

**TOWN OF CHESTER
PLANNING COMMISSION**

January 16, 2016

Board Members Present: Naomi Johnson, Tom Hildreth, Randy Wiggin, and Claudio Veliz.
Staff Present: Michael Normyle, Zoning Administrator, Cathy Hasbrouck, Recording Secretary
Visitors Present: Kelly Arrison, Amy Mosher, Marilyn Mahusky, Shawn Cunningham, Alison DesLauriers, Phil Perlah.

Agenda Item 1 Reorganize the Commission

Vice Chair Naomi Johnson opened the meeting at 7:00 PM. The committee needed to re-organize due to the resignation of Chair Tom Bock. Naomi asked for nominations for Chair. Randy Wiggin nominated Naomi Johnson to be Chair. Tom Hildreth seconded the motion. Claudio Veliz asked if the Commission should wait to reorganize until the Select Board appointed a new member to replace Tom Bock. Naomi said there would be another reorganizational meeting when the new member was appointed, which may not happen for several weeks. The Select Board may also expand the number of members on the Commission. Randy Wiggin asked if an alternate would be chosen. Naomi said that Vermont Statute does not allow alternates on the Planning Commission. A vote was taken on the motion to nominate Naomi Johnson as Chair and the motion passed.

Naomi then asked for nominations for Vice Chair. Claudio Veliz nominated Tom Hildreth as Vice Chair. Naomi Johnson seconded the motion. There was no discussion. A vote was taken and the motion passed.

Agenda Item 2 Review minutes from the December 19, 2016 meeting

Claudio moved to accept the minutes. Randy Wiggin seconded the motion. Randy pointed out an error on page 3. His last name was incorrect. Amy Mosher asked whether she actually had received an answer to the question shown in the second paragraph on page 2, 'what prevents a citizen from having a business such as an electrician based at home?'. Cathy Hasbrouck confirmed that on the recording Michael Normyle had stated that if the person confines the business to the house and uses a pickup truck there is no regulation to prevent that. There was no further discussion. A vote was taken and the motion passed.

Agenda Item 3 Discuss Education chapter of the Town Plan

The Commission considered the materials in the packet relating to Chapter 5 of the Town Plan, Education. There was a draft of Chapter 5, an excerpt from the Policies and Goals dealing with Education, and a graph of enrollment data which includes 2015 – 2016 figures. Naomi asked to have the working draft read out, half a page at a time, so that comments may be taken.

After reading the first half-page it was decided that the figures quoted in the draft were outdated. Alison DesLauriers, chair of the Green Mountain Union High School (GMUHS) Board, and Marilyn Mahusky, chair of the Chester - Andover Elementary School (CAES) Board, offered to get more

current figures from the supervisory union office. Marilyn said that the 2016-2017 enrollment in CAES was significantly lower than in 2015-2016, or about 195 students.

Both women told the Commission that Act 46, the Vermont legislature's mandate to consolidate school districts, would make extensive changes to how Chester schools are organized. Claudio Veliz asked for a summary of the possible changes. Marilyn Mahusky said work began on meeting the requirements in 2015. There are currently three different proposals being considered. In option A, a single district would be created for a group of towns that included Chester, Mount Holly and Ludlow. Black River Academy would be closed. All high school students would attend Green Mountain Union High School. In option C, a single district would be formed, but Black River Academy and Green Mountain Union High School would continue to operate. The third, backup proposal, is to form a Regional Education District with Andover, Cavendish and possibly Baltimore. Naomi Johnson asked when the decision about Act 46 will be made so that the Commission can discuss how the new organization should be reflected in the Town Plan. Alison said the decision could be made as early as March or as late as May 2017. For the present, Naomi Johnson proposed that this statement be added to the Town Plan:

In 2015 all Vermont school districts began working on Act 46 compliance. As of January, 2017, the changes have not been completed.

Tom Hildreth read the paragraphs in Chapter 5 about Green Mountain Union High School. He asked for statistics on the number of students who receive vocational and technical training at the River Valley Technical Center in Springfield. Alison DesLauriers said about 35 students attend River Valley Technical Center annually. She will send the Commission more precise information. Alison and Marilyn Mahusky discussed other educational programs for high school students. About 20 GMUHS students come from other towns as part of the Public School Choice program for grades 9 – 12. Students are also allowed to enroll in up to 4 college courses in their Junior and Senior years for college credit and credit toward their high school diploma.

