

RPC_Minutes_2019.04.16

Members Present:

Stuart Levasseur
Geo Honigford
Roni Johnson
Jim Rikert
Bushrod Powers
Sarah Danly

Other Attendees:

Kimberly Gilbert, TRORC
Peter Gregory, TRORC

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm by Stuart Levasseur, Chair.

Updates

- Letter about flood ordinance: At a previous meeting Geo Honigford agreed to draft a letter to present to the Selectboard discussing the idea of expanding the flood hazard area. Before this meeting, Geo sent around a draft. The PC members approved the letter and confirmed that the plan is to send it to the Selectboard in advance but also get on the agenda to attend the first meeting after they receive it. Geo will send the letter to Rose and request to be on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Roni Johnson has officially been reappointed to the PC.
- Old Home Days is going to be August 15-17 this year. It's a day longer because it's the town's 250th anniversary. The next planning meeting, open to anyone, will be on the 2nd of May.

Town Plan Update Schedule

Kimberly Gilbert (TRORC Staff) reviewed a meeting schedule that she had emailed the PC in advance of this meeting. This schedule was developed by working backwards from the goal of having this plan adopted at the 2020 Town Meeting.

- In order to leave enough time for public hearing requirements, the draft will need to be finished in October. This means that most PC meetings between now and October will need to address two chapters each (though a few longer ones, like the enhanced energy plan, can have a full meeting.)
- There are also a few weeks that TRORC will not be able to attend.

We also need to plan a public forum (separate from the public hearing requirements), towards the beginning of the planning process. This is not a statutory requirement but was promised in the Municipal Planning Grant application.

- The general consensus on the PC is that a public forum right before a regular meeting would be more likely to have attendance than a separate event, and the PC will be able to debrief during the regular meeting.
- The PC decided to schedule this for 6-7 pm May 21 – the hour right before a regular meeting.
- There is money in the MPG budget to post advertisements. This will be used for an advertisement in the Herald and for posters in 5 locations around town. TRORC will provide the materials and PC staff will post them.

Land Use Section...continued

- The PC revisited a question from last week regarding the Route 107 Low Density Service/Office section and why Bethel was included in Goal 3 and Policy 3. The PC determined that we should keep the reference as we should be conscientious of our neighboring towns – especially since we share a transfer station and a school district with Bethel.
- Clarifying questions arose about the enforcement capacity of this document.
 - Act 250 is the first line of defense.
 - If the town had zoning there would be more enforcement power.
 - Part of our obligation as a planning commission is not just to identify what cannot be done, but also to help businesses get clarity on what they *can* do – so it’s appropriate to use this plan to encourage or explicitly allow things as well.
 - Another way to make it more enforceable is to use stronger language (e.g. shall instead of should.)
- Given the question of stronger language, the group noted that there is “should” used in policies 4 and 5 of this section. However, the group recalled that we had decided to be more lenient in this particular geographic area, and did not make changes.
- Waterman Road Industrial Area section:
 - There was discussion around the statement that the intersection of Waterman Road and Rte 107 “should be re-aligned to reduce traffic hazards.” This was flagged because it seems unlikely to feasibly happen.
 - However, it was pointed out that if the Town seeks grants to work on this, some applications ask for language from the Plans that support the project.
 - The PC decided to leave this language in case it could ever help future applications.
 - Policies 1 and 4 both use the word “should”. The PC changed these to “shall”, especially as these policies are about unsafe and hazardous conditions.
- Intermodal Industrial:
 - The group discussed Policy 3 and how strongly it should be worded.
 - One consideration is that the plan places a lot of emphasis on businesses *not* using too much lighting – but there are valid safety reasons for all-night lighting. Many people go to businesses at night to clean, bring deliveries, etc.
 - The PC agreed that the intent is to discourage excessive impacts on neighbors, not to discourage *any* kind of nighttime lighting. The policy was rewritten to strike this balance, and for clarity.
- Farmland Conservation/Limited Development:

