

1 **TOWN OF Chester**
2 **PLANNING COMMISSION**
3 **July 19, 2021 Draft Minutes**

4 **Commission Members Present:** Peter Hudkins, Hugh Quinn, Barre Pinske, Tim Roper, and
5 Cathy Hasbrouck at Town Hall.

6 **Staff Present:** Preston Bristow, Zoning Administrator; and Susan Bailey, Secretary

7 **Citizens Present:** Scott MacDonald, Alexander Taft, Steve Mancuso, Arne Jonynas, Jason
8 Rasmussen, Cheryl Joy Lipton, Gwen Kerr via Zoom, Bill Lindsay at Town Hall

9 **Executive Summary**

10 Jason Rasmussen gave a presentation about zoning which included information from a document
11 entitled *Enabling Better Places: A Zoning Guide for Vermont Neighborhoods* by the Vermont
12 Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

13 Preston Bristow offered his thoughts and praise for the document.

14 Discussion from the board followed which included:

- 15 • Barre Pinske shared his concerns regarding affordable housing and the consumers who
16 may utilize it.
- 17 • Cathy Hasbrouck said she would be happy to work with the bylaws so vacant houses in
18 Chester could be turned into affordable housing.
- 19 • Hugh Quinn said affordable housing would make more people available for the
20 workforce.
- 21 • The board discussed accessory dwelling units, Air B&B's and reformation of street
22 standards with Jason.

23 Preston Bristow gave a report of the two subcommittee meetings.

- 24 • The meetings took place at Mount Ascutney Regional Commission office in Windsor.
25 Peter Hudkins, Cathy Hasbrouck, Jason Rasmussen and Preston Bristow were in
26 attendance.
- 27 • Since the subcommittee only included two Planning Commission members it was
28 believed that an agenda and minutes were not necessary.
- 29 • Subsequent discussion with Chester's attorney proved that assumption wrong
- 30 • An agenda for the next day's meeting at 10 a.m. had been posted and minutes would be
31 provided.
- 32 • Discussions at the two meetings held so far were general and focused around whether
33 they take small steps with the existing bylaws or look at changes for the proposed bylaws.

34 There was discussion among the board about the direction the subcommittee should go.

35 A motion was made by Hugh, modified, and seconded by Tim. The motion stated the
36 subcommittee would choose an area of the proposed bylaws and any subsidiary code attached to

1 the area, review it and give a date on which to deliver the review to the Planning Commission.
2 The motion approved unanimously.

3 Scott MacDonald from the DRB voiced his concerns regarding the public being afforded the
4 opportunity to comment. He had observed someone in attendance leave after forty-five minutes
5 passed without being given an opportunity to comment. He said he could appreciate all the hard
6 work the Planning Commission had done but heard someone say what the Planning Commission
7 says goes. He thought there was a disconnect and an arrogance to such a comment when there is
8 a culture in a community that may be hurt by that.

9 Steve Mancuso said in a nutshell, the Commission was a mess and needed to clean it up. He said
10 the taxpayer is demanding clarity and transparency from them. He said some of the Commission
11 realized it and has taken the correct form of action but he didn't see it as universal. He said they
12 are public servants and it wasn't an option but an obligation.

13 Gwen Kerr said she didn't appreciate the Commission saying the public can't ask questions
14 because the Commission knows better because they don't. She said if they do, they should be
15 able to clarify answers to their questions. She said when the taxpayers ask a question, she doesn't
16 expect to hear that she doesn't have the right to ask and she should just trust them. She doesn't
17 think that's how it works.

18 Barre told Ms. Kerr he wanted to know what problems she had with the new bylaws and/or if she
19 had ideas of what she wanted so they could do a better job for her.

20 Gwen Kerr answered that she thought 300 pages of bylaws for a town of 2800 people was
21 excessive. She wanted to know when they come forward with a question such as a business
22 wanting to establish roots in Chester, she wanted to have specific answers to the bylaws. She said
23 every time anyone asks a question they are told "we didn't know that was there and we'll get
24 back to you."

25 The agenda for the next meeting was discussed:

- 26 • Peter thought they should look at how they need to do affordable housing. He mentioned
27 anticipated funding for low-income housing money from the largest federal budget in
28 history.
- 29 • Cathy said she would like to invite Jeff Holden to bring maps of the water and sewer
30 system and discuss its financial health and possible extension and if it could handle more
31 consumers. Everyone was in agreement that would be an acceptable agenda item.
- 32 • It was decided that if time allowed at the next meeting, they would discuss a timetable in
33 anticipation of money for housing and infrastructure changes coming soon. There was
34 discussion of grant money that may be available from the state to work on affordable
35 housing. It was anticipated toward the end of the year that grants will open for housing
36 and the money is expected to be available in the summer of 2022.
- 37 • The board members discussed lifting parking requirements for the Village 12 district. It
38 was suggested to allocate time in the agenda for conditional requirements. It was
39 requested the town manager attend the next meeting.

