

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
Minutes for December 17, 2008 Meeting
Approved on January 21, 2009

Commission Members Present: Mark Letorney (Chair), Seth Jensen, Patrick Haller, Jason Hoover and Michael Nelson.

Commission Members Absent: N/A

Also Present: Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator) and Thomas Orfeo.

The meeting began at approximately 7:10p.m.

2009 Town Plan Survey

The Planning Commission discussed the Selectboard's town plan survey comments and made revisions to the survey. The Commission also accepted the RPC's revised location map.

Mark MOVED to take the survey to print.

Pat SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 -0.

The Planning Commission agreed to distribute the survey in the following manner:

- Send 2 copies, bulk mail, to all Westford mailing addresses and all landowners not residing in town.
- Post the survey on the town website.
- Have surveys available at the store, library, town office and post office, if possible.

Additionally, they agreed to place an article in the newsletter and on the Front Porch Forum addressing the importance of the survey.

Mark MOVED to distribute the survey in the above stated manner.

Seth SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 -0.

The Planning Commission discussed the proposed mailing and return date for the survey.

Mark MOVED to mail the survey on February 2nd with a return date of March 3rd (Town Meeting Day).

Pat SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 -0.

The Commission briefly discussed the method in which they will process the survey. Melissa said she expected the group to use the same format for processing data as was used for the 2003 survey with minor revisions based on new and/or revised questions. She said she could prepare the format. The Commission agreed they would split data entry between themselves.

Mark asked the Planning Commission to read the 2004 town plan prior to the January Planning Commission meeting. He also asked them to review plans from other towns. He hopes for each member to become a point person for a section of the town plan. In which case the point person will revise the sections they were assigned, the Commission will discuss the language and revise it as needed, and the section will be placed in the draft town plan to be proofed once all the sections have been revised/reviewed. The Commissioners agreed to discuss which sections of the town plan they would like to work on at their January Planning Commission meeting.

Energy Planning

The Planning Commission discussed the process of creating a Westford energy committee. The Commission agreed the Commission should submit a request to the Selectboard to appoint an energy committee. The Selectboard could then send a notice out to the community asking interested individuals to apply for appointment.

Mike asked if the committee would create its own goals.

Mark felt the energy committee should conduct a town-wide energy consumption inventory, fact-find for town boards, assist the Planning Commission when developing energy related plans and regulations, and conduct projects as directed by the Selectboard. He went onto further state that the current town plan energy policy is ambiguous and should be revised so it gives real direction when creating energy regulations.

Jason said that he would like the energy committee to draft the town's energy policy since he does not feel he is qualified to undertake such a task.

Pat said he would be willing re-write the town plan energy policy, if the energy committee is not up and running prior to the current plan's expiration. He also offered to start the energy policy for a new energy committee to review and revise prior to town plan adoption. Pat said a new energy committee should also focus on supporting the state's energy codes, which currently aren't enforced by anyone, and the committee could be a resource for the community with regard to tapping into state and federal funds and sharing information on energy issues and assistance programs. Pat added that the energy committee could review mandatory state documentation that should be part of what a developer submitted to the town.

Seth said the committee should focus on providing information to low-income families as well.

Melissa offered to draft a letter to the Selectboard requesting the appointment of an energy committee.

Mark asked to have discussion of the draft letter placed on the January Planning Commission agenda. The Commission agreed.

Tom stated the Commission should present Westford's energy consumption data when advertising for energy committee members. He thought showing residents the problem in black and white would encourage them to join the energy committee.

Pat said that he may be able to get Westford's energy consumption information from Efficiency Vermont, but it is highly unfeasible.

Zoning & Subdivision Regulations Prohibiting the Development of Slopes 25% or Greater

The Planning Commission discussed the deficiencies in the twenty-five percent slope protection regulations and the town's need to better the language.

Jason explained the issue as well as some of the Town's options - such as allowing development of steep slopes that do not disturb more than a specified amount of square footage or extend over

a specified length. Furthermore, the town should specify how slopes are calculated - such as with contour intervals of five feet.

