

## RPC\_Minutes\_2019.06.18

### Planning Commission Members Present:

Stuart Levasseur  
Geo Honigford  
Jim Rikert  
Bushrod Powers  
Sarah Danly  
Mark Wood  
Roni Johnson  
David Brandau

### Other Attendees:

Kimberly Gilbert, TRORC  
Brad Salzmann, Conservation Commission  
Mary Russ, White River Partnership  
Jo Levasseur

### Minutes:

6:00-7:00 was scheduled and advertised as a public forum. However, no community members attended (other than Brad Salzmann and Mary Russ, who came to participate in the 7:00-8:00 discussion on the natural resources and flood resilience chapters.) After waiting for potential attendees, a regular working meeting was called to order at 6:16 pm.

### Continuation of review of Natural, Scenic, and Historic Resources chapter:

The Commission continued reviewing the recommended edits from the Conservation Commission.

- In section J, a paragraph was added about invasive species, which the PC approved with the caveat of removing the reference to soil health since many other factors contribute to invasive species as well.
- Forest fragmentation: Tico Wolff of the Conservation Commission is working on draft wording so the PC will review after that is completed. A reference will also be added to see the forest blocks and habitat connectors page.
  - The group discussed the intent of the habitat connectors language and Royalton's location between the Green mountains and the White mountains. Is one of the explicit goals of preventing fragmentation to connect the green mountains with the white mountains?
    - There is a strip of highest priority corridor between the two ranges that runs through Royalton and is very narrow in the Royalton area.
  - What does the habitat connector designation mean for someone who has land in this forest block?

- Probably just that if somebody wanted to build a large housing development in that area and they went through the act 250 process they would consider that they'd be cutting off the wildlife corridor. As far as an individual already living there, there would be no effect, but a new development might not happen.
  - The group also discussed the housing shortage in the area and the potential that increased housing would directly conflict with the needs for wildlife habitat. How are we going to have all these people and the wildlife?
    - The habitat connector areas tend to be in much more isolated areas (though in the case of Royalton, it does about the village center because of the Kent's Ledge area)
      - However, theoretically, building in these more isolated areas could mean cheaper real estate prices, important in keeping the cost of housing low.
      - If you're subdividing your property to build houses for your own children, Act 250 does not apply. Someone could also develop incrementally without triggering Act 250.
- The group edited for clarity language around the Sarnoff parcel and the town forest(s). We will transition to referring to the former Sarnoff parcel as the Town Forest. The area on Oxbow behind the reservoir is fire district land and has more restrictions than a town forest.
- A few other changes were made to background information for clarity or because the facts were out-of-date.
- Scenic areas subsection:
  - A paragraph in the background section was moved into the policy section.
  - It was discussed whether to remove the list of specific scenic resources. The requirements are only for a statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceably scenic areas.
- As pieces of this chapter are dependent on more information from TRORC or further work from the Conservation Commission, the group will revisit at a future date, and moved on to discussing the Flood Resilience chapter.

#### Review of Flood Resilience chapter:

- Mary Russ, Executive Director of the White River Partnership, provided her initial feedback and suggestions.
  - In the goal related to floodplains, make it clear that Royalton is near the bottom of the watershed and receives most of the water that falls in the watershed. It's important for Royalton to have open floodplains due to its location in the watersheds.
    - The PC agreed to add a goal with this language – Mary will draft suggested wording.
  - Mary also provided additional information relevant to the question of the 500 year flood plain vs 100 year floodplain.
    - The White River Partnership recommends updating the flood zoning to restrict development in the 500 year flood plain, not just 100.
    - There is also an option to extent flood ordinances to the River Corridors designated by the State. In VT, most of our flood damage is from erosion where

the banks fall in or the river changes course. This is different than the inundation levels that FEMA maps in its flood zones. The River Corridor is the state's definition of the area where a river might move around. (It is also mapped for some tributaries that FEMA has never mapped a flood zone for.) IT may include areas that are not even in the 500 year flood plain. The state has created an incentive for towns to adopt another overlay to reduce development in the River Corridors – Towns that adopt it will have less of a cost share for FEMA projects. Without this overlay, the state pays only 12.5% (and the Town 12.5%), but with the overlay, the state pays 17.5% (and the town only 7.5%).

- Changing the flood ordinance from the 100-year to 500-year does not change the cost share for FEMA projects.
  - Sharon has adopted this and the Planning Commission is interested to know whether that affected the land values of the affected properties. Mary will look into this question.
  - In Sharon there is an adjustment process for where the calculated river corridor doesn't accurately reflect the reality of the site.
- The group was interested whether there are any historic records that show progressive erosion over time.
    - The state has a river scientist who could create maps and do historical analysis for the town for free.
    - ANR establishes their maps through some surveying and the rest through GIS calculations.
    - A longer term option is that Sharon did a thorough study where they walked the river to discover true conditions (rather than using a computer algorithm.) This is the way to get the most accurate data.
  - The group noted that existing Recommendation #9, of using the 500-year rather than 100-year flood plain, is the same as the recommendation the White River Partnership is making and the PC has proposed to the Select Board. This is something the Town has considered for a while.
  - Background section:
    - Historic Flood Events: The group discussed this and determined that the purpose of providing a historical narrative is to quantify the risk. However, the current draft may be stock text that a number of towns have used, since it is mostly not specific to Royalton. Kimberly will draft a new version that combines the two paragraphs and removes the pieces not relevant to Royalton. She will also edit to clarify and provide more detail on the damages within Royalton from Irene and add wording (to reflect Mary's observation about being at the bottom of the watershed) to clarify that the flooding from Irene was not due just to the rain that fell directly on Royalton, but the rain that fell upstream especially in Rochester, Hancock, and Granville.
    - The section on floodways only references the 100 year. References will be added to the 500 year plain as it is relevant background information even if the flood regulations aren't expanded.
    - Flood Hazard Regulation: we will input updated information on the number of structures in the 500 year floodplain when Geo collects it for the Selectboard.

- The paragraph on at-risk populations will be shortened to remove unnecessary detail and edited for clarity.
- The group noted that the information provided in this background section indicates a need for bylaws for the 500-year floodplain.
- Promoting Flood Resilience: Kimberly will input updated buyout information and rewrite to remove irrelevant history.
- Culvert maintenance: The group discussed and determined that it is still accurate to say that Royalton has a lot of undersized and outdated culverts. This language is referring to both stream crossing culverts and drainage culverts. What's been updated is a lot of the road infrastructure culverts but not as many of the stream crossing culverts, many of which are undersized. Minor edits were made for clarity and a sentence will be added stating the impacts of having outdated and undersized culverts.

Bushrod Powers moved to adjourn the meeting and Geo Honigford seconded.

Meeting adjourned at 8:24pm.