40 Peter Hudkins moved to adjourn the meeting and Tim Roper seconded it. The meeting was
41 adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

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Call to Order

Chair Cathy Hasbrouck, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. followed by approximately 10 minutes of technical difficulty.

Agenda Item 1, Discuss the ACCD document Enabling Better Places: A Zoning Guide for Vermont Neighborhoods

Jason Rasmussen said he was invited to the meeting to talk about the zoning for Great Neighborhoods Project and Enabling Better Places document. He believed it was a really good document. The Congress for the New Urbanism did a nice job with it. He hoped the board felt the same. Jason said he would walk through the document but told the board to feel free to stop him and ask questions. He said the primary focus of the document was to address housing. He said housing has been a major cause of businesses not being able to recruit workers. Jason said everything that can be done to aid with housing situation would be a good thing from a development point of view. He said the document addressed the need for affordable housing and how the market force and zoning can be hurdles. He said the document was created to be understandable and included concrete steps that Chester may want to consider doing, but that not everything suggested is worth doing.

Jason said if the permitting process could be streamlined, it would help, if only by not establishing unnecessary barriers for new types of affordable housing. He pointed to the first couple of pages of the document where they state that municipalities need to make permitting easier. He said there is a stock of old, large housing stock in Vermont and it wasn't what many people were looking for. Households are shrinking in size to one or two people. This doesn't match with the big old farmhouses available. Jason acknowledged that they recognize regulations need to be adjusted to accommodate retrofitting the larger homes into two- or three-unit rentals, as well as making changes to zoning to encourage or allow for smaller types of homes. He said the state is suggesting that code reform or bylaw updates be done incrementally. It could be overwhelming to do an overhaul and comprehensive re-write. It can be politically easier to accomplish things with an incremental approach. He asked for any questions before he continued.

Preston Bristow told Jason he was very impressed with the document when it came out. He said it put another spin on the issue of zoning. There is now a whole national conversation about zoning. Preston said the American dream was always to own your own home and your own piece of land. Zoning had promoted that ideal. He said state lawmakers are starting to say it is exclusionary because not everyone can afford a single-family home anymore. He said the document said zoning needed to be reformed. It was strong language.

Preston said they are trying to make housing more accessible to everyone. He mentioned that in Vermont the goal has been to preserve rural character and protect wildlife and the environment. There has been little focus on downtowns. The Better Places document says don't give up protecting the environment and preserving rural character but you can allow the downtowns to accommodate more people.

Barre said when one is old enough, they will have witnessed a number of things that seem trendy. He said people have built mansions and huge houses in the past. There was a big influx of cash at that time. He didn't know if setbacks had been changed in order to build bigger

1 houses. Barre said if you look way back in history, it is good to have kids get out and spread their
2 wings. He wondered if the idea of roommates and more people living together to make things
3 affordable was what natural life is. He asked if it is the responsibility of the community to make
4 sure everyone has their own apartment. He was concerned that breaking up nicer homes and
5 renting them out downtown to lower income tenants would result in seeing less people in local
6 restaurants because they couldn't afford to eat out. Barre said he didn't want to discriminate
7 against low-income people, but if big houses get broken up in order to make more money on rent
8 and those tenants don't patronize local businesses or working, it would have a negative impact
9 on the quality of life. Barre said he was concerned the people who would be moving in wouldn't
10 really be looking for jobs. He said he wasn't saying if he was for or against it, but wanted to
11 make sure the big picture was looked at.

12 Jason responded by saying they were talking about homes of varying types that everyone can
13 afford. He said that included teachers, firefighters and older folks looking to downsize who want
14 a one level, easier to maintain house and to stay in their community. Jason pointed out they were
15 talking about all sorts of housing and not just affordable. He said he would skip ahead, because
16 there was a lot to talk about in the document.

17 Cathy said there were buildings currently vacant and not being used, that she would be happy to
18 work with the bylaws so something else could go in there. Cathy sees the buildings as an asset
19 the planning commission and town need to take care of.

