

**TOWN OF CHESTER  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
October 2, 2017  
Minutes**

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

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

**Visitors Present:** Frank Bidwell, Terry Christensen, Phil Perlah

**Agenda Item 1, Review minutes from September 7, 2017 meeting**

Barre Pinske moved to accept the minutes from the September 7, 2017 meeting. Claudio Veliz seconded the motion. There was no discussion. A vote was taken and the minutes were accepted.

**Agenda Item 2, Citizen Comments**

Frank Bidwell spoke. He urged the Commissioners to develop a checklist for changes to the bylaws that included the following standards or actions:

- Insure that the bylaw is fair, that it doesn't favor one group of citizens over another
- Insure that the bylaw is in line with the Town Plan
- Insure that the bylaw is enforceable by the Development Review Board
- Insure that all terms used are fully defined.

Naomi Johnson asked Frank Bidwell if he could put these comments in writing.

**Agenda Item 3, Continue discussion on draft survey**

In the packet for the Commission's consideration was a copy of the draft survey by Barre Pinske, and two questions submitted by Naomi Johnson. A draft of a survey by Cathy Hasbrouck which included the questions from Naomi Johnson and several questions from Barre Pinske's version was handed out at the start of the meeting.

Naomi asked for comments on the documents. Claudio Veliz said he liked the questions that reveal the community's position on the topic of energy. Phil Perlah made two comments on surveys in general. First, the answers obtained in a survey depend to some extent on the questions asked and how they are phrased. Second, he warned people to beware of the tyranny of the majority. The fact that a majority of people favor a certain position does not make it right.

Frank Bidwell asked for the meaning of the words "solar power" on the survey. He asked if it meant a single solar cell powering a light or a large solar array. He wanted to know what the question was trying to address.

Naomi said the purpose of the survey is to gauge the general viewpoint of people in Chester. She said she thought that Chester would be creating an energy plan at some point in the future

and it would help to know, for instance, that the majority of the town was against a certain type of power. It could affect the mapping portion of the plan where the plan shows sites that would be suitable for certain types of power.

Tim Roper said he thought Frank's question was valid and pointed out that one of Barre's questions was, "How do you feel about visible solar fields?". Naomi said that if the objective of the state of Vermont is to get to 90% renewable sources, that would require fields of solar panels. Tim said the message the Commission is trying to communicate is that the state Public Utility Control is in complete control of the energy project siting process. He suggested that the question about visible solar fields be restored to the survey. Naomi suggested that a distinction between residential and non-residential would explain the meaning of "solar power" on the survey.

Tim Roper said solar installations were divided into 4 categories in the PUC permitting process: less than 15 KW, which is enough to run a home or business, 15KW to 150 KW which could power up to 10 homes or businesses, from 150 KW to an upper limit he could not recall and finally over that upper limit. He put the figures into a local context by saying the existing array in the field over the town well on Route 103 produces 500 kilowatts. The array in the field behind the farm near the corner of Trebo Road and Route 103 produces 1500 kilowatts. Tim said he considered the 1500-kilowatt installation a utility scale project. Claudio Veliz asked if the words "in Chester" mean on the green, or just anywhere in Chester. Naomi Johnson said it meant anywhere in Chester and the energy chapter would include maps of potential sites for alternative energy installations.

The next three questions in the proposed survey asked whether people currently use wind, solar or wood power on their property. Tim Roper said these questions show current adoption rates and he liked them. Michael Normyle asked if wood pellets would be included in the wood question. He also wanted to have the survey ask if people felt they had enough information to form an opinion about renewable energy sources. Some people felt that the question of having enough information potentially opened an expectation that the town provide more education. Commission members also wondered whether the question addressed the actual level of knowledge or only how the respondent felt about his or her level of knowledge. A moderately well-informed person may see the complexities in the issue and decide he or she doesn't know enough to form an opinion, when someone who knows few actual details may not feel he or she needs more information. Tim Roper said asking the question about the level of information would be expanding the scope of the project and survey. Barre Pinske felt that the survey's purpose is to gain insight into the community's perspective on energy. He felt the question on the respondent's level of knowledge would not address this.

Phil Perlah asked if fuels such as coal should be included in the questions about heat. He also asked if the survey should address citizen investments in renewable energy facilities not located in Chester. Naomi suggested the question be worded, "Do you currently have energy generating facilities at your home or business located in Chester?" After considerable discussion it was decided to add this question: Do you currently benefit from solar credits which are generated from a location other than your Chester home or business?

The next question considered was, “How important are energy issues to you?” The Commissioners were in favor of keeping this question.

Naomi Johnson read out the following question: Would you be in favor of allocating town resources to develop an energy plan chapter for the Town Plan if it gave the town a voice in the placement of renewable energy projects? Naomi said the Selectboard had authorized applying for a grant for resources to create an energy plan in the past and she expected the town will eventually write an enhanced energy plan. She thought the question was valid. Claudio Veliz said just putting the question out on the survey would enhance the public’s awareness of the process.

Naomi looked at other questions on Barre’s draft. She asked Commission members if any other questions on Barre’s draft should be included on the list.

A citizen asked if the question about wind power would also be modified to distinguish between a residential installation and an industrial installation. Naomi said it would.

Barre Pinske said in his draft of the survey he was trying to understand if the townspeople agreed with what the state is mandating. He questioned whether the state was representing the will of the people in this matter.

Naomi pointed to the question that asked if the respondent favored allocating town resources to produce an energy chapter as at least partly addressing Barre’s interest in whether Chester’s citizens favored the state’s goal. She asked if Barre wanted to include his question about whether the state’s 90% renewable energy by 2050 is realistic. Naomi said she could support such a question. Tim Roper said the 90% goal question doesn’t address the core question of whether the town should allocate resources. Claudio Veliz said the survey could ask to what degree the respondent supported the 90% state goal, on a scale from one to five. There was general agreement for that question.

