

**TOWN OF CHESTER
PLANNING COMMISSION
August 7, 2017
Minutes**

Commission Members Present: Naomi Johnson, Claudio Veliz, Tim Roper, Barre Pinske.

Staff Present: Cathy Hasbrouck, Recording Secretary,

Visitors Present: Dennis Allard, Shawn Cunningham, Phil Perlah, Leah Cunningham

Agenda Item 1, Review draft minutes of the February 28th and July 17th meetings

There were not enough members present who were present at the February 28, 2017 meeting to approve the draft minutes from that meeting, as Claudio Veliz had not arrived yet. That business was tabled.

Barre Pinske moved to accept the minutes from the July 17, 2017 meeting. Tim Roper seconded the motion. The only correction was to the date of the meeting in the heading. There was no other discussion. A vote was taken and the minutes were accepted with the specified correction.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen Comments

No one in the audience wanted to speak. Naomi Johnson read aloud an email dated July 20, 2017 from Frank Bidwell which expressed concern about the Planning Commission's lack of an interview policy. Discussion of the letter was tabled until Agenda Item 4.

Agenda Item 3, Update on advertisement for the Zoning Administrator's position

Naomi Johnson asked the Recording Secretary, Cathy Hasbrouck if she had an update on this. Cathy replied that she had not spoken to Julie recently.

Barre Pinske asked if Commissioners were allowed to post ads for the position on websites such as indeed.com. Naomi Johnson said she believed the town would have to place the ad. It was agreed to ask Julie Hance about posting the position on indeed.com and jobsinv.com.

Agenda Item 4, Discuss the candidate interview policy

Naomi Johnson discussed the Appointment Procedure adopted by the Chester Selectboard in the spring of 2017. She read in full the second to last paragraph that stated the Selectboard would conduct interviews in Executive Session and would accept comments about the candidates before the Executive Session began. Naomi Johnson said she favored this approach, as did Tim Roper.

She asked that Frank Bidwell be informed via email that the Planning Commission would be following the Selectboard's policy.

Agenda Item 5, Discussion of Town Plan Update Process

Barre Pinske showed the Commissioners town plans from Lanesboro MN and Telluride CO as examples of towns which have improved their town's economic well-being through planning. Barre distributed iPads displaying the two town plans to Commission members and mentioned some of the highlights of each document. Barre characterized Telluride, CO as a mountain town with a ski area. He said it had lots of arts and culture and many wealthy citizens. The citizens have put a lot of effort into planning and were concerned about property values. Barre said Lanesboro, MN was a small town with serious economic issues. He said arts and culture became the engine of the town's renaissance.

Claudio Veliz asked Barre how he saw Telluride's origins as a mining town paralleling Chester. Barre said Chester had talc mines, gravel pits, wood and even gold in its past. He thought Chester could showcase that part of its history.

Naomi thanked Barre for his input. She said she liked the Telluride document's format, which listed the principles and values first and was more of an outline than a prose document. Barre said he was impressed by the amount of information the Vermont Municipal Plan Manual wanted to be included in a town's plan. Claudio felt the town plan would benefit greatly from more graphics and that the graphics should not be just maps.

Phil Perlah asked if the Commission intended to keep the work that was done in the past year or start over. Naomi Johnson said that the Commission planned to keep the work done so far at this time. The current plan had the elements required by the state. She felt that the plan needed some reorganization and different formats.

Naomi Johnson asked for input on ways to solicit public input. She said that the last time the Town Plan was substantially updated the Commission held seminars with Jason Rasmussen's help and other people came in to facilitate workshops to gather citizen input. Two ideas suggested in the Municipal Plan Manual were a survey and a photo contest.

Barre Pinske suggested that the Commission gather information from the new downtown Master Plan and do outreach to areas surrounding the town center for those citizens' input. Claudio Veliz said the community must be involved since the Town Plan does not have the same purpose as the Master Plan. He also felt multiple modes of communication must be offered to the community. He felt a deadline for input should be published so people will know when they need to submit their comments.