20 Jason said there are other communities where large homeowners have a hard time with the cost
21 of heating them. He said by creating rental units, it has helped them to stay in their homes while
22 earning rental income.

23 Preston added that zoning can't make anybody do anything, but it can put up obstacles or make
24 things more possible. He said the goal was to not have zoning get in the way of making things
25 useful.

26 Hugh in reply to what Barre had said about affordable housing, said on one hand, people worry
27 about affordable housing folks on the lower income scale moving in, but on the flip side, if you
28 can make housing more available and affordable and in walkable areas in a village or town, there
29 are more people available to join the workforce. Hugh said not everyone can afford to go to
30 restaurants but by the same token, most people can only eat so much food in restaurants. He said
31 larger homes are mostly empty or only have a couple of people in them.

32 Jason said in the interest of time, he would skip ahead. He said there were a lot of ideas and they
33 would have to figure out how they would fit in Chester. Jason said it was worth touching briefly
34 on some of the topics of reform discussed in the document. He said dimensional standards
35 referred to minimum lot sizes and setbacks. Typically most communities starting from scratch
36 could not build them as they look today based on the zoning. He said there is recognition that
37 these dimensional standards aren't necessarily in line with what is on the ground today. Perhaps
38 maybe they should be. He said the document includes ideas of short-term fixes and matching
39 dimensional standards to existing conditions. If that was done there would be fewer non-
40 conforming structures.

41 Jason said the document included other ideas such as making sure density standards were
42 appropriate. Some projects were not feasible because of the restrictions on number of units.
43 Jason said these were common barriers.

1 Barre asked Jason what he envisioned. He wondered if there would be more density in the zones
2 that comprised The Green and Chester Depot and how the rural area would be affected.

3 Jason said it was the community's choice, but smaller was generally more affordable, so it may
4 make sense to consider where infrastructure currently is. He said the village districts, where
5 water and sewer existed should be considered. He said it should be based on community needs
6 and the housing market conditions. He referred to Preston's comment about the national
7 conversation. They should allow for duplexes and triplexes in any residential district.

8 Tim said when he read the document he was struck by the impression that the proposed bylaws
9 document already accomplished increasing density in the village district and it aligned with what
10 they had already done.

11 Jason said he was a little rusty on the details but thought they were steps in the right direction in
12 terms of the setbacks. He said it was important the math works when considering how
13 dimensional standards relate to one another. Jason thought the setbacks in the village were an
14 improvement.

15 Tim said the setbacks were decreased in the proposed bylaws.

16 Barre mentioned an article about Chester's architecture and unique Stone Village. He said a lot
17 of houses in town have barn-like structures on the back. He suggested turning them into in-law
18 structures would help the homeowners by giving them rental income. Barre pointed out they
19 already have water and sewer available and doing so wouldn't change the character of the town
20 because the properties would look the same.

21 Tim responded that Barre's suggestion would fall under ADU. Cathy said accessory dwelling
22 units were in both sets of bylaws. She said the difference between the two sets was the adopted
23 bylaws didn't have the square footage requirement, but the proposed bylaws did. So, under the
24 adopted bylaws, she said you could have as many homes as you could physically fit on the lot
25 but under the proposed bylaws, they would be limited by the square feet per dwelling unit
26 requirement.

27 Barre said when people come up with housing concepts, they believe the downtown should
28 provide things like a store, senior center, place to gather. He said Chester was definitely a town
29 but lacked a lot of the conveniences most towns have. Barre said if someone is older and didn't
30 have a car, they would not do well in Chester. He said if more housing were created, what would
31 the town accomplish, unless there was an art school or something that would attract young
32 people. He thought Chester was unique but they should be realistic.

33 Hugh agreed with Barre and said changing zoning bylaws wasn't a silver bullet to solve all the
34 affordable housing problems in the community but thought if everything were to come together
35 in a positive way, he would not want the bylaws to get in the way. He said the process gets in the
36 way so much that it discourages ideas in the first place. Hugh felt changing the bylaws wasn't
37 going to make Chester the perfect place but said if they could eliminate a roadblock or barrier,
38 they should do it.

39 Barre said another issue was there wasn't a lot of flat ground that wasn't near water. He thought
40 one of the best spots is behind the Stone Village but suspected the people who lived there would
41 be upset if they put it there because it's a historic district.

42 Cathy said that was an argument for trying to make what already exists into apartments. She

1 thought if they could make it easier to create more affordable housing they should do it.