Seth mentioned that the zoning regulations are also lacking adequate language concerning development of steep slopes on pre-existing lots. He said the Commission may want to look into requiring conditional use approval for development of steep slopes on preexisting lots. He also stated that he would like to present the Selectboard with a comprehensive regulation dealing with all aspects of developing and disturbing steep slopes, including slopes less than twenty five percent.

Pat suggested the Commission focus on slopes 25% or greater first since that is the issue the Selectboard asked the Commission to deal with.

Mike said the new language should clarify whether the regulation applies to natural slopes and/or man-made slopes.

Pat stated that the Commission should also look into whether there is a difference with regard to whether the proposed project requires digging or filling.

Jason explained that any disturbance of slopes 25% or greater will create substantial environmental impact. Jason offered to draft new steep slope language prior to the January Planning Commission meeting.

Draft Town Center Wastewater Capacity Inquiry Letter Prepared by Seth

Seth explained the purpose of the Town Center Wastewater Feasibility Study and submitted a summary of the report to the Commission. He said the next logical step is contacting property owners who own soils suitable to develop small community wastewater systems. He said he would like to work with public entities prior to contacting private landowners. Furthermore, he would like to have a discussion with the Wastewater Committee prior to the Planning Commission requesting that the Selectboard take action. He explained that a large publicly-owned community wastewater system is ideal. However, small privately-owned community systems are far more feasible and the town could promote development of these systems by providing landowners with legal and technical assistance. Seth said that he would discuss his proposal with the Wastewater Committee and, if agreed upon by said Committee, would draft a letter for the January Planning Commission meeting asking the Selectboard to pursue discussions with public entities regarding the development of community wastewater systems.

Commercial Language Outline for Town Plan

The Commission reviewed economic development language from the towns of Shoreham, Cornwall and Craftsbury. The Commission agreed to review economic development language in other town plans.

Mark suggested the Commission double check their draft economic development language by reviewing what they would like to see for commercial language in the regulations and work backwards to ensure the town plan promotes/allows for those types of development.

Selectboard Public Hearing on the Draft Town Plan, Zoning Regulations & Subdivision Regulations

The Planning Commission briefly discussed the Selectboard's public hearing on the draft Town Plan maps, Zoning Regulations and Subdivision Regulations.

Minutes of the October 15, 2008 & November 19, 2008 Meetings

Jason MOVED to approve the minutes of October 15, 2008 and November 19, 2008 as amended.

Mike SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 – 0.

Other Business

The Planning Commission discussed the questionnaire Mark prepared inquiring into each member's skills and interests. The Commissioners answers were as follows:

What skills do you have that pertain to planning?

Pat – Public speaking, engineering, efficiency and renewable energy.

Jason – Planning and development processes, landscape architecture, site design, smart growth principals, and local and Act 250 regulations.

Mike – Customer service and sales, public speaking, can translate technical details to broad audience, and contract negotiations.

Seth – Town planning and bringing the perspectives of many towns to the table.

Mark - Zoning experience and willingness to serve.

What is your area of expertise as it pertains to planning?

Pat –Residential construction, residential sprinkler systems, groundwater and hydrology, and knows how to build a power plant.

Jason – Landscape and design guidelines, PRD and planning standards, road standards, drainage, and slope issues.

Mike – New to the planning world but a quick study.

Seth - Housing and village center planning.

Where could Westford use improvement?

Pat – Create a more vibrant town center, promote home businesses, better teamwork between state and local boards.

Jason – Reduce the proposed minimum acreage requirement in the town center district.

Mike – More citizen involvement, more translation between town plan and regulations, and creation of a long-term vision for the town.

Seth – Create a more vibrant town center, improve affordability in town, create more public open spaces, create a better plan for Plains Road, and improve infrastructure (i.e. road base).

Mark – More public participation and pursue sustainable agriculture.

Mike MOVED to adjourn. Seth SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 - 0.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:20 p.m.

Submitted by,
Melissa Manka, Planning Coordinator