

RPC_Minutes_2019.02.05

Members Present:

Stuart Levasseur
Mark Wood
Jim Rikert
Bushrod Powers
Geo Honigford
Nell Gwin
Roni Johnson
Sarah Danly

Additional attendees:

Peter Gregory, Kimberly Gilbert, Jan Eberly, Betsy Donahue

Minutes

Meeting called to order at 6:03 pm by Stuart Levasseur, Chair.

Previous Minutes

Mark Wood moved to accept the January meeting draft minutes as written, Geo Honigford seconded. After no discussion, the minutes were approved.

Scheduling the Town Plan updates meetings

At the previous Planning Commission meeting, Kimberly Gilbert of TRORC had walked the Planning Commission through a list of which plan sections had required or recommended participation from additional town participants. After reviewing the list, the Planning Commission decided to reach out to these groups to see when they would be available to come in to the regularly scheduled Planning Commission meetings. This will then be used to determine the schedule for which plan chapters to work on at which meeting.

Update on the Arts Grant:

Nell Gwin gave an update on the Vermont Arts Council grant to which several members of the PC and other townspeople had submitted a Letter of Interest in the fall. Royalton has been invited to apply, one of 9 towns invited to apply out of 52 Lol.

The full application is due March 19 and the committee has continued working on it. There are a number of additional steps but the top priorities are getting permission from the railroad, which owns

the property in question, developing a budget, and getting letters of commitment from businesses and town organizations.

Land Use Chapter

The Planning Commission and the TRORC staff members began reviewing the existing Land Use chapter and discussing revisions.

- When the current Town Plan was approved by the board of TRORC, their main concern, which almost prevented them from approving the Town Plan, was that the town future land use map does not align with the regional land use map. The town map includes the area around Welch's as part of the Royalton Village village designation, while the regional map does not. There are also different borders on North Windsor St, South Windsor St, and Oxbow, but these were not as great concern to either TRORC or the Planning Commission.
 - The Planning Commission discussed this issue but did not make any final decisions at this time.
 - Some Planning Commission members supported excluding the area in question from a village designation in order to prevent additional development so far from the "compact downtown" (the reason it is excluded from the village in the regional map.) Other Planning Commission members raised concerns that there is not room for additional retail in the area that the regional map designates as the village and that adopting those boundaries would prevent new businesses from opening or existing businesses from expanding.
 - The Planning Commission also received clarification from the TRORC staff around the implications of the town map not aligning with the regional map: the Town has the authority to keep the map as it is currently, but TRORC may not approve it as being compatible with the regional plan. In 2015, the TRORC board approved the plan despite noting the inconsistencies, but the TRORC board is interested in more strongly addressing regional goals and has recently declined to approve several other town plans. If a town map and a regional map disagree and a project has local impacts only, the town map would trump the regional map. If the project has regional impacts, then the regional plan trumps the local one. Lacking regional approval may also affect applications for funding or other programs.
 - Even if the area around Welch's was excluded from the designation of Royalton Village, then a small commercial use (under the threshold for Act 250) could still be developed there and TRORC would not become involved.
 - Members of the Planning Commission also raised the question of whether the village designation could be maintained as it currently is in the town map, and a case be made to TRORC to adjust the designations in the regional map.
 - The Selectboard is also interested in expanding the village boundary southwards to align with the water district.
- Updates to the chapter text:

- The Planning Commission realizes that changes may be occurring in Act 250 that will make incorrect the Act 250 explanation contained in this chapter. But the Commission also sees value in keeping information about the current law for those who may be reading this plan and need the Act 250 information to form an educated opinion. The PC decided to add language identifying the explanation as “as of 2019.”
- The existing reference to a survey of residents about land use regulation is still the most recent data.
- The PC discussed the statement that “locating buildings at the top of ridgelines or at the brows of hills where land is open and sites would be highly visible from nearby public roads is prohibited.” Members of the Planning Commission agree with prohibiting new construction on high ridgelines that are visible from a great distance and interrupt scenic viewsheds that are commonly appreciated by the public, but does not think the current wording precisely and clearly expresses the intended meaning. The group discussed several alternate ways to phrase this and Kim Gilbert (TRORC) will look into potential definitions and the language that other towns have used.
- The PC discussed a desire to better define “home business”. Kim Gilbert will look for potential definitions.
- “Existing buildings or parts thereof shall be reused for commercial development.” After discussion, the PC determined that this does not leave enough flexibility, and will add the words “where feasible.” However, the PC acknowledges that historical buildings should have stricter standards than this amended version, and will address that in the Historic Resources chapter.
- Within the “Uses at Exit 3 Interchange” section, the Planning Commission identified several small wording changes to add clarity. The PC also discussed more generally the idea that new buildings should “complement the traditional buildings already in this area,” whether that would exclude new building styles such as energy-efficient modular homes, and whether those structures should or should not be excluded. The PC determined that, as this section relates specifically to a designated area at Exit 3, it would maintain the stricter visual standards here while still allowing these modern forms of construction in the more general residential areas.

At the next Planning Commission meeting, which will be on Town Meeting Day, the PC will continue with the discussions that are paused pending additional research from TRORC, and continue editing the next section of the chapter, Future Land Use.

Roni Johnson moved to adjourn and Geo Honigford seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 7:57pm.