2 Jason said the cost per square foot for building new structures is ridiculous right now. He
3 referred to Montpelier's ADU pilot program and said they're trying to avoid new structures and
4 instead renovating existing structures. He suggested that, like Barre had said, maybe that was
5 where Chester's efforts should be right now but that it was a local choice.

6 Jason said another topic was parking. He said maybe parking standards were suburban focused
7 and suggested reducing the parking standards or allowing on-street parking. He felt it was less of
8 an issue in Chester than most other places.

9 Jason pointed out allowable uses. He said zoning talks about three categories: single, two, and
10 multi-family dwellings. He suggested having four categories to include three and four family
11 dwellings. He said it was typical that multifamily structures had to undergo a conditional use
12 review. He said some of this would be existing structures and what harm was there in an existing
13 large home being three rental units. He said they needed to look at the impact on the
14 neighborhood and the conditional use review standards. He said in effort to make it easier for the
15 review process they should consider whether it was a permitted use or if it could required only
16 administrative review. He asked for any comments.

17 Barre asked if he thought they had to regulate potential Air B&Bs. He said Chester is in a way a
18 resort community and changed the rules so everyone could have an apartment in a back barn.
19 They would make more money renting out for weekend than having a hillbilly like him moving
20 in full time. Did they define if so that it can't be an Air B&B?

21 Jason said he didn't believe the document dealt with it but it was an issue in Ludlow. He said
22 they may decide they want to regulate it. There are state building codes to comply with. Chester
23 may want to consider a registry. A lot of towns see short-term rentals are beginning to be a
24 problem. He said Barre was right that they reduce available long-term rentals.

25 Barre said Chester was a sort of resort town with all the skiers that visit and many people had Air
26 B&Bs He didn't want to get in their way because they benefit from them. He asked if the
27 potential affordable housing would be prohibited from being used as Air B&Bs and how would
28 they be classified.

29 Jason didn't recall the document specifically dealing with that but agreed that it was an issue. He
30 said he knew it was an issue in Ludlow and suspected it was an issue in Chester and other places.
31 Jason said the town may choose to regulate them. He said they need to comply with state
32 taxation and building codes. He said some are requiring short-term rentals to be on an owner-
33 occupied lot only which would address party issues. He said the Air B&Bs reduce the number of
34 long-term rentals that could be available.

35 Barre said his concern was if the purpose was to create more housing in Chester and they ended
36 up becoming Air B&Bs, it would totally defeat the purpose. Hugh said he could see Barre's
37 point. He said a homeowner could chop a big house into apartments and Air B&B them. He said
38 people loving to come to Vermont year-round would need to face the Air B&B issue.

39 Barre said they need to consider all the angles. He said there was no way he would live in
40 Chester if didn't do the business he does. He would like to see more arts in Chester to make it
41 more interesting. Barre said vacationers and second homeowners affect the local economy. He
42 said they can't just come down from Montpelier use a rubber stamp for Chester because it wasn't
43 a normal town.

1 Jason said each community looks at short-term rentals differently. He said they bring people into
2 town who support local restaurants and the economy. He's heard people talk allowing for an
3 ADU in a tourist home situation and that person acts like more of a caretaker. He said it was
4 something to consider.

5 Jason also touched on the topic of reforming street standards. He said the document is pushing
6 for on-street parking where it makes sense. Jason suggested for long-term, they should consider
7 what standards could be modified or added to. He said they are suggesting changes to make
8 communities more walkable and safer if there are more homes in the village.

9 Preston said on-street parking requires a lot of effort into removing snow in the winter and if that
10 isn't done, on-street parking disappears for four months or more.

11 Barre said Chester has some of the best public works people. Preston said if true, they could use
12 on-street parking year-round. Barre compared Chester to a country club and said they take good
13 care of their residents.

14 Jason said they suggested allowing owner occupied lot, not an owner-occupied primary house to
15 allow for flexibility, larger sizes, and eliminate parking, if applicable. He suggested considering
16 an adaptive reuse provision to accommodate the creation of an apartment in a barn out back.
17 START HERE

18 Jason concluded that it was important for the board to streamline the process the best they can.
19 He said if they find as a result of hearings, that criteria isn't applicable to the project at hand,
20 they may want to make a permanent change in the land use. Jason then asked for questions.

21 Barre asked Jason if he had written the recommendations down and could forward them to the
22 board in an email. Jason said they would be happy to follow up and help the board. Barre asked
23 if the board felt they knew what Jason was talking about.

