

Draft Minutes

Meeting of the Middlesex Planning Commission
Wednesday, January 19, 2022
6:00 PM
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, VT 05602

This meeting was conducted remotely using the town's Zoom account.

Planning Commission Members Present

Sandy Levine
Elias Gardner
Philip Comen
Mitch Osiecki
Theo Kennedy

Guests:

Clare Rock, CVRPC
Kevin Thompson, ZA
John Leibowitz
Nicole D'Agostino
Mike Pelchar – joined at 6:16
Dayton Crites, DuBois & King – joined at 7:00
Michael Levine – joined at 7:10
Russ Bennett – joined at 7:20
Juli Beth Hinds – joined at 7:45

Call to Order

Chair Sandy Levine called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

Roll Call: All members of the Planning Commission were present (Elias Gardner joined at 6:07).

Guests were introduced and welcomed to the meeting.

Old Business:

Zoning Regulation Updates

Clare discussed ongoing edits to zoning document.

We will add language to address the Town Plan goals with respect to Natural Resource protection.

Clare has taken an initial stab at revising Section 6 (Subdivisions). Discussion of a few particulars

6.1 C) Waivers

6.1 D) Deferral of Subdivision Standards

6.2 Subdivision Development Standards

6.2 D) Lot Layouts – “avoid spaghetti lots” – current standard is ... slippery?

Discussion of difference between minor and major subdivisions. Could consider allowing ZA to approve only 2-lot subdivisions, with all others referred to PC.

It would also make sense to require notification of all abutting landowners when any subdivision is proposed.

Mitch raised concern about how we currently define a spaghetti lot. Situations have arisen where our definition makes it difficult to approve a fairly mundane subdivision request. Can we allow for some flexibility in the regulation?

Have added language to establish a “building envelope.” Discussion of how a building envelope is established. Is this concept intuitive to a typical landowner?

If development of land is deferred, it would be reasonable to allow for the deferral of the establishment of the building envelope as well.

Dayton Crites (DuBois & King) joined the meeting at 7:00. Discussion of zoning regulation updates tabled to allow Dayton to provide an update on the Walkable Village Scoping Study.

Public Engagement Posters present four distinct options:

1. Village Placemaking
2. Walking Village
3. Walking & Biking Village
4. Do Nothing

Poster will also include a link to a short survey. Elias asked if we can include a QR Code as a shortcut to get to the survey. Yes.

Public Meeting: Incorporate as part of next month's regular meeting, or later in the month as a special meeting?

Possible timeline:

Feb 9 – Open survey / posters distributed / outreach underway

Feb 23 – Special Meeting

3/9 – Close survey

3/16 – Present results at regular March meeting

Dayton concluded his presentation and departed.

Russ Bennett & Mike Pelchar of Planetary Matters joined meeting to discuss ongoing projects and future plans.

One near-term project will be to build paths to connect scenic overlooks along the Winooski River. Would eventually like to explore the feasibility of connecting property to Route 100B.

COVID-19 has thrown a monkey-wrench into some of the development plans for the Camp Meade campus.

The Mud Studio has relocated to Waterbury. Frees up that shop as well as adjacent parking. Currently exploring some options – hope to optimize use of this space.

PC can set up a lobby display in Red Hen building to promote upcoming Scoping Study meeting.

Colby Property

Have already begun some initial research to determine potential uses of the property. Some possibilities:

- Residential
- Mixed development – jobs to support the residents
- Solar – exploring options
- Daycare facility – definitely a need
- Art and/or Music school?
- Affordable housing – however you define it, there's a need

Property is some 278 acres. Approximately 35 acres are currently open. The hope is to preserve open spaces and possibly some agricultural use.

Would be open to exploring making some land available for public recreation (trails, x-c skiing, and sledding hill?). Worth noting is that land connects to Notch Road via an old legal trail.

A study was done by Stone Environmental a few years ago to determine if lands might provide an adequate water supply for the village. If feasible, Planetary Matters would be open to making some water available as a resource for the Town.

Plans are to explore a condominium-type development structure. PM wants to develop the property responsibly. Do not plan to subdivide or sell any portion of the land.

Other Projects

The Project List on our Google Drive has been updated once again.

The Select Board has approved the Enhanced Energy Plan. The Energy Plan will be voted on by Australian ballot on Town Meeting Day.

A postcard will be mailed to all residents to remind them of this vote.

Minutes

Theo moved to approve meeting minutes of December 15; Elias seconded. **Motion passed, 5-0-0.**

Upcoming Meetings:

- Wednesday, Feb 16: Regular monthly meeting
- Wednesday, Feb 23: Public Meeting – Scoping Study

Resumed discussion of Zoning Regulations / subdivisions

Section 6.2 – Protection of Natural Resources

Should review this language – does it support goals of Town Plan?

Section 6.3 – Sketch Plan Review

May submit a sketch plan review for minor subdivision; must submit one for major subdivisions.

Potential New Section – Ridgeline Overlay District

Similar to the Conservation District standards, with some additional restrictions (placement of structures, access, conditional use review).

We also want to do some outreach to residents of Putnamville. Sandy has drafted a letter to residents. Invite them to attend our regular March meeting or reach out to PC members with feedback.

Mitch volunteered to help with identifying current Putnamville residents.

Adoption Timeline – review current timeline to make sure we are still on track for vote in November.

Administrative Changes

While we're revising zoning regulations, this is a good time to consider whether there's support for changing structure of our quasi-judicial bodies. Two options:

- Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment (current arrangement)
- Planning Commission and Development Review Board

A change to our regulatory structure can be made any time. However, since we're in the middle of revising regulations, this is a good time to consider this change. If there's support for reorganizing, it allows us to update language about governance structure while we're already revising the zoning regulations.

Select Board has the authority to make this change. One key difference DRB members are appointed by the Select Board, rather than elected by the public.

Pros & Cons?

Mitch: has seen the DRB model work well in other communities. Streamlines hearings somewhat. Frees the PC from subdivision and site plan reviews to focus on planning matters.

Theo: can see the value in having one body reviewing all matters.

Kevin: also likes the DRB concept.

One suggestion: could DRB include one SB member, one or two PC members, and other at-large members? Probably, if a SB member and PC member(s) are willing to serve.

Might be worth bringing this to the SB in March, after Town Meeting, to see if there's support for the change.

Sandy will work with Clare to incorporate changes discussed tonight.

Adjournment

Mitch moved to adjourn; Elias seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:42 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitch Osiecki,
Planning Commission secretary