

Draft Minutes

Middlesex Planning Commission
Wednesday, May 9, 2019
6:00 PM
Middlesex Town Hall
5 Church Street
Middlesex, Vermont 05602
(802) 223-5915

Planning Commission Members Present

Elias Gardner
Sandy Levine
Mitch Osiecki
Dick Alderman

Absent

Theo Kennedy

Guests

CathyAnn LaRose
Stewart Clark
Peter Hood
Mike Pelchar
Bill Kight
John Rahill
Jim Gallagher
Carl Dupont
Michael Levine

Call to Order

Sandy called the meeting to order at 6:10 pm.

Guests were welcomed. Owing to a communications error, tonight's meeting was noticed through various channels as beginning at either 6:00 or 6:30. We opted for a "soft opening" for the first 30 minutes of our meeting.

No adjustments to the agenda.

Old Business

Cathy led a brief introduction to the draft Town Plan. She explained that previously, town plans had been required to be updated every five years; they now require updating every eight years.

The current draft of the town plan is available on the town's web site. Another draft of the plan will be forthcoming in a few days.

Update on the Town Plan Survey. The survey had received 263 responses as of Dec 26, 2018. We currently have 303 responses. The next draft of the plan will include up-to-date survey results.

Peter Hood pointed out that upon adoption of a new Town Plan, a rewrite of the town's Land Use Regulations (zoning regulations) will be a high priority. It will be important to make sure that the Town Plan is written with an eye toward zoning regulations.

The town's Industrial District lies largely in the river corridor. Future state and federal land use regulations are likely to restrict development in river corridors, meaning less development opportunity in our Industrial District.

Our rewrite of zoning regulations will afford the town the opportunity to guide future development in town. One way to achieve this is to differentiate between existing and future development.

Cathy led a discussion of preservation of forest blocks, which has gained increasing attention in recent years. It is now recognized that preserving contiguous forest blocks is critical to the health of wildlife.

Cathy recommended a website (stayingconnected.com) as an excellent resource for anyone seeking more information about preserving forest blocks.

Stewart Clark, a planning commissioner from Worcester, pointed out an error on the forest block map provided by CVRPC. Stewart explained that due to a mapping error, CVRPC identifies Wood Road as a major highway, which has the effect of cutting an existing priority forest block off from a high priority forest block.

At 6:30, Cathy led a formal introduction to our draft Town Plan.

She also previewed a timeline of the process for adoption of our revised Town Plan. The entire process includes no fewer than five separate votes, each of which need to be formally warned in advance.

We made available a contact sheet as part of this meeting. Mitch invited attendees to leave contact information so that the Planning Commission can stay in touch.

The Town Plan addresses development of renewable energy above certain elevations and on slopes greater than 25%. We might want to soften current language slightly so that development isn't explicitly prohibited. In these situations. For example, the state's guidance on development in such areas considers elevation and slope to be "cautionary factors," rather than "prohibitive factors."

Further discussion ensued about addressing future land use in the Town Plan. Again, we must take care that we don't limit our ability to craft appropriate land use regulations because of overly strict language in the Town Plan.

Peter Hood mentioned that some of the maps in the draft plan are difficult to read because of their size. A suggestion was made to consider full page maps in the appendices, which could simply be referenced in the body of the plan.

Another comment was offered that the language covering schools is out-of-date, due to ongoing merger action. While the state of our local school district is admittedly still in flux, we're still hoping to refresh this language to better reflect the current state of the school system.

It was suggested that we might consider setting up a temporary display of the larger-format maps that Cathy brought to tonight's meeting. Perhaps we might leave them on display at the Town Hall so that residents could stop by and study them. Cathy mentioned a couple of other great mapping resources:

ANR Natural Resource Atlas
ANR Biofinder

Both of these maps can be found on the Agency of Natural Resources website.

Michael Levine noted that the draft Town Plan does not mention climate change. Response from the PC was that while true, it was not a conscious decision to avoid the topic. (Dick Alderman also left at this point).

Correspondence

Susan Clark was unable to attend tonight's meeting, but shared several comments about the draft plan via email.

Gillian Fuqua, a resident of Putnamville, contacted Mitch after participating in the Town Plan Survey. A question in the survey raised concerns for her that possible changes to the zoning status of Putnamville might be imminent. Mitch responded and assured Gillian that the question on the survey was intended only to begin a conversation about that area of town. Mitch advised that at this point, only an update to the Tow Plan is underway. Possible changes to zoning districts could only occur during a rewrite of zoning regulations, and that can't happen until after a new Town Plan is adopted.

We also received feedback on our current draft Town Plan from the CVRPC. Cathy will incorporate relevant updates from the CVRPC into the next draft of the Town Plan.

And finally, since our last meeting, we've received two more letters from Jim Colby expressing concerns about how changes to the Town Plan might affect his family's ability to eventually develop a large parcel of land they own. Mitch will respond.

Public Hearing on Draft Town Plan

We've slated our public hearing on the final draft Town Plan for June 19. Final draft must be locked down 30 days ahead of the public hearing.

Cathy will distribute a final draft of the Town Plan in advance of next week's regular monthly meeting. At our meeting on Wednesday, May 15, we should be prepared to approve a final draft and publish a warning of the Public Hearing on Wednesday, June 19.

We will also need to distribute a report to accompany the final draft. Cathy will provide Sandy a sample, from which Sandy will work up our report.

Sandy will review timeline to ensure we've got all dates correctly identified.

The Public Hearing needs to be warned 15 days in advance. We are allowed to warn it further in advance if we wish.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 15, 2019 at 6:00 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15pm.

Dick Alderman _____

Elias Gardner  _____

Theo Kennedy _____ N/A _____

Sandra Levine  _____

Mitch Osiecki  _____