

**TOWN OF CHESTER
PLANNING COMMISSION
Special Meeting September 7, 2017**

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

Staff Present: Cathy Hasbrouck, Recording Secretary.

Visitors Present: None.

Agenda Item 1, Review draft minutes of the February 28th and August 21st meetings

Claudio Veliz moved to accept the minutes from the August 21, 2017 meeting. Tim Roper seconded the motion. There was no discussion. A vote was taken and the minutes were accepted.

The minutes for February 28, 2017 were then taken up. Claudio Veliz moved to accept the minutes. Naomi Johnson seconded the motion. There was no discussion. A vote was taken and the motion passed.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen Comments

No citizens were present to speak.

Agenda Item 3, Continue discussion on proposed survey

Naomi Johnson began the discussion with a review of the Town Plan's recent history. In 2008 and 2009 the Planning Commission did a major overhaul of the town plan. Focus groups and surveys were conducted. The new town plan was adopted in 2010. The plan expired in 2015 and had to be re-adopted. By then, the state required chapters on economic development and flood hazard to be included. Those chapters were written and added to the 2010 plan. With other minor changes, the expanded plan was adopted in 2015.

Naomi went on to report that in 2017, state law changed to say a Town Plan will expire in eight years, not five. No one is sure whether the current town plan will expire in 2020 or 2023. In discussions with Julie Hance, Naomi has learned that the town has obtained a grant to audit its zoning bylaws. That process is expected to take six months. Julie hopes that the town can then obtain a second grant to re-write the bylaws using the input from the zoning bylaw audit. That process is expected to take 2 years. Both of these processes will be seeking public input. Julie Hance and Naomi Johnson discussed the amount of public input being sought by those projects and the town plan. Neither of them wanted to overwhelm Chester's citizens with surveys. Given that, Naomi reviewed the statutes on the Town Plan and saw that the Planning Commission could update or amend the Town Plan at any time. It is possible to modify parts of the Town Plan at shorter intervals than the 5 to 8 years between the expiration dates. Naomi noted that an update or amendment requires the same approval process as a full adoption after an expiration. A report

explaining the reasons for the changes must be written and submitted to surrounding towns and certain state agencies.

Naomi suggested that the Planning Commission consider a series of updates to the plan instead of a massive rewrite. Claudio asked if there were small subjects, or “low hanging fruit” that could be addressed quickly. Naomi listed input from the Town department heads, an update to the education chapter, given the reorganization of school districts, historic resources to be recognized, a chapter on alternative energy sources and a look at the goals as smaller projects she would like to see addressed. She said looking at land use issues seemed less appropriate given the projects to study and possibly re-write the zoning bylaws.

Claudio asked about the logistical details for the process of gathering information from department heads. Naomi said the Commission had received some input last year. She would like to have the department heads come to a public meeting to discuss what the Commission has received so far and answer more questions.

It was agreed that a survey on alternative energy was still an important project and that the Commission should proceed with it. Tim Roper asked if the message was that outreach should be limited. Naomi felt the outreach could be structured to address the specific goals mentioned before: education, historic resources, department goals, alternative energy, and a statement about vision for the town. Naomi felt that the Commission should still ask for input from representatives of the community such as business, civic and religious leaders.

Claudio asked where the consultants would fit into the process. Naomi said their focus will be on the zoning regulations, not so much on the Planning Commission’s modifications to the Town Plan. The consultant’s focus is expected to be on current issues and objectives and how the current bylaws facilitate meeting those goals. However, Naomi pointed out, the goals of the bylaw projects are still being worked out. The Commission then looked briefly at the Master Plan binders which had been passed out at the meeting. Claudio pointed to a section of foldouts that summarized the Village Center Master Plan goals. It was not practical to discuss the Master Plan at the meeting as no one had had any time to study it. In summary, the Commission would be amending some chapters of the Town Plan a bit at a time. The Town Plan would be re-adopted when it expires either in 2020 or 2023.