Terry Christiansen said he liked the question about does the respondent feel he or she has enough information to form an opinion because it may give insight when looking at other survey responses. He did not mean that the results from respondents who said they didn’t have enough information should be disregarded. He felt that it could be helpful to look at differences between the people who said they had enough information and the people who said they did not. He also advised that the survey would be more valid if the answers offered as choices have the same format. Some questions in the proposed survey offered a scale of 1 to 5 and other questions had a different scale. It was agreed that all answers with a scale would use the 1-to-5 scale.

Barre Pinske said people who are passionate about something are likely to consider themselves expert, whether they actually are expert or not. He saw that as a risk to the validity of the survey. Naomi asked whether a question should ask how informed the respondent felt on the topic of energy and have a 1 to 5 scale like the other questions. The Commission was in favor of adding this question.

#### **Agenda item 4 Continue discussion on draft press release**

The press release was taken up next. Tim Roper had sent an e-mail with changes to his draft of the press release to the Commission on Saturday September 30<sup>th</sup>. Claudio Veliz had offered some edits and comments Sunday October 1<sup>st</sup>. Copies of the edited draft were handed out. Claudio Veliz confirmed that the press release will say the responses will be anonymous. Naomi Johnson said she liked the statement that the long-term goal is to hear from everyone. Tim Roper agreed to add that there will be multiple surveys over time and the first survey will be about energy issues. It was decided that the replies to the survey will come to Cathy Hasbrouck as Recording Secretary and that she will get a town hall e-mail box set up. Michael Normyle said that citizens have been using the new contact feature on the town website. Perhaps that feature could also take in comments on energy.

### **Agenda Item 5 Review proposed letter to be sent to community members and list of proposed recipients**

Tim Roper said he had envisioned starting focus groups with the list of possible letter recipients and asked if that was too ambitious a project. Naomi asked what Tim had in mind for the agenda or topics for the groups. Tim said he thought that would be determined as time went on. He thought the Commission would prepare a list of questions and topics that pertain to the Town Plan. He thought that the focus group might bring up ideas and issues that the Commission did not think of. Frank Bidwell said he thought the town committees group that meets once a month might include most of the groups included on the list and could be an easy way to form the focus group. Naomi quoted the proposed letter as saying “we’re interested in your view on Chester’s current and future needs”. Naomi felt the letter was addressing individuals or individual organizations. Tim Roper said he hoped a focus group would develop from those interviews.

Barre Pinske said a large number of interviews and focus groups were part of the Village Center Master Plan process. Barre wondered if Mark Kane could be enlisted to help with a Town Plan focus group. Tim wondered if David Pisha or other town staff could help with this work. Naomi suggested that the Commission focus on the four topics mentioned in previous meetings which included education, and historic resources, town department heads and energy. She suggested that the focus group might be put off for some time. Barre said perhaps if the Commission could cull information for the Town Plan from other activities which are currently planned, such as the bylaw audit and possible re-write. Naomi said that she and Julie Hance had discussed the possibility that the citizens would get tired of offering input and not respond. While public input is useful, she thought it advisable to put the focus group off until sometime in the future.

Tim Roper expressed interest in the Town Committees group. Claudio Veliz, who is a member of the group, described recent meetings and the level of attendance. The possibility of having the Planning Commission meet with the Town Committees group was discussed. The possibility of asking the group to come to a Planning Commission meeting was also discussed.

Barre Pinske asked if revising the Town Plan is a more distant goal. Naomi Johnson explained that the Town Plan didn’t need to be readopted until 2020. Updates could be done in sections before that date. She listed three areas she felt the Commission was in a position to address now:

education, input from town department heads, and historical preservation. She said that the energy plan could be addressed when funds were obtained. She also felt a vision statement was needed and that could be started now. Issues such as land use needed to be put aside until the bylaw audit and possible re-write were complete.

Naomi Johnson asked the Commission for questions they would like to ask the Town Committees group. She said the questions in the proposed letter about current and future needs of the town could be a starting point. Tim Roper thought a list of topics should be made. Frank Bidwell suggested that it might be difficult to schedule a meeting of the Town Committees group with members of the Planning Commission since many of the people involved have busy meeting schedules. Claudio Veliz asked if the Commission would get more input by meeting with the member committees of the Town Committees group separately. Further discussion about strategies to gather input ensued. A separate survey to the town committees was considered. In the end it was decided that the Commission members needed to think this through and bring their fully thought out ideas to the next meeting.

#### **Agenda Item 6 Follow up on information from the Noise & Sound Presentation Tech Environmental**

Naomi Johnson talked about the conclusions reached at the end of the presentation. Tech Environmental said the current bylaws could be improved by specifying that the decibel standard in the bylaw is the maximum value, specifying that the measurement is to be taken at the property line and specifying that the decibel measure is A-weighted. Tech Environmental also suggested that exempt categories could be listed and a checklist for the property owner should be part of the bylaws. Tech Environmental also sent examples of regulations for boom boxes in cars. No one felt boom box noise in cars was a serious problem for Chester. Claudio Veliz brought up the question of regulating engine braking by tractor-trailer trucks. Barre Pinsky said that when he asked town officials about this he was told it was an area the state regulated and the town could not have its own regulations.

The next meeting was set for Monday October 16, 2017 at 7:00 PM. Claudio Veliz moved to adjourn the meeting. Tim Roper seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the meeting was adjourned.