24 Preston told Barre the booklet contained the list of what Jason had gone over on pages 14 and
25 15.

26 Tim Roper told Jason he had been involved in working on the proposed bylaws and road
27 standards and found in almost every case the fire department determines the required road width
28 and where turnarounds need to be. He asked Jason how to balance things.

29 Jason replied that Philadelphia doesn't get near the amount of snow that Vermont does and their
30 streets are only seven feet wide and they maintain them. He said the state standards have more
31 flexibility than people may realize and it was worth talking about. He said there is a push to have
32 Complete Streets' policies so streets are designed for more than just cars, i.e. walking, biking,
33 etc. He said he personally thinks there is opportunity for streets to be narrower and it would be a
34 conversation for the town to have.

35 Cathy said they would probably start with highway superintendent. Peter said the Select Board
36 has the ultimate authority regarding roads. Cathy asked if Main Street was a state street or
37 belonged to the town. Peter said portions belong to town but need to meet state standard. Cathy
38 said, at the moment, they were not thinking much about new development and she wouldn't have
39 Kirby Putnam in to talk about it as he doesn't have control over it.

40 Preston said Complete Streets legislation applies to VTrans, as well. They have roads that have
41 tractor trailer trucks and are supposed to consider Complete Streets in all of their work. Barre
42 said there was a whole design for the downtown area and opposite The Green regarding

1 walkability and parking with the downtown master plan.

2 Tim said he was thinking both in terms of new development and to allow on-street parking
3 probably need to reduce the travel lane width to allow for parking spaces.

4 Barre said there wasn't a lot of ground in town and the roads were already set. He said he loved
5 Monopoly houses and other cool architectural things in other places. He said if somebody were
6 to do something that would involve different structures without tearing something down it would
7 have to be on the edge of town or the cornfields on the Green Mountain Turnpike as that's where
8 the land is.

9 Jason mentioned that VTrans was revisiting some of their standards and thought Chester's
10 Village Center Master Plan had a lot of good ideas in it and suggested that it might be a good
11 starting place. Before Jason left the meeting, he said he would be happy to follow-up with
12 everyone and thanked them for coming. He asked to let him know how he could follow-up.

13 **Agenda Item 2, Status Report on the Bylaw Subcommittee Progress**

14 Cathy asked Preston if he wanted to give the report. Preston said they had two meetings at
15 Jason's office. Hugh asked who attended and Preston said it was Peter, Cathy, and himself.
16 Preston said at first, they didn't think they needed an agenda and minutes but the town manager
17 and attorney said they should.

18 Cathy said the town manager didn't want them to have minutes but the editor of the Telegraph
19 said they did, so she confirmed with the town's attorney that it was required. Cathy said there
20 was an agenda for the next day's meeting at 10 a.m. and there would be minutes provided.

21 Preston said going forward there would be more transparency. He said the two discussions were
22 general and focused around whether they take small steps with the existing bylaws or do they
23 look at changes for the proposed bylaws. He said their group was more inclined to take small
24 steps with the existing bylaws. Preston said they considered taking the best out of the proposed
25 bylaws and incorporating them into the current bylaws. He said there were two meetings but they
26 didn't discuss specifics. He said if they hold a public hearing with the proposed bylaws, with the
27 Planning Commission divided, he thought they would lose a lot of credibility. He would like
28 them to go forward with something they can be proud of.

29 Tim said he wasn't an expert on Roberts Rules of Order but thought subcommittees report back
30 to the full committee. He was taken aback that that was the full report from two meetings. He
31 found it interesting they could meet twice without a report and then learn the direction had been
32 decided on by a committee of two. Cathy said the committee was four. Tim said the committee
33 appointed was two from the Planning Commission and thought the Commission would vote on a
34 direction to be taken.

35 Barre agreed with Tim. He said he thought it was great they had met but he was expecting
36 minutes and was a little surprised Julie said she would prefer not to have minutes and would like
37 to know why that was the case. Barre said being he was the person who suggested the
38 subcommittee, the goal wasn't to have a theory on how to move forward but to identify what
39 they thought should be replaced because the community didn't want it. Barre wanted the actual
40 problems with the new bylaws written down and proposed wordage and then brought back to the
41 Commission for a vote.

42 Peter said all they talked about in the last meeting were the bylaws and the book and that's why

1 Cathy brought it to this meeting. He said Jason took on role to transplant ideas. Peter said the
2 book was used because they were taking a completely different outlook. He said he and Cathy
3 had spent most of a morning walking the Village Green looking at the proposed bylaws.

