

Royalton Planning Commission
Final Minutes- As Amended and Approved
February 24, 2014

Members present: Dreisbach, Powers, Levasseur, Wilhite, Johnson.

Guests present: Chris Sargent, TRORC; Selectboard members Joan Goldsein and Phil Gates; Emergency Coordinator Gidget Lyman; Recreation Committee members Jenny Lane, Billie-Jean Vesper, Lisa Southworth and Bridgit Barry; Peter Chap and Sandy Conrad.

Meeting called to order 7:03 pm with a review of the evening's agenda.

1. Minutes, February 10, 2014.

Motion to approve by Powers, seconded by Wilhite. Motion by Levasseur to move Dreisbach's request to be recorded as nay to the bottom of the minutes, which is when that occurred.

Motion carried.

2. Survey: Dreisbach introduced the plan to conduct a public survey, outlined the purposes of the Town Plan and that the PC tries to represent the opinion of the townspeople. The survey is to be distributed to voters, property owners and perhaps business owners. Consensus of PC that we need to know the public's opinion on commercial development and the tax base.

Wilhite distributed a flow chart made from the last meetings discussion, outlined deadline and commented on process for re-adoption.

The issue of commercial development has been brought up in recent years. PC feels we should look into what the town wants.

Can we increase the tax base by bringing in more business, what sort of business, where, and does the existing infrastructure support it?

Will a larger tax base increase our school funding mechanism?

Availability of energy as a subset of commercial development.

Does the town want the Plan to be more specific, easier for developers to make choices?

Survey of 2005: many respondents didn't want restrictions on their property, but did want mechanisms to control general land use surrounding them.

Levasseur questioned Sargent: what happens if Town Plan doesn't conform to the Regional Plan and does the Town have influence or input on the Regional Plan?

Sargent: Plan approved by the Regional Commission if consistent with statute and the Regional Plan. If not town loses access to grant programs and Village Designation status, and in Act 250 consideration the Regional Plan trumps the Town Plan if there is regional impact.

Dreisbach commented on possibility for congestion and undesirable abundance in the village.

Sargent stated that the Regional Plan is consistent with State in limiting retail operation in the

area of highway interchanges.

The grant we are working under is for a plan that can be approved by the regional commission. Town input in the Regional Plan is from our appointed representative to that board.

Goldstein commented that it's hard to think about commercial development without thinking about zoning, which would change our Act 250 status, and that the Act 250 process is expensive. Dreisbach: we should craft survey questions that address the issue of zoning.

Wilhite explained that we have drafted zoning and sub-division by-laws, which can be looked at again after revising the Town Plan.

Sargent added that TRORC can set up an interactive link for the survey on the Town website.

Dreisbach asked for audience input.

Peter Chap asked what the definition of commercial is, and how broad?
Answer is that we're seeking input for that in the survey.

Chris Hudson asked about disagreements as to the meaning of the Plan. Wilhite explained difficulties in interpretation and that Act 250 decisions affect Royalton.

Chap: are citizens better protected by vagueness (in Town Plan and regulations)?
Sargent: vagueness gives up decisions to the State.

Jenny Lane would like to see questions related to keeping public lands, for public use.

Gidget Lyman asked about green spaces left in the wake of Tropical storm Irene.
Sargent: the Plan can address the need for grants etc. to make use of such properties.

Billie-Jean Vesper spoke on Act 250 limitations on business in residential areas.
Sargent and Wilhite responded that's in how the regulations are crafted, and there can be tiered regs on home occupation business.

Gates: question about businesses in the flood zone.
Sargent answered there are more regs being put in place in response to that, including Act 250 regs and insurance subsidies.

Dreisbach wondered about capital budgeting.

Sandy Conrad would like the questionnaire to ask about affordable housing, elder care and transportation.

Goldstein pointed to the need for related infrastructure, including waste water treatment.

Dreisbach asked commission about acting on Slattery's position paper. No motion was made.

Levasseur asked to include a copy in alongwith the minutes.

Levasseur questioned how the PC budget was slashed to eliminate the consultants line item.

Dreisbach answered the Selectboard did that.

Levasseur made a motion to move to restore monies at Town Meeting. There was no second.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo Levasseur

Addendum: The following written comments were provided prior to the meeting by Bob Slattery and are included with the minutes as a part of the permanent record. No actions were taken.

Here are my thoughts on the upcoming Selectboard proposal to build a new Town offices on the Crawford parcel. Please use them as you and the RPC members see fit. I will be back in Royalton in time to attend Town Meeting.

1. (editorial comment) A member of the RPC has been working with the Selectboard over the last year on a proposal to build a new town offices building. The RPC welcomes the increased co-operation with the Selectboard on this and other important issues, and believes that the frank and respectful exchange of opinion is essential to the development of sound public policy, even as we don't always agree.
2. The Town's purchase and clean-up of the Crawford property, funded by the value of the on-site gravel, is a prudent and far-sighted action, and deserves full support.
3. The Crawford property is, by location, drainage, and electric power one of the most valuable development parcels in town, and should be returned to the tax list as soon as feasible, hopefully under a comprehensive development plan that maximizes the long-term value to the town.
4. The Town Offices functions have been spread out for years in several, rather inefficient locations, and would benefit by being consolidated in a new building. Several proposals and studies have been advanced over the years, and the Selectboard has, to it's credit, made it one of it's priorities to come up with a solution. The panelized construction system identified seems to be a good start, more prudent and affordable than last year's proposed renovation of the obsolete existing building.
5. Concerning the important issue of where a new, centralized Town Office building should be located, the RPC has a fundamental difference of opinion with the Selectboard proposal. One of the most valuable features of the physical plan of the town of Royalton is the clustering of most of the daily activities of town life around and near the traditional Town Green. This includes the bank, post office, multiple small retail, commercial, and restaurant businesses, the Law School, churches, housing, schools, fire and rescue, police, library, town offices, evening restaurants, etc,

etc. In addition, the Green itself hosts many important functions, including graduations, band concerts, Old Home Days, quiet relaxation, etc.

It is easy to take this clustering for granted, and forget just how important this is to the quality of life in South Royalton. The existence of a readily identifiable town center with its regular meetings of friends, elected officials, business people, students and faculty, etc, is an important, even essential ingredient of the small-town life here that we all value so highly. Every effort should be made to strengthen, not dilute this town center.

6. It is the studied opinion of the RPC that the new Town Offices, whenever funded and built by the voters of South Royalton, should be built on the town side of the river, around or near the Town Green. This is not a small issue, and once built, the location of these essential town functions will impact the character of South Royalton for generations to come.