- The group noted that this section applies to a specific geographically defined area – it is *not* the overall agricultural plan (which is a later chapter) and it does not apply to the generalized ag/res land use areas.
- The group flagged a number of questions about the feasibility and purpose of protecting farmland given the current farm economy in the town. Because this section refers to a particular geographic area at the “gateway...from Interstate 89”, and refers specifically to the scenic values of the farmland, the language in this section was left as is. However, many of these questions will be revisited in more depth in the agricultural chapter.
- Policy 4 was strengthened by changing the word “should.”
- Land use map / village designations: The group revisited the questions flagged at the beginning of the land use chapter about discrepancies between the Town map and the Regional map.
 - Specifically, the area between Welch’s and Benson is currently designated as part of the Royalton Village Center in the Town map, but is not part of a village in the Regional map. When the current town plan was adopted, the Regional Planning Commission allowed the discrepancy but encouraged Royalton to fix the problem and may not be willing to approve the plan again with this discrepancy.
 - The group discussed several considerations regarding this decision:
 - This area was included in the village because the Town feels it is the only feasible location for a store such as a grocery store which would benefit the Town.
 - The question was raised of whether it would be possible to get this changed in the *Regional* rather than Town plan. This is difficult to predict.
 - The biggest concern from the regional commission’s perspective is that they consider this to be sprawl. The PC discussed the definition of sprawl and how this applies to the area:
 - Because it’s geographically not that distant from Royalton Village, hypothetically, if there was a pedestrian tunnel through the underpass, it might not meet the definition of sprawl in that it would be walkable.
 - However, it would probably still not be considered “compact.”
 - The biggest reason to include it in the village area, is that there would be no room in the current regional village areas for a business (like a grocery store, or even like Welch’s as it currently exists) that needs a lot of retail space and/or parking. However, Welch’s is an integral part of the town and other businesses could be equally important – why legislate against something so valuable?
 - It was also noted that this site was considered for an additional retail store because it could share a parking lot with Welch’s.
 - The PC decided to explore a compromise where the area in question is removed from the village designation but a new land use area is created for it that provides goals, policies that limit development to appropriate uses, and design guidance. This will be more restriction than leaving it in the village area, but still allow the type of retail business that the Town would like to allow. Requiring a new store to use a shared driveway and parking lot with Welch’s would be the most important restriction, to prevent this area from becoming sprawl.

- Sarah Danly will create a first draft of this section for review at the next PC meeting.
- TRORC staff would let the PC know if the regional commission seems unlikely to approve whatever the town creates.

Demographics Chapter

- Kimberly Gilbert shared with the Planning Commission the updates that she has already made to the demographics section; there is not much new data as there is no more recent census.
- The PC is interested in looking into whether there are population/demographic *projections* that would be helpful to include, with the understanding that these are often inaccurate.

Community Facilities and Services Chapter

- It was noted that Objective 2 is contradictory in saying that facilities in South Royalton must be located within South Royalton *or* Royalton Village. Language was clarified.
- There was also discussion around how strongly this objective should be worded – whether facilities “shall” be located in the villages or “should” be located in the villages. A concern was raised over the current use of “shall” in that some facilities (for example, a transfer station) might preferably be located *outside* the village centers. While the decision was not unanimous, the majority of the PC supported softening the language to “should” to account for these cases.
- Recommendation 1 refers to encouraging recycling in compliance with the Universal Recycling Law; a reference to composting was added.
- Recommendation 2 refers to the “newly developed” Carpenter Land; that phrase was removed as it is now out-of-date.
- It was briefly discussed whether Recommendation 8 (on high speed internet access) was also out of date, but ultimately the recommendation was left in place.
- The chapter contains a subsection on recreational facilities but no objectives, recommendations, or goals, other than a recommendation to develop a town recreation plan. The PC decided to ask the recreation committee to review this chapter and submit more specific objectives, recommendations, and goals. Stuart Levasseur will contact them with the request.

Previous Minutes:

Bushrod Powers motioned to approve the previous minutes as posted. Jim Rikert seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Bushrod Powers moved to adjourn the meeting and Roni Johnson seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:54pm.