4 Tim agreed they should look at the Better Places document and he thought it was terrific
5 document from what he had seen so far. He took issue with Peter and Cathy and Preston, the
6 subcommittee, and Jason melting the document into their existing bylaws as he didn't think it
7 was a function of the subcommittee.

8 Peter said they couldn't approve anything on their own but could propose it to the Commission.
9 He said they needed time to look at them. He said Jason had been involved with the modification
10 history of the bylaws. He said Jason was more comfortable working with the document worked
11 on for 20 years than with Brandi's document.

12 Preston said they already met twice and the impression was to work with the bylaws they have.
13 Tim said the Commission was charged with a full rewrite of the bylaws.

14 Cathy said Jason had immediately questioned what they were supposed to be doing. Julie said
15 they wanted a full review of bylaws and not necessarily a full rewrite. Tim wondered why they
16 spent the 1.5 years rewriting them. Barre thought it was three years. Cathy said nobody expected
17 Brandy to come up with a complete new set of bylaws. Barre said she didn't – that the board did
18 and Cathy was there. Barre said it was influenced by Brandy as the consultant but Cathy said she
19 wrote them.

20 Barre said he wants to know what will be approved and what won't and would like it written
21 down. Peter said he didn't think it was necessary to write things down that had already been
22 agreed upon. He pointed out that he was removed as Chair because they didn't like what was
23 being done. Barre felt it was the same argument.

24 Tim said the subcommittee had already made a decision and maybe Julie had been involved.
25 Barre wondered if Julie was involved and said he didn't like throwing her under the bus. Barre
26 said they were an independent committee and whatever they say goes and wondered who was
27 pulling the strings. Peter said it was Barre's suggestion to form subcommittee and he was now
28 telling the board it wasn't his idea. Barre said that was the idea and Peter told him to be patient.
29 Barre said he felt it was a festering thing. He said he didn't have a clear understanding of what
30 people wanted or why. He felt something was getting changed along the way.

31 Cathy pointed out the first time the subcommittee met was June 22nd and this was the first time
32 the Planning Committee had met since June 21st. Barre felt the reality was that Preston and Jason
33 had been charged to rewrite the bylaws and Tim added without any committee input. Barre felt
34 strings were being pulled.

35 Barre asked why they didn't write down the problems they have. He said he had heard no
36 specific reasons and if he had a problem, he would write down. Barre said the only thing he hears
37 is that people won't approve it because they don't like it. He asked who those people were.

38 Peter said the biggest thing they don't like is the amount of regulation is doubled.

39 Tim asked who everyone was. Peter said when he first came to the meetings there was a group of
40 people in attendance regularly who drove things, but they were no longer there.

41 Cathy said they would meet tomorrow at 10 am and asked what the Commission wanted to see
42 out of that meeting. Barre replied minutes. Cathy said she could tell them what transpired but

1 that would not solve the issue.

2 Hugh said as a subcommittee they had latitude but they needed to look at the proposed bylaws by
3 section and identify areas that were problematic and areas that looked good and then write those
4 up, because until they had something to look at, they couldn't do anything other than read work
5 in progress.

6 Tim said to be clear, they wanted to know which sections were issues and which were good, but
7 not to assign limited resources as a subcommittee and rewrite a whole other set of bylaws and
8 present them to the Commission.

9 Barre said he had no problem with that and that they could do that. He said what was important
10 to him is to see what was decided and why in writing.

11 Tim said there was limited resources and time, but to do that without the Planning Commission
12 voting and approving it was procedurally way off track.

13 There was discussion between Tim and Peter concerning the amount of time that had already
14 been spent working on the proposed bylaws and what, if any, time limit there was. Tim felt they
15 needed to be making some progress.

16 Barre said the reality was bylaws could be changed and they had spent years and had meetings
17 and felt they would keep taking the same steps and still not have accomplished anything. He said
18 in March there would be a new member not as bright as Cathy and they would have to take time
19 to bring them up to speed and said they may as well adjourn until March.

20 Cathy asked if they were so attached to the proposed bylaws, why were they unwilling to what
21 go over the changes made in 2020 to make sure they were entered properly.

22 Tim said the process under the previous two chairs was to review what was written, discuss
23 together as a commission and alter, if necessary, and if there was a consensus, to vote on it move
24 on. He said it had not been done over the last year.

