

Grafton Planning Commission
Regular Monthly Meeting
Tuesday, September 10, 7:00 PM
Grafton Town Hall 2nd Floor

Zoom Recording: <https://youtu.be/WDO1GWwzm5I?si=KtpR7gpDolynkB0A>

Planning Committee: Matt Siano, Eric Stevens, Ron Pilette, Buzz Fisher
Not in Attendance: Les Schwalb
Public in Attendance: N/A

MINUTES

Call to order: 7:14 PM – Buzz Fisher acting as interim chair as Matt Siano was running late to attend meeting.

September Agenda: Approved with one modification. Motion to take item III (Town Plan Chapter Review) and place it after item VI (Marketing Grafton). Motion seconded and approved.

Approval of the August 2024 minutes. It was noted the minutes from the previous meeting were brief due to the poor recording quality of the August Zoom call where Lester was remote. Lester had made a request for others to fill in any gaps in the minutes as needed. Minute approved as is.
Ron Pilette noted he prefers brief meeting minutes.

Town Hall Audio System: Eric noted Morgan had requested the Planning Commission move this item forward. Discussed the importance of moving this review forward as it is key for transparency with the attendees that may call into the meeting via Zoom. Discussed testing to determine if the issue is with the laptop (settings including treble/bass) or the Owl device. May bring in a separate laptop to help isolate where the issues may be.
Buzz Fisher will follow up with Morgan Wilbur on the quote that was received some time ago and perhaps follow up with the vendor. With a room the size of the Town hall, second floor, hanging mics may be an option to investigate.

Welcome to Grafton signage: Discussion on making the signage more visible. Noted the Grafton is a destination, not on a byway, so may be a bit moot to expand signage. Follow up with Mike Siano if more discussion is needed.

Matt Siano joined the meeting at 7:39 PM

Welcome to Grafton signage: *continued*

Signage tied to the marketing of Grafton. Potentially move the signs to the actual borders as they are now well within the borders. Change to refer to Welcome to Grafton Village?

Question: Who owns and maintains the signs? Matt Siano is going to investigate this question.

Signs were put in place many years ago and was part of a larger promoting Grafton campaign with original web site back around 1985.

Does the Planning Commission do any follow up on this topic, especially related to Marketing?

Marketing Grafton: Discussion on hiring a professional firm to get Grafton more exposure, website, marketing plan. Only the Windam Foundation does any marketing now. Ger Realtors or other town businesses involved.

Telework as a future focus to attract residents/visitors is briefly mentioned in the town plan. But this could be greatly expanded and 1 GB connectivity, with future 10GB connectivity would be a powerful message.

Grafton Slogan? "Grafton: As fast as you want to be."

Tied into our first chapter discussion.

Working from home is very well supported with the available internet access.

Invite the new Executive Director of the Windam Foundation (Dan Lerner, Ph.D.) to coordinate on Marketing of Grafton and other topics including the town plan: Mike Siano will contact Dan Lerner for a "meet and greet".

Town Plan Chapter Review: This week was the review of Chapter 1. Ron started with a review of the introduction and noted that much of the previous town plan introduction verbiage can be reused, though the first paragraph needs to be updated. The first chapter was well researched and well written though the data references will need to be updated.

Page 8 - Question on what is the "Designation of Growth Center or Cluster Housing" in current town plan.

Eric answered by referencing an email he shared with Planning Commission members on 9/10/2023 from the Windam Regional Commission (WRC) the has a "Municipal Plan Review Tool" that has a step-by-step process of what town plans should include today. The email also included a 47-page attachment that are abstracts of the regulations that have changed and will impact town plans. The WRC will also be reviewing these changes and giving directions on town plans. Eric read the section on "Land Use Plan" (*refer to email*) which includes what the WRC expects in a town plan Land Use Chapter.

One significant update would be **habitat connectors**:

- Designate areas of habitat connectors – not in current town plan. The state wants to see connectors that join forest blocks. Not too many forest areas in Grafton that are

not connected. Roads do not seem to significantly restrict wildlife movement – how can this be verbalized to minimize future state mandated zoning? How does this tie into neighboring forest blocks?

