, must have knowledge of the regulations.
5. Eric reported about the Flood Hazard document. It's a legal document and includes many references. We have to make sure that it is internally consistent. Eric thinks that it's OK, although a few places still need editing. Eric said that we can go back to edit provisions (e.g. we have building electrical infrastructure 2 foot above flood zone while FEMA asks for 1 foot above, so the document meets the standard; however, we can add to make it more specific, editing it further if we want to, and if you don't want to, any flood administrator can accept it as is. Next steps are to make sure the document is internally consistent and that it is what we want; then it goes to the select board. Then, if approved by the select board, it will be sent to Alyssa Sebbetto, regional senior staff planner for WRC. Eric removed River Corridor regulation requirement from the document. Alyssa will be generally supportive of our editing, because she is aware of the issues for our town. Eric asked PC to proofread and check for internal consistency and always ask "why is this in here"
Eric gave some context: the River Corridor (RC) standards are arbitrary: the boundaries are a set distance from the water corridor, regardless of topography. They make some funny accommodations for roads. And, RC extends to small streams that you could jump across and makes them subject to the RC statutes. How much leeway do we have for site-specific issues?
Eric: I think that we can write in anything. Eric suggested that we identify areas by scientific measurements (e.g., Fitzgerald river erosion analysis) and build on that analysis to construct a better library of vulnerable locations. Eric suggests that we then use that "library" not to impose a regulation on the landowner about what they can or cannot do instead offer owners money for any easement. Not sure if the Select Board would go for that. On a lot of the properties, we could enhance a wildlife corridor. Some people wouldn't agree and they could

get washed out in the next flood; other people would allow a wildlife corridor easement. Ron and Seth asked questions if there are benefits to the RC statutes. The carrot behind RC, is ERAF, a state emergency relief fund, which responds after a natural disaster, giving owners a certain percentage of damages. If the town has the river corridor adopted, percentages of relief are higher. Another choice one can do, under FEMA: if you do education for the community, it allows you the same percentage. But you have to keep up on it and file paperwork regularly. Instead, if we had a good geological survey, we could easily identify the flood danger areas. Discussion: wariness of adopting a strategy that has to be renewed each year (recording flood locations and recording community outreach). Matt said that there is an appeal process under the national flood insurance program. Eric said that you can appeal the details only if you have the RC program in place Seth asked if other towns have adopted RC statutes. Eric thought that the majority have adopted it but the drawback is the arbitrariness of the regulation, which the actual data could better inform action.

We need to protect what we have and what property and home owners need. And, the RC statute implementation could take out part of the town. We need to balance: which regulations could help us and which could hurt us. We can protect our landowners and do other things to protect wildlife. Eric strongly suggests that we keep this at low level as possible.

6. American Recovery Act funds. Money was used for Town Hall but it appears that there are also municipal planning grants. There are a few relevant categories. We need to update our subdivision regulation. We could use topography map for the flood work. FEMA doesn't acknowledge that they have defective maps. But recently there were FEMA surveyors measuring any structure that goes over the river. Grants could cover updating the town plan, doing a professional survey, addressing housing needs. We are pursuing getting the Grant applications in by 11/1/22.
7. Re: the survey. Could we do a preliminary survey to get a pulse about what residents want the village to be, in order to get information that will help construct the best questions for the later more substantial survey, and then do another more professional survey a year before the plan is due? How do we find other completed surveys in comparable towns? Chuck Wise in Rockingham did one. Dave Culver in Grafton will be invited to speak to us about the survey that he did? There is a contact list of municipal planning grant recipients. Matt was going to reach out to Dave and Chuck Concerns about the survey: How anonymous will it be? How is it best to get people to answer? A professional firm to hire who can help with these questions. (that could be cost prohibitive?) Who in the household answers the survey? Many issues. UVM may have a student who would be able to help. Les to talk to UVM to see if there is a way to get a student. He will check with The Gund Institute. Also ask Chris Campany if he knows of resources for surveys.
8. Budget request to select board for July 1. We will request money to start the first step of the upcoming Survey. The big work will need to be done 2023 and 2024.
9. No new business
10. No public comment

11. Next meeting is Sept 6.

12. Meeting ended at 8:29.