

**TOWN OF WESTFORD**  
**PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES**  
**Minutes for May 5, 2010 Meeting**  
Approved on June 2, 2010

**Commission Members Present:** Mark Letorney (Chair), Gordon Gebauer, Patrick Haller, Jason Hoover and Seth Jensen (7:20 PM).

**Commission Members Absent:** N/A

**Also Present:** Melissa Manka (Planning Coordinator) Suzanne Blanchard and Noelle MacKay.

The meeting began at approximately 7:09 p.m.

**Meet with Smart Growth Vermont**

Suzanne Blanchard and Noelle MacKay were present.

Mark explained that the Planning Commission would like to apply smart growth principles in the Town of Westford by fostering a more vibrant downtown and preserving the rural character of outlying areas.

Pat said they didn't want to re-create the wheel and hoped Smart Growth Vermont could point them in the right direction by providing example regulations or planning studies.

Mark said the Commission's plan was to draft architectural standards and re-write the commercial regulations.

Jason said the Commission asked Smart Growth to meet with them to determine whether they're using the right strategy to rejuvenate the Center area.

Noelle asked whether the town had looked into the Sustainable Jobs Fund, if the Town's intent was to promote forestry, agriculture and employment.

Mark said ideally the community would support any economic development as opposed to the economic development supporting the community. He clarified this by stating the town wasn't looking to develop industrial parks, but would like to foster the development of shops in the Town Center area, the expansion of home businesses, and diversification of farms.

Noelle said towns typically begin implementation of smart growth principles by listing town assets, listing what the town hopes to attract, and meeting with groups of residents to development a vision. She said the Commission's endeavor was quite similar to a recent project Smart Growth Vermont conducted in Danville. However, Danville differs in the fact that they have municipal wastewater capacity. She went on to explain her organization was contracted by Danville to conduct public outreach meetings to determine what folks liked and disliked about their down town and a survey regarding residents' needs, wants and concerns. She noted that the survey gave two options for every topic. During that process Noelle met with four different groups of residents to discuss the town's future. The groups were divided into business owners, residents, public officials, etc. She stressed the need to include the leaders and opinion formers of the community in these meetings early on. Noelle said they were able to find participants through direct calling, personalized letters and offering food. She also said Preservation Trust has a Downtown Health Indicator that takes into account existing features, the working landscape, and local heritage. It was further explained that having a compact village with rural surrounding areas has a beneficial impact on taxes because for every dollar received in residential taxes more than one dollar is spent providing services to that residence as opposed to

agricultural land which for every dollar received in taxes less than fifty cents is spent in services. Therefore, compact development saves money for the town.

Seth mentioned that parking has been an issue in the Town Center area and the Commission really needs to develop on-street or off-site parking requirements.

Mark said Westford really needs to focus on septic before development in the Town Center can occur.

Noelle suggested the Commission talk to Faith at the Department of Housing and Community Affairs regarding small scale wastewater system funding.

The Commission agreed they need to begin contacting Town Center residents about potential community wastewater locations.

Noelle also suggested the Commission sign up to receive Smart Growth E-News.

Pat would like Smart Growth to review our draft Town Plan for smart growth principles.

Gordon said the Commission will likely need Smart Growth for collecting and collating survey data as well as facilitating meetings.

Melissa said she will contact Noelle about costs and will ask for more information on the Danville project.

The Commission agreed to focus on the Town Center area at this time.

Mark suggested the Commission start discussion of the project on the Front Porch Forum, in Newsletter, and/or start a blog.

Jason said the first newsletter article could introduce the project and following articles could touch on different Town Center topics. He stressed the importance of holding public forums in addition to taking written public comment.

Melissa warned of the difficulty of boiling down written comments into a useable format and used the example of the 2009 Community Survey. She believes a survey and forums will be most useful.

Mark and Melissa will look into the possibility of beginning a blog on the Town Website to be advertised in the newsletter and Front Porch Forum.

Pat said a paper option for submitting comments also needs to be available for individuals who do not use the internet.

Seth said the Commission should send personal invitations to specific individuals such as Kevin and Roland and general invitations to all Town Center residents. When warning the public meetings.

Jason would like Melissa to ask Noelle whether the Danville forums were restricted to a selected group of individuals.

Pat said he would write a synopsis of the 2009 Community Survey, why the Commission is taking on this project, what the Commission is trying to accomplish, ask why folks like the Common and ask what folks would like to see in the Common in the June Newsletter.

### **Regulation Deficiencies.**

The Commission discussed the Selectboard's memo asking for an opinion on Cori Hill's and Tina Shoup's proposal to park vehicles in the travel lane of the Town right of way to service a commercial business which will host outside events in the summer months.

Mark said he didn't believe the regulations could allow parking in the travel lane of a public right of way, because roads aren't wide enough to allow parking with two open travel lanes and due to safety concerns. He said the Commission couldn't craft conditional use language that would hold weight allowing on-street parking without being completely site specific.

Seth suggested perhaps adding language to the bylaws which state the DRB may consider on-street parking based on Selectboard approval of on-street parking to serve a specific use and a plan depicting parking which meets Selectboard standards for on-street parking.

Seth said he could provide example language to the Commission.

Melissa said she would send the Selectboard a message reiterating Mark's and Seth's thoughts.

### **Commercial Business & Associated Zoning Definitions.**

Mark began by stating he believed the home occupation and business standards were fine.

The Commission discussed how they should deal with the other permitted and conditional business types currently allowed in the Zoning Regulations and decided to investigate performance/form based commercial regulations as opposed to using commercial business definitions with general conditional use criteria.

Seth said he could provide the Commission with example performance standards.

### **Other Business**

#### Planning Commission Appointments

Pat MOVED to appoint Mark as Chair.

Gordon SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 – 0.

Mark MOVED to appoint Jason as Vice Chair.

Pat SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 – 0

Jason MOVED to appoint Gordon as Clerk.

Seth SECONDED the motion.

The motion PASSED: 5 – 0

### **Planning Commission Work Plan**

Melissa will update the work plan as discussed throughout the meeting.

### **Minutes of the April 7, 2010 Meeting**

The Planning Commission will review the April 7<sup>th</sup> minutes at their next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:15 p.m.

Submitted by,

Melissa Manka, Planning Coordinator