

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
Minutes for March 18, 2009 Meeting
Approved on April 8, 2009

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

Commission Members Absent: Seth Jensen.

Also Present: Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator).

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

Draft Steep Slope Regulations

Jason presented the Commission with draft steep slope regulations.

Melissa asked if the minimum amount of disturbance on a property was accumulative and Jason said yes.

Jason explained that the 1000 square footage minimum allowed disturbance area was arbitrary, beyond the fact that many towns use an exemption between 500 to 1000 square feet.

The Commission discussed whether the regulation should apply to natural as well as man-made slopes and they agreed it should.

Melissa said that stating development shall not occur on steep slopes in both the zoning and subdivision regulations could prevent an individual owning an existing lot from accessing or developing their property unless a variance was received. She said someone could argue the language allowed for a taking by the Town.

The Commission agreed that they would like to prohibit all development on steep slopes as a protection against erosion, water degradation, habitat disturbance and emergency access issues. They feel comfortable that an individual with an existing lot could apply for a variance if there was no alternative access or building site on a property.

Pat asked whether wind turbines would be prohibited on steep slopes.

The Commission agreed their intent was not to prohibit wind turbines on all steep slopes since it is very likely that a turbine or turbine access road would be located on steep slopes.

Mark said the energy committee should develop town plan and regulation language that allows development of wind turbines and associated infrastructure on steep slopes.

Pat said this type of development should only be allowed if the benefits of the turbine outweigh environmental impacts.

Melisa said she would present the draft steep slope regulations to the Selectboard for comment and will bring the comments back to the Commission prior to the Commission taking the draft language to public hearing.

Town Plan Survey Data Collection

The Commission agreed to submit their survey results by Wednesday, March 25, 2009.

The Planning Commission had the following comments regarding the 2009 town plan survey and data compilation process. These comments are to be taken into consideration when the next town plan survey is conducted:

- A consultant should be hired to write the survey and analyze the data.
- Or Survey Monkey should be used to process the surveys, because recording the data as formatted is time consuming and tedious. Also, Survey Monkey allows a person to analyze the data in many different ways.
- Questions should be designed to take into consideration the results the town would like to capture as well as the purpose and intent of the question.
- Omit “not sure” and “no opinion” as an option.
- Omit redundant questions.
- Omit question #4.
- If the survey is digitized, more geographic areas should be added to the location map.
- The Commission should encourage folks to take the survey on-line, but have paper copies available for those who do not have computer access.

2009 Town Plan Amendments

Town Center Wastewater, Fair Housing & Affordable Housing Plans

The Commission will discuss the town center wastewater plan at their April 1st meeting and the housing plan at their April 15th meeting.

Steep Slope Plan

Jason presented the Commission with a steep slope plan and the Commission agreed the language should be placed in the natural features section of the town plan.

Mark suggested that the housing section include language regarding development of steep slopes. He added that Commissioners should flip through the town plan once they have completed writing a section to ensure that the topic they have focused on is cross referenced in all pertinent sections of the plan.

Energy Plan

Pat said it would be more efficient if the energy committee reviewed and revised the energy plans prior to the Commission commenting on the draft plan, because the Committee may completely revise the energy plan. The Commission agreed to wait to comment.

Economic Development Plan

The Commission will discuss Mark’s draft of the economical development plan at their April 1st meeting.

Natural Resource & Feature Plan

The Commission agreed that waterways should be added to the critical habitat list. Furthermore, they agreed that critical habitat and rural character should be defined in the plan.

Pat told Mike he would send him Middlebury’s water resource pamphlet to review. He went on to suggest that the natural resource section of the plan call out specific agencies that could help individuals with the stewardship of their land, such as the Vermont Land Trust.

Mike said that the Vermont Land Trust is focusing on Lamoille County and Addison County and they are only interested in large tracts of land.

Pat said if the town is concerned about conservation road blocks we could become a voice to the state explaining that Westford residents need the option of conserving their land from development even though Westford is located in Chittenden County.

Mike said he would strengthen the land protection and easement language.

Jason said the first paragraph of section 1.6 may need to be revised based on the survey results.

Mark asked that the plan use words like “protect rural character” rather than “limit development”. Also, he asked that the word “should” be replaced with “shall”.

The Commission asked for the language on floodplains to be placed back in the natural resource section of the plan.

Melissa asked where the National Flood Insurance Program language should be placed in the plan.

Pat said he felt the plan needs to speak more about protection of prime agricultural and forest soils, because the regulations do not adequately protect prime agricultural soils from development. He stated the town may need to identify in need of protection. He also suggested the natural resource plan address invasive species.

Jason said the plan could promote the prevention of invasives through the development landscaping guidelines.

The Commission agreed to review the language again.

Chapters of Town Plan in Need of Attention

The following individuals will update the following sections of the town plan:

Pat – Transportation.

Jason – Historic Resources.

Melissa - Facilities, Utilizes & Services; Planning Process; Populations; Existing Land Use; Relationship With Other Towns.

Seth – Housing.

Mike – Greenways; Town Trails

Everyone – Introduction; Future Land Use.

Jason said the information on greenways and trails should be taken out of the transportation section of the plan and given their own section. Mike said he would work on a greenways and trails section utilizing the Trails Committees expertise.

Mark stated the natural resource, energy and recreation sections should cross reference each other. He also suggested that the group review the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations pertaining to the section of the town plan being worked on to ensure a direct and real relationship between the goals in each section of the plan and each section of the regulations.

Planning Commission Work Plan

The Planning Commission reviewed and revised the draft work plan. They agreed to review the work plan at the next meeting.

Minutes of the February 18, 2009 Meeting

The Planning Commission will review the minutes of the February 18th meeting at their April 1st meeting.

Scheduling Home Builders Association Officer to Discuss Affordable Housing Initiatives

Pat will ask Seth what he would like to learn about affordable housing and will try to schedule a member of the Home Builders Association to discuss affordable housing at the April 15th Planning Commission meeting.

Jason MOVED to adjourn. Mark SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 4 - 0.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:45 p.m.

Submitted by,
Melissa Manka, Planning Coordinator