

**TOWN OF CHESTER
PLANNING COMMISSION**

**December 5, 2016
DRAFT Minutes**

Board Members Present: Tom Bock, Tom Hildreth, Randy Wiggin, and Claudio Veliz.

Staff Present: Michael Normyle, Zoning Administrator, Cathy Hasbrouck, Recording Secretary

Visitors Present: Philip Perlah, Kelly Arrison, Amy Mosher, Barry Goodrich, Mary Jane Miles, Roy Spaulding.

Agenda Item 1, Minutes of the November 7, 2016 meeting

The meeting opened with a review of the November 7, 2016 meeting minutes. Tom Hildreth moved to accept the minutes, Randy Wiggin seconded the motion. Claudio Veliz asked to have 2 commas added to the second and third Agenda Item headers and for the removal of a repeated word, about, from the second bullet of agenda item 3. Tom Hildreth asked for clarification of that same bullet item which referred to power pole work around the green. A vote was taken and the minutes were accepted with these changes.

Agenda Item 2, Discuss document about group homes from MJ Miles

Mary Jane Miles had sent a letter to the Planning Commission asking to discuss the addition of Group Home as a use in most zoning districts. An extensive discussion of the issue is summarized below:

- Chester does not currently allow Group Homes in any zoning district.
- In the proposed Bylaw changes, Group Home has been added as a permitted use to every district, as the State of Vermont has determined that Group Home should be given the same treatment as Single Family Residence.
- Mary Jane Miles said a group home for recently released prisoners is operating on Whitmore Brook Rd.
- Mary Jane Miles said group homes are required to have state permits. She asked if anyone in Chester is checking to see that currently existing homes in Chester have permits.
- Zoning Administrator Michael Normyle said no one has contacted him about operating a group home in Chester.
- Mary Jane wants Chester to make use of the information and guidelines offered by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns on group homes.
- Mary Jane said the VLCT information states that town officials should be notified when prisoners are released into group homes. Mary Jane asked which officials get notified.
- Roy Spaulding said he had asked the Chester Police Chief about his (the Chief's) knowledge of the presence of recently released prisoners in Chester. The Chief said he had not been notified of anyone released from prison moving into Chester.
- Roy Spaulding said that there is no cell phone service at that location on Whitmore Brook Road. He wondered how an ankle bracelet GPS device can function without cell phone service.
- Tom Bock said that the town's lawyer, Jim Carroll, had discussed this issue with the Select Board in the past. He also been contacted recently about this issue. Jim's initial opinion was that the town must treat group homes as single family residences. On further discussion Jim decided he wanted to do more research into the matter.

At the end of the discussion, the following motion was made by Claudio and seconded by Randy Wiggin:

In the amended Unified Development Bylaws, wherever Group Home is allowed as a use in a zoning district, the commission prefers that the use will be a conditional use, if allowed by law. In addition, an asterisk would be placed by the Group Home use, which would read as follows: provided the appropriate state agency forwards verification that ALL requirements for a prospective group home have been met and the home has a State License.

Tom Bock agreed to discuss the issue of Group Home with the Town Manager and the Chief of Police and to pursue the matter with the Town Attorney, Jim Carroll.

Agenda Item 3, Review information gathered for Chapter 3 of Town Plan, if any

A draft document from Town Manager Dave Pisha which contained input to the Town Plan from all the Town departments was discussed. It was resolved that Tom Bock and Claudio Veliz would discuss the matter further with Dave Pisha in order to set up some interviews with department heads or the Town Manager. The goal of the interviews would be to gather additional information and opinion about current and future trends for use in the planning process.

Tom Hildreth asked if emergency personnel are using personal cell phones to communicate with each other while attending to an emergency. This led to a discussion about why personal cell phones might be preferred over official channels and whether the town would have any liability if cell phone communication failed and official channels did not function well as backup. It was again agreed that more discussion with the Town Manager and department heads was needed.

Agenda Item 4, Review of Chapter 5 of Town Plan, Education and Child Care Facilities

This brief (one and one-half page) section was discussed generally. Tom Bock said he preferred to discuss the section with members of the school board. An invitation to speak was extended to Chester Andover Elementary School Director Marilyn Mahusky via Kelly Arrison. The current Plan gives a history of the school buildings that extends back prior to 1955, when the current elementary school was built. Some commission members questioned the need for this history in the Town Plan. Claudio said that the Town Plan would be read by developers from out of town and out of state, and the history adds charm to the document. Tom Hildreth wanted to see figures on the number of students enrolled in vocational courses in Springfield.

Agenda Item 5, Citizen Comments

There were no further citizen comments.

Agenda Item 6, Set the date for the next meeting

The next Planning Commission meeting will be a public hearing Monday December 19, 2016 at 6:00 PM to discuss proposed changes to the Unified Development Bylaws. The next meeting to discuss the Town Plan will be Monday January 16, 2017 at 7:00 PM.

Randy Wiggin moved to adjourn the meeting. Claudio Veliz seconded the motion. The motion passed.