25 Cathy said once Brandy was not part of process there was a period where they worked on the
26 zoning map but also made changes to bylaws and held them waiting for an agreement from
27 Brandy to continue her role as the keeper of the document When the agreement never
28 materialized Cathy figured out how to edit the bylaws and put the agreed upon changes in. Barre
29 asked if they had voted on each line. Cathy said she changed document. Peter explained she
30 worked on it all last January and when the document was brought back to the Commission, they
31 did not want to review it.

32 Barre felt Peter was making up stuff. He said his problem was they were throwing their work out
33 rather than to say what was wrong with the document and felt it was insulting to the board.

34 Preston told Barre he heard him and agreed that if they have problems they need to tell them.

35 Barre said he's not married to the deal and is just showing up for work and doing his job. He said
36 no matter what is done it requires a vote so if it came down to lobbying the select board for new
37 players, they could do that. In the end, it is all politics.

38 Peter suggested letting the subcommittee play out as it was Barre's idea.

39 Cathy said there was public comment.

40 Scott MacDonald from the DRB had a few concerns. He said he was new and had only been in

1 Chester 5 years and could appreciate all the hard work the Planning Commission had done. He
2 mentioned Barre's comment about wanting to hear from people and understood how frustrating
3 that could be. He said there was a man sitting in the audience for 45 minutes and left because
4 nobody gave him the time of day. Barre said he asked him ahead of time and he had no
5 comment. Mr. MacDonald said it would have been nice to know what he wanted to say. Mr.
6 MacDonald said he also heard someone say what the planning commission says goes and he
7 thought there was a disconnect and an arrogance to such a comment when there is a culture in a
8 community that may be hurt by that.

9 Barre clarified the comment by referencing what he believed was Section 181 that defined the
10 role of the Commission with respect to zoning laws. The Planning Commission was responsible
11 for the bylaws and whatever it did couldn't be decided by the Select Board or someone else.

12 Peter said a bylaw change could and had been decided by citizen vote. Barre disagreed. Peter
13 said it was put on by petition and voted by public.

14 Barre said he could be wrong, but his point was he sees his role as a job and has not been happy
15 with the leadership for 1.5 years. He felt like he had done the job a million times and wanted to
16 know who has decided they need to redo it and what is wrong with it.

17 Peter said if minutes were presented, then Barre would be okay with it.

18 Hugh said the subcommittee should consider which areas of the proposed bylaws they want to
19 address first, set a timeframe, and provide the Commission with recommendations, with respect
20 to good and bad. He said they should pick work they can manage and estimate a completion
21 date. Hugh said at the next meeting if the only thing they did was lay out where to focus and
22 when they would report back, it would allow them a path forward for productive discussion. He
23 said if they could do that, they would not feel like they were standing around in a circle.

24 Tim felt that was an excellent suggestion and asked Hugh to put it in the form of motion.

25 Hugh moved that subcommittee in the next meeting formulate which areas of the proposed
26 bylaws to review and provide a target date for conclusion and report back to the full Planning
27 Commission. Tim asked to modify it to provide a specific section of the proposed bylaws.

28 Peter said he had a problem with the motion because there would be an overlap of different
29 sections. Tim said he understood but once the proposals were brought back, they could discuss
30 them and if approved, apply them. Peter said he thought they could pick up different sections
31 rather than one specific section.

32 Tim asked Hugh if he wanted to modify his motion. Hugh modified his motion to give latitude if
33 they pick a topic like the Village Center and it pulls in multiple sections of the document. he
34 didn't have any objection to that. He just wanted something tangible that, as a commission, they
35 could review.

36 Cathy read the motion as the subcommittee would choose an area of the proposed bylaws and
37 any subsidiary to be reviewed and a date on which to deliver the review to the Commission.
38 Hugh agreed and moved, and Tim seconded. The motion approved unanimously.

39 There was discussion by the members that they felt they could move forward now.

40 Peter thought they should look at what they need to do for affordable housing. He mentioned
41 anticipated funding for low-income housing money coming in the largest federal budget in

1 history.

2 Cathy suggested they discuss agenda for the next meeting.

3 Barre said he expects people who bought during COVID to sell based on social media posts. He
4 said it wasn't that long ago the government was paying people \$10,000 to move to Vermont and
5 anticipated things to change.

6 **Agenda Item 4, Citizen Comments**

7 Cathy asked for public comment from those who were waiting on Zoom.

8 Steve Mancuso said in a nutshell, the Commission was a mess and needed to clean it up. He said
9 the taxpayer is demanding clarity and transparency from them. He said some of the Commission
10 realized it and has taken the correct form of action but he didn't see it as universal. He said they
11 are public servants and it wasn't an option but an obligation.

