

Draft Minutes

Meeting of the Middlesex Planning Commission

Wednesday, June 17, 2020

6:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom videoconference & Phone

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 pm.

Roll Call

Planning Commission Members

Elias Gardner
Theo Kennedy
Sandy Levine
Mitch Osiecki
Dick Alderman

Guests

Clare Rock, CVRPC
Michael Levine, resident

Note: Due to concerns about the spread of coronavirus, this meeting was conducted via Zoom videoconference and phone.

Adjustments to Agenda

No adjustments to agenda.

New Business

Zoning Regulation Updates – Discussion with Clare Rock

Clare Rock led a discussion of items the Planning Commission may wish to consider as it gears up for a revision of the town's zoning regulations. East Montpelier mentioned as a town that might serve as a suitable model for our updates. Clare shared that East Montpelier is in the process of updating their regulations right now, and is getting some pushback from the community. While changes the town has proposed appear to be more cosmetic than substantive, the format of the proposed regulations looks quite different, which has led to some resistance.

Calais and Bolton were mentioned as towns that appear to follow a format fairly similar to Middlesex, so might be good models to look at.

Theo expressed that he would prefer to focus on a significant overhaul of the regulations, and as needed, plan to include some time for community outreach and education as to reasoning behind the proposed changes.

Clare asked if the PC could provide some idea of its sentiment for the degree of changes hoped for. With that information, she might be able to offer some approaches the PC might consider.

Clare has taken a preliminary look at current regulations and has identified a few opportunities to add some clarity. As an example, current regulations do not reflect the state's recent updates to Agricultural Uses.

Clare also asked whether intent of the PC is to focus on changes to permitted uses in the Village, or if we want to look at the entire town.

Sandy advised that the PC has informally compiled a list of areas that might be worth considering. In no particular order, some of these ideas include:

- Change from a Zoning Board of Adjustment to a Development Review Board;
- Revision of zoning districts and permitted and/or conditional usages;
- Mixed Use district – Jim Colby has suggested several uses we might consider;
- Flexibility in allowable conditional uses – let ZBA consider a use not explicitly listed as conditional use, so long as the character of the district is preserved;
- The area of Putnamville is currently considered a Village district; might prefer to distinguish this area, and perhaps the area around Rumney School, as a new district. A Hamlet, perhaps?
- Would like to take a closer look at the Planned Residential Development (PRD) and Planned Unit Development (PUD) guidelines. Are these working well? As intended?
- Revisit the idea of district flexibility – lot density vs. minimum lot sizes;
- Are current Village boundaries reasonable? Perhaps extend closer to interstate access;
- Are site plan review guidelines sufficient? Require septic permit? Other state permits?
- Height limitation of structures is fairly rigid. Perhaps some flexibility here as well.
- Renewable energy guidance.

Clare's impression was that this list is ambitious. Some of these changes will require a commitment of resources (time and money) to do some community outreach and education.

It is likely the PC will have to look at this list carefully and prioritize. Realistically, we may need to focus on a few of these as we overhaul the regulations. The others may have to be deferred to a later date.

Theo asked about our Enhanced Energy Plan, and specifically the degree to which we can identify preferred sites for siting renewable energy projects. Hopes we can make the EEP consistent with zoning bylaws.

Clare responded that municipal zoning regulations are typically not considered in evaluating a proposed renewable energy project. State statute explicitly exempts net-metered renewable energy projects from oversight by municipal zoning regulations.

Sandy asked PC members to share their initial thoughts on specific areas of zoning regulations each would like to concentrate on.

Elias would like to look at things like lot density and simplification of language where appropriate.

Mitch also would like focus on making regulations clearer.

Theo would like to look at the Village District vs. the Designated Village Center. Perhaps extend Village district out closer to the I-89 interchange. Look at the Mixed Use District – what uses make sense there. Also, change from ZBA to DRB.

Sandy mentioned that the questions she hears most often have to do with the Village. Would also like to revisit lot density. Would still like to think about appropriate designation for Putnamville, but it's a lower priority than many other things that have been raised.

Theo hope we can engage people in some discussions about both Putnamville and the area around Rumney School.

Clare asked about how members might prioritize looking at permitted uses in both the Village and Mixed Use districts. General agreement that there are opportunities to revisit standards for the Mixed Use district in particular.

Comment was offered that it would be worth our time to reread current regulations as pertain to the Mixed Use district.

PC will have to think about a timeline for revising zoning regulations. The Select Board has expressed their desire that we move this project forward.

For July meeting, members are asked to review regulations, try to prioritize the ideas discussed above, and consider what is achievable in the next six months or so.

Clare left the meeting at this point.

Old Business

MPG: Discussion at special meeting on June 10 seemed to go well. Sandy was able to introduce a contact at GMP to the Dubois & King consultants. GMP seems to be receptive to at least the possibility of some development along the river.

Upcoming calendar:

- June 24: special meeting to consider three zoning applications.
- June 29: meeting of the Energy Committee. Lauri off to a good start. Has several folks engaged.
- July 1: Public Meeting on Enhanced Energy Plan
- July 8: Special Meeting - meet with Dubois & King/feedback
- July 15: scheduled July meeting
- July 21: Scheduled SB meeting – update SB on MPG work
- July 29: Special Meeting - Public Presentation of MPG project

Approval of Minutes

Theo offered a couple of minor corrections. Mitch moved to approve minutes of June 10, with edits; Elias seconded. Roll call vote: Theo, Elias, Mitch, Sandy voted in the affirmative; Dick abstained. **Motion carried, 4-0-1.**

Elias will post draft minutes of this meeting, and agenda/warning of next week's PC hearing on the What's Next Middlesex website.

Adjournment

Motion: Theo moved to adjourn; Elias seconded. Roll call vote: Sandy, Theo, Elias, Mitch, and Dick voted in the affirmative. **Motion carried, 5-0-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:15 pm.