The Commission took up the draft survey on energy written by Barre Pinske. Naomi Johnson praised the draft and its focus on energy. She said she would like to add a couple additional questions to find out what other topics citizens may feel are important as goals and need addressing. The Commission discussed the introduction to the survey and the questions. The first three questions of the survey were designed by Barre to gauge the level of public interest in the issue of climate change and renewable energy. If the citizens are not interested, then pursuing the creation of an energy plan for the town may not be appropriate.

Tim Roper brought up a news item he saw in the Vermont Digger where a private company had applied for permits for three separate 20 megawatt solar arrays, which would cover a substantial amount of acreage. He said the state Public Utility Commission was already taking applications for permits and holding hearings for them. Would the towns ever be allowed to have any input

to these decisions? The Commission pondered the issue of asking for an opinion about solar arrays or wind towers on the survey when the Commission may not actually be able to do anything about it.

Naomi suggested adding another answer to the question, "How do you feel about wind power?" which would be, "I support it if it is properly permitted". Another thought was using a scale from one to five where people could indicate their degree of support or opposition to an issue. Naomi said she thought that was useful and easy to tabulate. She also liked the, "I Support it but not in my backyard" answer Barre had included. One of the answers to the question, "How would you feel if Chester helped Vermont transformation away from oil, gas and coal to renewable energy sources such as wind and solar?" was, "I like the concept but I don't want to see wind mills and solar panels." The Commission decided that wind mills and solar panels ought to be listed as two separate questions because people may approve of one but not the other.

Naomi read a question from a 2008 survey which asked the respondent about other issues that were important to them, with space for write-in issues. She felt it could be a template for the question about important issues she would like to ask in the current survey.

The format of the survey was discussed next. Jason Rasmussen of the Regional Planning Commission had suggested that a copy of the survey be mailed to the participants. A website address where the survey could be done electronically would be included in the printed survey. The Survey Monkey software proposed to handle the electronic survey can refuse to accept more than one response from a given computer. This would make it more difficult for one person to respond to the survey multiple times. Mailing the notice of the survey will reduce the number of non-residents responding. A non-resident would have to receive information about the survey from someone else. Barre and Tim both spoke about accepting a good enough solution and moving forward as a reasonable plan of action. They felt these precautions were sufficient to prevent the survey from being skewed by invalid entries.

The Commission concluded that it had a few possible courses of action. It could use the survey to gauge public opinion and insert that public opinion into the Town Plan. This would have some influence with the PUC in the event that an alternative energy installation is considered for Chester. If public concern is strong enough, it could recommend to the Selectboard that an enhanced energy chapter be added to the Town Plan and ask for money or grants to do it. Having an enhanced energy chapter will give the town more of a voice on the placement of an installation. The town's wishes will have to be considered.

The Commission decided to work individually on the survey and bring their versions to the next regular meeting which will be Monday, October 2, 2017.

Agenda Item 4, Discuss seeking input from Department heads and the Town Manager on the revised Town Plan

The Commission decided it needed to consult with Michael Normyle and track down whether there was some actual input from the Department Heads or the Town Manager. Michael was away until Tuesday September 12. He will be contacted after that.

In a separate issue, not specifically mentioned on the agenda, the press release that Tim Roper wrote was also discussed. A few revisions were suggested, given the changes in priorities brought on by the Town's plan to evaluate and possibly rewrite the zoning bylaws.

Naomi Johnson recapped the agendas for the next two Planning Commission meetings. The special meeting on Monday September 18, 2017 at 7:00 PM is a joint meeting with the Development Review Board to learn about noise and noise regulation. The Selectboard members have also been invited. The following meeting will take place on Monday, October 2, 2017. At that meeting the Commission will finalize the survey, the press release, the letter to representatives of the community, and the list of recipients of the letter.

Barre Pinske moved to adjourn the meeting. Tim Roper seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the meeting was adjourned.