Claudio Veliz read paragraphs on Childcare. Alison DesLauriers offered 2 clarifications. She said the Opportunities in Learning program is now a program within the Green Mountain Union High School, and Head Start is part of Chester Community Pre-School at GMUHS. Randy Wiggin asked for more statistics on preschool enrollment. Alison DesLauriers said there were 9 licensed preschools available in southern Vermont. She did not have attendance figures. The Commission could get those figures from SEVCA or the Supervisory Union. She says local towns must pay \$3200 per year for 10 hours per week of preschool to any licensed preschool the parents choose.

Alison DesLauriers then addressed capital improvements. She said that GMUHS was putting a bond before the voters this March to replace the roof. Chester Andover Elementary School has recently repaired and updated their roof. Marilyn Mahusky said that CAES windows need replacing, having been damaged in the gas station explosion that took place decades ago, but they will not be issuing a bond for that this year.

Michael Normyle asked about physical space at the two schools. Marilyn Mahusky said that declining enrollment at CAES has resulted in staff reductions. The unused physical space is mainly in a double wide classroom behind the school which cannot be used for student services because it does not integrate with the school's security system. Claudio asked about staff reductions as a result of Act 46 consolidation. Alison DesLauriers said that no students from other schools would be added to the Chester - Andover Elementary School. At the high school level, there is the possibility of combining

Black River Academy and GMUHS. If the two schools were combined, the staffs would be pooled and reductions that may take place would be based on factors such as seniority.

Tom Hildreth asked Marilyn Mahusky what she thought about security at the elementary school if the Conservation Commission proceeded with plans to build a bridge and nature trail across the brook behind the school. He said that the public has been banned from the trail behind the high school during school hours. Marilyn said she thought the elementary school board and the Conservation Commission should discuss this.

Michael Normyle proposed adding statistics on educational outcomes to the Town Plan, such as the number of students going on to technical or vocational training, college, the military or employment. Allison DesLauriers said that those statistics were sometimes hard to get, but the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation and the guidance departments could supply some information. Michael felt these figures would reflect well on the town and encourage development.

Claudio Veliz brought up the issue of poverty in Chester. Marilyn Mahusky and Alison DesLauriers confirmed that the number of children in both schools qualifying for free or reduced lunch has risen, as it has in neighboring towns. Marilyn said that there was a farm-to-school program in place and a garden at the elementary school to teach about healthy food and support healthy diets.

Claudio Veliz asked for input from the audience on what could be included in the Town Plan to support the schools. Alison DesLauriers said the town should continue to invest in family-friendly activities such as hiking trails, and facilities at the Pinnacle recreation area. Marilyn Mahusky said she wanted sidewalks and bike paths, particularly connecting the high school to the center of town. Claudio Veliz asked about family education programs, where families come together to learn about a subject like citizen science. Marilyn Mahusky pointed out that facilities such as the Grafton Nature Center, Newsbank and the Whiting Library do have programs for families now. Randy Wiggin asked if student service organizations such as the high school honor society could have more community based activities. Alison DesLauriers said there was some activity in that area. The Rotary Club sponsors a program about Nicaragua and student groups do tutoring.

Claudio Veliz asked about physical plant projects in the community which could enhance the educational experience. Alison DesLauriers said there has been discussion for years about a community center, an indoor facility for the entire community. This has never gotten enough support to become a project. Tom Hildreth asked about the playground at the elementary school. Marilyn gave details about the current plan to replace the existing playground. It could be mentioned in the Town Plan as a fund-raising effort.

Naomi Johnson read the current Goals, Policies and Recommendations entry for Education in the Town Plan. Claudio Veliz quoted the policy statement “ The Town should continue to work with the school board on capital development programs for buildings and other structures. “ and asked whether the Town Plan was recommending funding for the projects. Alison DesLauriers explained that the schools are separate municipalities themselves and the school districts span multiple towns. For that reason Chester would not unilaterally fund a project for a school. Alison said she thought the language in the Town Plan was referring to projects in other parts of the community that serve school-age children, such as the facilities at the Pinnacle.