12 Barre asked if he had specific ideas they wanted them to look at.

13 Gwen Kerr said she didn't appreciate the Commission saying the public can't ask questions
14 because the Commission knows better than the citizens. She said if they do, they should be able
15 to clarify answers to the citizens' questions. She said when the taxpayers ask a question, she
16 doesn't expect to hear that she doesn't have the right to ask and she should just trust them. She
17 doesn't think that's how it works.

18 Barre told Ms. Kerr he wanted to know what problems she had with the new bylaws and/or if she
19 had ideas of what she wanted so they could do a better job for her.

20 Gwen Kerr answered that she thought 300 pages of bylaws for a town of 2800 people was
21 excessive. She wanted to know when they come forward with a question such as a business
22 wanting to establish roots in Chester, she wanted to have specific answers to the bylaws. She said
23 every time anyone asks a question they are told "we didn't know that was there and we'll get
24 back to you."

25 Cathy asked if there were any more comments and there were none.

26 Cathy said she would like to invite Jeff Holden to bring maps of the water and sewer system and
27 discuss its financial health and possible extension and if it could handle more consumers.
28 Everyone was in agreement that would be an acceptable agenda item.

29 Barre inquired about the length of Jeff's presentation and if it would allow time for other items
30 on the agenda. Cathy asked if there was anything else they wanted on the agenda.

31 Hugh asked if the subcommittee would agree to use the Better Places document. And Cathy
32 agreed. Hugh said that was fine but if they were not going to then an agenda item would be for
33 them to look through the document.

34 Peter said his feelings wouldn't be hurt if they went through it to understand it better. He said he
35 had read it cover to cover and liked their approach and reasoning. He would like to see them
36 move forward and keep working on affordable housing.

37 Cathy proposed if time allowed at the next meeting, that they discuss a timetable in anticipation
38 of money for housing and infrastructure changes coming soon. She suggested they should make
39 changes to the bylaws to be ready to accept that money.

40 Barre asked where he could find information about the anticipated money. He said affordable

1 housing was complex and someone had to be behind it. Peter said they can get a \$5,000 grant
2 available for a single-family home from the state to work on affordable housing in the state of
3 Vermont. Peter said the state allotted \$30 million last year for affordable housing.

4 Cathy said Julie is looking at grants which will open toward the end of the year. She's going to
5 fund a municipal planning grant to direct to housing. The study will provide much better and
6 more current data on housing in Chester. Money will be available in the summer of 2022 to put
7 toward the housing needs found in the study.

8 Barre asked if that was more for affordable housing, like the place across from the Jiffy Mart,
9 and if in order to qualify for affordable housing it had to have reduced rent. Peter said it could be
10 done in many different ways.

11 Cathy said there was a lot to it. She said a big house, sitting empty in Chester, being turned into
12 multiple units could happen and they needed to do what was necessary to the byulaws to allow
13 for that.

14 Tim said they only went to 3 units once and 4 would require a state permit. Tim asked if Julie
15 could directly report to them about what it is and what they should be considering.

16 Peter said from what he had read there was federal money coming down to the state. And
17 Vermont has Leahy who is currently the most senior senator seems to hand out money. He
18 suggested they figure out where to put things. Tim said it would be nice to have Julie's overview
19 of that.

20 Hugh said his proposal based on that discussion was 6 topics of reform. He would like to address
21 them individually and take not more than 15 or 20 minutes of discussion. He suggested picking
22 them in the context of a zoning district. He suggested taking dimensional requirements in the
23 Village District or something that makes sense and then look at their recommendations.

24 Peter, Tim, and Cathy talked about lifting parking requirements for the district. Tim said those
25 are the things they have always wanted to revisit. It was suggested to allocate time in the agenda
26 for conditional requirements. Tim said if Julie couldn't attend, writing was second best but
27 preferred that she attend the meeting.

28 Barre said he wanted to make sure it got in the minutes that the number of pages of a document
29 didn't make it good or bad. Tim agreed. Barre said the DRB asked for things they included and it
30 didn't mean more rules, only more words. Barre said people react emotionally sometimes.

31 Peter suggested they table it and move to adjourn.

32 **Agenda Item 3, Review minutes from June 21, 2021 meeting**

33 Cathy Hasbrouck asked if there was a motion to review the minutes of June 21st and it was
34 suggested they be tabled, as well.

35 **Agenda Item 5, Discuss Agenda and Set Date for Next Meeting**

36 Peter Hudkins made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Tim Roper seconded it. The meeting
37 was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.