

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
Minutes for November 18, 2009 Meeting
Approved on December 8, 2009

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

Commission Members Absent: N/A

Also Present: Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator), Patricia Hechmer, Robert Pittala, John Doanne, Tim Budell, Della Budell, Eva Paquin, John Quinn, Alex Weinhagen, Joel Fay, Barb Peck and Marilyn Thomas.

The meeting began at approximately 7:07 p.m.

Draft 2009 Town Plan Planning Commission Public Hearing

Mark opened the hearing and explained the hearing process.

Pat gave a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation explained the adoption process, information used to develop the 2009 Town Plan, the reasons for updating the Plan and the maps associated with the draft Town Plan.

Mark opened the hearing for public comment on the Plan and associated maps.

Alex Weinhagen had the following comments:

Pg 22 & 23 – The definition of unfragmented habitat should be reworded and Map 10 should exclude areas around dwellings and driveways. He believes that there is less unfragmented habitat in Town than depicted on the map. He suggested the Commission use the data provided by UVM.

Pg 22 & 23 – The definition of stewardship should be reworded. He suggested the following language: Careful use and conservation of land and natural resources to retain value and ecological function for future generations.

Pg 38 (Public Transportation) – Alex stated that Westford is not conducive to public transportation. He suggested that the Selectboard work with Essex to develop/encourage an Essex Park and Ride with express CCTA busing to large employment centers.

Pg 41 (Objective #6 Implementation #1) – Needs to be more specific.

Pg 46 (Recreation Department) – This section should state how much the Recreation Dept does for the Town and describe the programs offered. Alex offered to write something for the Recreation Dept.

Pg 58 – Alex stated that this section should clarify that the Town’s solar resources are unlimited, but other renewable energy resources are uncertain. He asked if solar power was limited in Town due to our lack of three phase power.

Pat said that it was due to the expense of three phase power.

Alex suggested the language state that large scale solar would be difficult due to the lack and expense of three phase power.

Pg 60 (Objective #2 Implementation # 4) – Alex said the language should be reworded so it can not be interpreted to say projects that do not have a two year net simple payback should not be pursued.

Pg 66 (Objective #2 Implementation # 4) – Alex asked the Commission to reword the language so only the Town Common District would be subject to historical/design review.

Map 10 – Alex stated that he does not understand the wildlife corridors depicted on Map 10 and does not believe the map is defensible.

Map 9 – Alex asked the Commission to think about extending the Conservation District to the north and south and consider placing a Conservation District on the west side of Town. He went on to say that the district shouldn’t only be ruled by trails, but other significant resources should be taken into consideration.

Barb Peck had the following comments:

Pg 71 (Objective # 2 Implementation # 1) – Barb asked why the Commission was proposing more stringent landscaping requirements for development along paved roads and stated that she objects to this statement.

Jason said the requirement would be applied to commercial development only.

Barb said she does not object to that, but would like that stated more clearly.

Pg 72 (Implementation #6) – Barb asked where she could get more information about the Bridge and Culvert Inventory.

Melissa said she could get more information at the Town Office.

Pg 73 (Section 10.1.2) – Barb asked who was enrolling in the NFIP.

Melissa said the Town was enrolling in the program and it would benefit the Town as well as residents living within the floodplain. Melissa said she could get more information at the Town Office.

Eva Paquin had the following comments:

Pg 58 – Eva said the Button-Up Workshop wasn't funded by ANR.

Pat said that Plan references last year's workshop which was funded by ANR.

Conservation District - Robert Pittala asked what the Conservation District would entail?

Mark said development would be restricted in some form whether through stricter planning standards or increased lot sizes.

Process - John Doanne asked whether the Planning Commission would meet with effected property owners when developing language for the Conservation District.

Mark replied that they would not specifically contact effected property owners, because it would set a precedent when making any change to the regulations. He stated that the Commission would notify members of the public as required by state statute, in the Westford Newsletter and on the Town Website.

Alex agreed that regulations were a town wide consideration as opposed to just concerning effected property owners.

Robert said the Town should be more transparent and should notify effect property owners.

Barb asked whether the Conservation District would be a new zoning district.