- Discussed potential for the town to buy easements and compensate landowners to provide for good passage of wildlife to pre-empt state regulation which could be heavier handed. These easements would typically follow streams and would typically not conflict with agricultural uses and could be quite narrow. If forested sufficiently, would get a lot of use.

Potentially:

- Mollie Beattie and Putnam Forest (Saxtons River Corridor)
- Howe Brook and Willie Brook (Townshend Valley)

Discussion: All surface waters are state waters. The group was not 100% sure of this statement. Discussion on road over and under wildlife crossing and examples in New England.

- Oct 13th, 2023 - Wildlife Crossing Project Launches to Connect the White Mountain National Forest across US Route 2 in Randolph, NH
- Dec 8th, 2023 - A \$1.6 million federal grant received this week by VTrans would fund the design of a bridge system that will allow wildlife to pass under I-89 and Route 2 in western Waterbury.

Crossing of 121 where it is gravel should not be difficult for wildlife.

Page 8 – Zoning regulations need updating. Far beyond 2006 and Otter Creek report.

Page 11 – Grafton Resource Lands writeup needs updating to current state guidelines/requirements.

Grafton Rural Residential Land section needs to be updated. Map does not match description – Map needs to be updated with Eastman Rd Northern section needs to be made blue.

Flood plain not discussed in this chapter but should reference to Chapter 10.

Page 10 – Update that Grafton received “Village Center Designation” and there is some degree of financial resources for non-municipal building within the confines of the Village Center. Also on Page 12, Recommended Action, item 2 – Achieved.

Page 12 – What was the focus of this language in the current town plan?

Encourage voluntary action to ensure Plan implementation, including:

- a. privately-agreed restrictive covenants binding on purchasers of land,

May have been related to forest blocks and connectivity we discussed. Expand to tie into that area.

Review Chapter 2 Review for next Planning Commission meeting: “Chapter 2 Historical, Cultural, and Natural Resources”

Review in context to the email Eric shared with Planning Commission members on 9/10/2023 from the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) the has the “Municipal Plan Review Tool”. This will be a long-term effort, at least a year.

Old Business: Wastewater 90 % report with addendum report out on 9/11. The invitation went to the Water Committee and the Select Board.

New Business: All (Planning Commission) received the email on the Goodrich gravel pit expansion. Eric forwarded, should have gone to Mike for Planning Commission. Not in DRB jurisdiction. Planning Commission should have been informed. WRC sees all Act 250 major project effort application, then they have to be reviewed and commented on by Project Review Committee (Eric a member).

On Eastman Rd, where Richmond Rd Y’s off opposite Story Ln. Near old campground area.

Update on the Grafton Outdoor Alliance (GOA): if you are not familiar, the GOA was formed to earlier in the spring with their primary focus on outdoor recreation within Grafton. As we all know, there are miles and miles of trail systems within the village, but they are all independent and not connected. We have the Village Park, State Parks, Windham Foundation/Grafton Outdoor Center, Nature Museum, GIA, Pinnacle, and the VAST trails. GOA applied for and received a VOREC planning grant. They have hired Drew & Carolyn from CRO Planning & Design to help come up with a ‘master plan’. Within that, they have done several site visits with each organization, and are doing a lot of research about how often our trails are used, connectivity, etc. Jeff Nugent from the Windham Regional Commission has also jumped on board and is helping with mapping of all of these trail systems. So, within all of that, the community input is crucial and very valuable.

We plan to tentatively hold an “Open House”/Public Visioning session on Wednesday, November 6th from 5:30-7 p.m. at the Elementary School. They plan to have posters, maps, displays, etc. for people to look at, ask questions, and give their thoughts on. Ultimately, there will not be any type of presentation. It is more geared towards getting community input so people can stop in for however long necessary.

The Selectboard’s role: so far, we are just a supporting element right now. I’ve (Morgan Wilbur) been attending all of the meetings and trying to stay informed as much as possible. I’ve also been able to help give some ideas as to community trends and what people are looking for. I think it’s important for the Selectboard and Planning Commission to know this work is being done. Also, this type of thing is spelt out pretty clearly in the Town Plan.

Tie above into the town plan recreational chapter.

Public Comment: No Public Comment to record

Next Meeting October 8, 2024

Adjournment at 8:56 PM