Naomi Johnson thought a survey would be helpful and that it should accept both mailed and online responses. Tim Roper thought that offering both modes of communication was important. Claudio Veliz suggested that the Commission look at other town's surveys. Shawn Cunningham suggested that the Commission look at the last Town Plan Survey. Jason Rasmussen said the

2010 survey was time-consuming to analyze because there were so many write-in answers. Naomi Johnson said she would find a couple of surveys she thought would be useful examples and writing a new survey would be a future agenda item. Dennis Allard asked if the survey would be given to every landowner in town. Naomi said yes, all landowners would receive the survey.

The board next considered input from other sources. She asked about the school board chairs. Cathy Hasbrouck said that Michael Normyle had sent e-mails to Marilyn Mahusky and Allison DesLauriers. She did not know if they had replied yet. Naomi said that she would like to discuss goals and needs again with town department heads. The Master Plan should be available by early fall. Barre Pinske brought up the economic development group. Naomi said the Commission did get information from them a few months ago.

Barre Pinske said there was a regular community wide meeting of representatives of the school board, Historical Society, Beautification commission, etc., organized by David Pisha and Julie Hance. He wondered if input could be gathered from that group. Naomi said she would ask Julie Hance about the meeting's schedule and if there was a way to get the Planning Commission together with that group.

Agenda Item 6, Jason Rasmussen from the Regional Planning Commission to review Act 174, Vermont Energy Standards

Jason Rasmussen gave a presentation about Act 174 and how it could impact the Town of Chester and the town plan. (A copy of the slides from his presentation will be available at Town Hall.) Jason told the Commission that the state Public Service Board, (the PSB) is now called the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). The Department of Public Service issued the enhanced energy standards for town plans in November, 2016. Chester's current town plan entitles the town to "due consideration" in the siting of energy projects. If Chester were to comply with the enhanced standards in the energy chapter of the town plan, it would be entitled to "substantial deference" in the siting of energy projects. This means that Chester could possibly protect a natural resource such as a vista, from development. There is no regulation requiring an enhanced energy plan and there are no "energy police" looking for violations.

Jason said some of the goals of the plan are very ambitious. He cited the transportation goal as particularly difficult to accomplish in a rural state. Claudio Veliz said he had hope that technology would provide more answers than anticipated. In the case of transportation, autonomous vehicles might help the state reach its transportation goal. Jason presented samples of data gathered so far showing current levels of use and projections of future use levels and goals.

Jason explained that three towns have been given help to create their energy plan in the past few months and funds are available for assistance to three more towns. Drafts of the first three town's plans are available for study. The Regional Planning Commission would be able to help prepare maps and other data which are required for the Energy Plan. A town energy plan could open a discussion about types of renewable energy wanted in the town. If a town does not want a wind installation, it could construct an energy plan that meets the goals and does not include

wind installations. Jason thought that, to receive “substantial deference” from the state PUC in this first iteration of the legislative process, an energy plan must be prepared by July, 2018. After that date it’s possible that the Regional Planning Commissions will determine whether a town gets “substantial deference”. He was not certain that these facts were correct. He would do some research and get back to the Commission with his findings.

Phil Perlah said he has purchased solar panels but they are not in his yard, they are at a remote location outside of Chester. They feed power into the grid and he is reimbursed for the energy they produce. He wanted to know how a situation like that would be handled in the energy plan. Would all the generating capacity have to be sited in Chester? Jason said that, at this point, it doesn’t look like generating capacity outside the town would be counted in the energy plan.

Naomi Johnson said an important start would be to survey the town to find out citizen’s preferences, particularly on types of energy generation projects. Dennis Allard said the Conservation Commission was opposed to wind projects. Barre Pinske said that the state-imposed engineering fees make water power installations prohibitively expensive. Many people felt that writing the plan would help the town understand its own priorities and give it more control over the siting of projects.

Jason closed with two thoughts. First, in places such as Windsor, where an enhanced energy plan is not yet in place, people who own potential sites are asking their Planning Commissions for preferred site status. It would be helpful if Chester had a well-considered policy in place. Second, the Regional Planning Commission is putting together an energy committee and, as yet, Chester has no representative on that committee. He hoped someone would volunteer.

The next meeting of the Planning Commission will be Monday August 21, 2017 at 7:00 PM.

Claudio Veliz moved to close the meeting. Tim Roper seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the motion passed.