Tom Hildreth asked for examples of where the town has worked with the school board in the past on capital expenditures. Naomi Johnson suggested that the new skating rink would be an example of an expenditure that benefited school-age children. Marilyn Mahusky said the schools did not have an opportunity to participate in the town planning process for solar panels. The invitation to the discussion came to them only a couple of months before the end of the process. It was agreed that the word 'continue' would be removed from the policy statement cited above, as there was little evidence that the town had been doing so in the past.

Marilyn Mahusky asked if a goal to connect the high school and the center of town with a sidewalk and bike path could be added. Naomi Johnson said it could be a goal, but perhaps that goal belonged in the Facilities chapter rather than the Education chapter. Tom Hildreth expressed support of this as a goal. Claudio Veliz asked why Chester sidewalks have not been upgraded and maintained. The Commission members and audience discussed it and concluded that sidewalks are a low priority and no one sees sidewalks as an economic driver that would help the town's economy. Claudio cited a study from Milwaukee in the 1970's that showed sidewalks were a productive economic investment. Naomi suggested the following wording for the sidewalk goal: Develop a sidewalk to connect Green Mountain Union High School to the center of town. Claudio suggested that the goal be broadened to include a network of sidewalks throughout the town. Naomi said that such a broad goal would belong in the Facilities chapter. Tom Hildreth said the Master Plan committee had discussed sidewalks recently. In their discussion, it was said that curbs and curb cuts needed to be installed before sidewalks could be added.

Naomi Johnson thanked Marilyn Mahusky and Alison DesLaruiers for their input on this agenda item.

Agenda Item 4 Discuss new Energy chapter requirements of Town Plan

The Commission discussed a letter from Jason Rasmussen of the Regional Planning Commission regarding the creation of a detailed energy plan. Here is a summary of the points of discussion:

- The State of Vermont has set a goal of obtaining 90% of the energy consumed in the state from non-fossil fuel sources by 2050.
- The Regional Planning Commission is offering three towns extensive help with creating a detailed energy plan.
- The draft plans would be due in July, 2017.
- Information to create the plan such as maps and energy use figures will not be available until April at the earliest.
- Towns that have a detailed energy plan will receive consideration from the state Public Service Board regarding the siting of energy projects.
- The Chester Select Board has voted to pursue the opportunity with the Regional Planning Commission.

The Commission decided that they have several questions to ask Jason Rasmussen before they can agree to apply for aid from the Regional Planning Commission for help to create their detailed energy plan. They decided to ask Jason to attend their next meeting.

Agenda Item 5 Discuss UDB treatment of Air B&B and other non-traditional tourist lodging trends

The highlights of this discussion were:

- About 20 properties in Chester advertise on the Air B&B website
- State law requires a fire and safety inspection for every property that rents space to the public.
- Many properties in Chester are not fulfilling this requirement.
- The Unified Development Bylaws should address this.

Action on this item was deferred to the next meeting.

Agenda Item 6 Update on Residential Care/Vermont state licensed homes

Michael Normyle expected to have information about this from the town Attorney Jim Carroll, but he was unable to obtain it. This item was deferred until Michael receives a response from Jim Carroll.

Agenda Item 7 Letter from Dan Patenaude

Michael Normyle shared a letter he had received from Dan Patenaude asking for permission to build a new home for his elderly parents on the lot where their current home is located and to delay removing the old house indefinitely, possibly until his parents are both dead. Michael said he has had 3 or 4 situations in the past where a piece of property has had two primary residences for some period of time, usually the length of a building season. He wanted the Commission to be aware of this issue and to consider if changes to the UDB's could be helpful. Consideration was deferred to a later time.

Agenda Item 8 Citizen Comments

Kelly Arrison invited the Commission members and citizens attending the meeting to the showing of a video entitled Heart and Soul Planning. The video was created by Ed McMahon, Jr. of the Orton Family Foundation and will be shown Monday January 30, 2017 at 6:30 PM in the Newsbank conference center upstairs room.

Agenda Item 9 Set date for the next meeting

The next meeting of the Planning Commission will be Monday February 6, 2017 at 7:00 PM

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