

TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
Minutes for January 5, 2011 Meeting
Approved on February 16, 2011

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

Commission Members Absent: N/A

Also Present: Tim Cassese (Planning Coordinator).

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

Town Revitalization Project Update

Mark revealed that the select board approved the \$1,500.00 grant to proceed in having Smart Growth Vermont assist in the development of the town center. Mark continued to explain how Smart Growth could be a big help in assisting in the septic issue associated with the town office and with the town common. It is mentioned how the solution to the septic problem for the town center could also be integrated with the town office, as upgrading the septic system will be necessary in upcoming years. Seth agreed that the more the planning commission gets the language roughed out before Smart Growth comes to help, the more productive they can be. Gordon questioned form based zoning, and asked Mark to go back over what they had talked about before as he thought form based zoning could be rather subjective. Pat talked about how Westford has always been a hybrid between conditional use and form based zoning. The good thing about Smart Growth is that they would not just teach about form based zoning, but properly implement it to get the precise results the town is searching for. Gordon brought up that there should be another meeting with Smart Growth before any contract is signed, and Mark and Seth agreed.

Patrick stated that he thinks Smart Growth could help make strong non-skewed language, Seth agreed saying it would remove personality issues.

Patrick also believed the idea of stakeholders or micro-groups of town people could be crucial input in the development process of the town center. Seth thinks going off of other developed towns like Richmond and Jericho could show what worked well, and did not work well, as they became more commercial.

Septic is the town center's limiting factor if it were to become a greater developed area. The planning commission all agreed that this should be first priority to not delay the process of any development in the future.

Mark believes the community as a whole, or individual property owners could be a big part of the "capitol" necessary to make it happen. Whether this "capitol" means community support or a property owner in the town center agrees to allow their property to be part of the solution. Seth believes the building blocks are present, but the community still needs to come together to get things to happen. Smart Growth can assist in this process, connecting community members and ideas to coincide with decisions depicted in the Town Plan.

In the end the Town Plan is to have a stronger village community, drawing residents and non-residents together. Seth contributes that the town retains the historic feel of the mill town it once was, and it would be a nice quality to preserve throughout the development process.

PUD Density Bonus for Donation of Public Spaces

After the board reviewed different languages, Patrick pointed out how he liked the Hinesburg PUD bonus language on Page 9 where it is stated that the board decides whether or not a bonus is awarded depending on the value of the property donated. Seth and Mark discuss the matrix based chart showing “% Density Bonus by District” on Page 8. Pat said that the planner from Hinesburg (Alex Weinhagen) would be a good person to talk to about the implementation of this language, and see how it has been working since its abduction in 2009. Mark agreed and said that he would be invited to come to the next meeting in February. Patrick, Seth, and Mark all agree #4 on Page 9, “Important Public Spaces & Public Infrastructure” could work very well for Westford. Gordon brought up the point that additional dwelling units have a different value to property owners than greater lot coverage. Along with different value to the property owner, it also would have different impacts to certain zoning districts like the town center. Mark brought up the question of how far the development of Westford could go, and if they are expecting commercial growth to happen in Westford. Seth said that the town center is probably going to stay residential or commercial residential, but could possibly have commercial growth outside the town center. Mark moved to continue discussion to the next meeting.

Performance Standards

Seth agreed that measureable quantifications such as in Hinesburg’s language will be important in the creation of Westford’s Language.

Sound was the first to be discussed, and was decided to need a decibel level, as people have different opinions of “too loud.” It was mentioned that 70 decibels is an ordinary noise level threshold as a maximum day time sound level. Mark then brought up the problems associated with having to measure this with a sound meter that would need regular calibration, to follow up on any noise complaints. The possibility of renting one would reduce ownership costs. The addition of time periods associated with varying acceptable sound levels were thought to be important to the Westford language.

Vibration was agreed to have no need to be a measureable amount, but by feel at the edge of the property. This would be clarified as being “discernible at the property line, without the use of a meter” to ensure the meaning of discernible to not be overpowering. Pat notes that exemptions must be made for temporary vibrations like blasts. Patrick also points out that most buildings with machinery emitting serious vibrations may have not been built to diminish vibration as it was an already existing structure. Mark also added that sound is also usually associated with vibration so it would also have to adhere to sound regulations.

Dust is another performance standard, thought to be a part of country life, such as dirt road’s dust being a constant variable. Dust that should be regulated is more of manufacturing dust (saw dust being released from a vent), along with large amounts of dust moving from one yard to another. Two parts per million was the amount of particulate matter or dust in the air to cause respiratory problems. Visible dust accumulation was decided by Mark to be what the regulation would prohibit.

Solid waste and Outdoor Displays became a topic of discussion as screening is necessary for unsightly materials put in view of other properties. Everyone agreed that Norwich’s Language was very well written controlling outdoor displays. Mark believed there should be a broad statement controlling public hazard.

The planning commission agreed all lights must remain Dark Sky compliant. Patrick informed the board that all new commercial development has state code controlling light standards. Mark brought up that lighting should not be allowed throughout the night. Shelburne has restrictions from 12 am to 4 am. Mark thinks that time restrictions should also be implemented in Westford. Patrick suggested that there should not only be a safe minimum lighting, but also maximum because of commercial areas over lighting to draw in customers. Seth informed the commission that Jericho's maximum was 1 foot candle average over the total lighted area. Patrick mentioned that he could bring in IESNA lighting standards, along with a foot candle meter, to give a better idea of adequate light measurements for different purposes. Lastly, Mark brought up how business hours could impact residents, depending on what regular work hours a business had. It was decided to recognize different business hours of operation, and must be regulated by their zoning district, and type of business.

Minutes of the December 1, 2010 Meeting

The Planning Commission will review the minutes at their next meeting.

Other Business:

The board discussed options with Patrick Haller of resignation, or future resignation from the board.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:27 p.m.

Submitted by,
Tim Cassese, Planning Coordinator