

Draft Minutes

Meeting of the Middlesex Planning Commission

Wednesday, September 16, 2020
6:00 PM

Due to restrictions on public gatherings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, these hearings were held remotely via the town's Zoom account and telephone.

Planning Commission Members Present

Sandy Levine

Elias Gardner

Theo Kennedy

Mitch Osiecki

Dick Alderman – absent

Guests:

Clare Rock – CVRPC

Liz Scharf – Middlesex Select Board

CTO at 6:04

Clare Rock (CVRPC) and Liz Scharf (Select Board) were welcomed to the meeting.

Old Business

Walkable Village Design Draft

Dubois & King have prepared a draft of the Walkable Village Design, which was shared with PC members just in advance of this meeting. We would like to present the design to the Select Board in October. Sandy proposed that the PC discuss draft at a special meeting in a week or two, since no one has had the review it yet. Date TBD.

Municipal Planning Grant

The Select Board wants to submit an application for the next round of Municipal Planning Grants. The SB wishes to pursue a grant to support a Capital Planning project. This would mean the PC would have to defer pursuing a grant through this program for a year. (One grant application allowed per municipality). We would be free to apply for other grants as we are ready to move to the next phase of this project.

Liz: At Town Meeting last spring, a number of residents expressed concern that a number of projects are regularly proposed that taxpayers are asked to support, but the opportunity to discuss these projects in depth before putting them to a vote is limited. The Select Board is hoping to foster more discussion of some of these projects in advance of Town Meeting, with the goal of planning capital expenditures in a more inclusive and transparent fashion.

In the coming days/weeks, the Select Board intends to develop a survey to get some feedback from residents about prioritizing projects under consideration.

Theo commented that he is supportive of SB plans, but would like clarification of Walkable Village “next steps” and how that might fit with the SB’s capital planning process.

Sandy clarified that if the SB pursues the MPG this year, the next phase of the Walkable Village project would likely be deferred a year to accommodate the SB.

Liz asked if it might be possible to combine the projects.

Mitch suggested an alternative combination project. The updated Town Plan that was approved last fall includes a number of Goal and Objectives that highlight a number of projects that were identified as worthy of pursuing over the next few years. It seems like that task would actually fit well with the scope of the SB’s capital planning project.

Also, the PC can move forward with the next phase of the Walkable Village project when the time is right; we’ll just have to find an alternative funding source. D&K can likely help us explore other grant sources.

Theo commented that he’d like to learn more about the project the SB is considering.

Motion: Elias moved that the PC recommends that the SB apply for a Municipal Planning Grant to support budgeting of future capital expenditures. Mitch seconded. Sandy, Elias, Theo and Mitch voted in favor. **Motion carried 4-0.**

Theo asked to be kept in the loop on this project.

Liz left the meeting at 6:48.

Further discussion of next steps of the Walkable Village project.

Sandy recommended that she and Theo set up a call with D&K to get better clarification of how close the project is to take forward to next phase. They will also get advice about identifying alternative funding sources, since the MPG won't be available to us this year.

Zoning Update

We outlined a number of priorities at the July meeting.

Sandy and Clare have roughly scoped out an update process with a very rough budget of about \$6K.

Ideally we would like to figure out how to do some level of outreach to the community in order to avoid the appearance that the PC is setting and driving priorities on our own.

Sandy prepared a summary of our previous discussions of zoning priorities and came up with four broad categories:

1. Uses and standards in Village & Mixed-Use District, with the possibility of considering the Industrial District west of the Village.
2. Clarification and Updates (generally administrative updates to improve language where current regulations are vague).
3. Natural Resources (ridgeline protection, similar to what's done in Waterbury; revisit density calculations in Rural Residential and Conservation Districts; stream buffer requirements for smaller streams; revisit Industrial District east of village, particularly development potential along river).
4. Administrative (ZBA or DRB, redundancy of site plan review & conditional use review)

It might be reasonable to look at each of these section one at a time, thinking about how to best communicate with interested residents as each section comes up for review.

How much outreach can/should we do? How much time is reasonable to spend on each section?

Clare commented: In her experience, municipalities undertaking zoning updates have had more success when taking little bites at a time, rather than trying to overhaul zoning regulations entirely.

Opening up the process to update any and all regulations that people want to undertake often makes the entire process difficult to manage.

Do we have a history of recent zoning updates? That might be beneficial to explore. Mitch can pull something like that together.

Sandy proposes that we consider looking at the three broad sections sequentially, maybe spending two months on each. We could include a public meeting component for each section to encourage feedback/input from residents.

The commented that he's fine with encouraging public participation, as failing to do so risks having the proposed updates being rejected. But PC members have to commit to diving in and tackling the work.

Upon further discussion, consensus emerged that it might be better to commit three months to each section.

Elias commented that we should maintain focused on keeping updates limited to the specific section under discussion at the time.

Mitch commented that the proposed timeline seems reasonable. Suggested that we use some shorter, focused surveys as a way of (1) letting community know what revisions are currently under discussion and (2) getting some level of feedback as to degree to which community members are interested in the particular section we are working on.

The observation was made that Front Porch Forum is great, but doesn't reach everyone. We should think about ways to reach other community members who don't engage via FPF.

Sandy: it's fairly easy to collect email addresses and create a distribution list. Even if we only get a handful of responses, it will at least be people who are interested/engaged in what we're doing.

Observation was made that we can likely combine sections #2 & #4, leaving three general categories: Village & Mixed Use Usages; Administrative; Natural Resources.

Clare wondered if it might be good to tackle the development in the Industrial District separate from the rest of that section. No consensus reached at this time.

Goal/homework for next regular meeting (October): carefully review standards for the Village, Mixed-Use and Industrial Districts; review state guidelines for development along Interstate; review Middlesex Interchange study.

Upcoming schedule:

September 23: Special Meeting to review Walkable Village Design Draft

October 14: Next regular meeting

October 13 or October 27: Special Meeting to present Walkable Village Design to Select Board

Correspondence

Mitch shared that a couple of items have come our way: Montpelier has shared draft bylaw changes and Aegis Renewable Energy has noticed a petition for a Certificate of Public Good for the proposed 150 kW ground-mounted solar project at 58 Center Road (adjacent to Kingsbury Construction).

No response necessary for either of these.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes of July 15. One edit noted: reference to Hinesburg zoning regulations should be Hyde Park. Elias moved to approve edited minutes; Sandy seconded. **Motion approved, 4-0.**

Minutes of Special Meeting of July 29. Draft minutes no finished; they will be submitted in advance of next special meeting for approval.

Adjournment

Motion: Theo moved to adjourn; Mitch seconded. **Motion carried 4-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:57 pm.