Mark said yes.

Barb asked whether property values would be affected.

Mark said the market determines property value. He added that the language for the district is proposed to be worked on in 2012 and will go through the public process.

Taxes - Robert stated that the #1 priority in the survey results was controlling property tax and asked what in the Plan controls taxes.

Seth noted that throughout the Plan it states that projects should only be pursued if economically feasible. Furthermore, the Plan encourages growth of small businesses, which will increase the grand list value and lower taxes.

Pat added that implementation of the energy plan will reduce energy consumption and save tax payers money.

Robert said that 50% of the land in Town is in the Current Use Program. He said this hurts the Town with regard to fair taxation. He asked the Town to research the way individuals are taxed and more specifically the Current Use Program.

Alex said that the Current Use Program is a state program and the Town can not do anything about it. He added that the Town should not waste time investigating the program. He went on

to say the Commission did a great job on the Plan and many of the implementation recommendations speak to reducing taxes, such as encouraging business along paved roads, encouraging sustainable business and the entire energy section.

John Doanne had the following comments:

Process - John asked whether there was going to be further dialogue after this hearing.

Mark said that the Commission would discuss the comments they received on December 2nd and make revisions accordingly. He said that the Selectboard would hold a public hearing to take public comment on the Plan in the next few months.

Alex said that comments can be submitted to the Selectboard prior to their warning a public hearing, because the Selectboard can revise the Plan prior to issuing the warning.

Pg 58 – John suggested that an implementation recommendation be added to the energy section that states the Town shall assess/inventory renewable energy resources.

Pat informed him that the state has already hired a consultant to conduct a statewide renewable energy resource assessment, which will be complete in February.

John suggested the Plan recognize that inventory.

Historic Section - John recommended that design review in the Town Center area be advisory in nature rather than regulatory.

Map 10 - John added that the Plan should put more emphasis on public trail and wildlife corridor linkages.

Tim Budell had the following comments:

Map 9 – Tim said he is in favor of the district, but would like the purpose of the district defined in the Plan. He said aesthetics were not a strong reason for creation of such a district. He added that the district should include conserved lands to the north, natural resources to the south and the area around Westford Pond as well as the Rogers Road area. He also asked how the boundaries would be defined. He encouraged the Commission to use easily identifiable boundaries such as roads and property lines. He also suggested that the Conservation District boundary be proposed larger than expected since the boundaries are not definite at this time. He said it would make it easier for the Commission to define the boundary in the future without individuals questioning an increase in the boundary from what is proposed on Map 9.

Bella Budell agreed that the district should be increased to the north and south and use of the area reduced. She said human recreation should occur on the Common and at the school, trails should be created on a volunteer basis, trails should be closed to protect wildlife, and wheeled vehicles band from public trails.

Alex agreed that the purpose of the Conservation District should be stated in the Future land Use Section.

John Quinn said that the Commission should keep in mind potential ancient roads when developing the district.

Bella said that land owner wishes should also be taken into consideration.

Seth referred her to General Goal #1 on page 2.

Map 10 – Tim said Map 10 seems to inaccurately depict unfragmented habitat and wildlife corridors.

Process – John Quinn suggested that the Commission hold work sections with the public when developing the regulations associated with the goals of the Plan.

Mark MOVED to close the hearing.
Patrick SECONDED the motion.
The motion PASSED: 5 – 0.

The hearing adjourned at approximately 8:37 p.m.

The Planning Commission opened the Planning Commission meeting.

DHCA – Village Center Designation

The Commission approved the proposed village center boundaries. Melissa said the DHCA informed her that the village center can be expanded in the future.

Zoning Certification

The Commission reviewed the Zoning Certificate currently used by the Administrative Officer and agreed it has the proper language to ensure that the Administrative Officer does not approve unknown violations.

Planning Commission Work Plan

The Planning Commission reviewed the work plan and asked Melissa to revise it as discussed.

Minutes of the October 21, 2009 Meeting

Pat MOVED to approve the minutes.
Gordon SECONDED the motion.
The motion PASSED: 5 – 0.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:51 p.m.

Submitted by,
Melissa Manka, Planning Coordinator