

**TOWN OF WESTMINSTER
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
OCTOBER 20, 2014**

Members Present: John Medeiros (Chair), Chris Vincent (Vice-Chair), John Barnett (Clerk),
Matt Conklin, Kathy Kingston, Randy Major

Others Present: Russell Hodgkins (Town Manager / Planning & Zoning Administrator)

CALL TO ORDER: Medeiros called this Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:05 PM in the Westminster Town Hall. He noted that a full Board was present. He advised that meetings are tape recorded therefore asked anyone wishing to speak to identify themselves for the record.

ADJUSTMENTS TO AGENDA: Additional items to be discussed under Other Business will include an update on the Bellows Falls Union High School field lights and the ancient roads.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES – September 8, 2014: Barnett / Major moved to approve the Minutes of the September 8, 2014, meeting, as printed. The Minutes were approved by a 6-0-0 vote (approved, abstained, opposed) vote.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC COMMENT: Hodgkins had three issues to discuss:

1. He distributed copies of the Vermont League of Cities & Towns “Fall Planning and Zoning Forum” to be held on Wednesday, October 29, 2014 in Montpelier, VT. Please let him know as soon as possible if any members plan to attend. Conklin will go and offered to drive. Kingston and Medeiros will let Hodgkins know if they will attend or not.
2. A letter was received from Regina Borden advising that she plans to resign effective November 14, 2014, as the Recording Secretary, for both the Planning Commission and Development Review Board.
3. Bellows Falls Union High School - The DRB put a stipulation on the lights when the final permit was given that they match the Act 250 standards which is to put visors on all the poles and all of the lights except for C-1 and C-2 which are in the outfield of the baseball field as they are away from the nearest house to the field. The DRB also stipulated that after the lights were turned on the members wanted to take readings to match the permit. They met on Thursday of last week and had a person with a detector do the readings and the readings dropped significantly; from .07 to .01 with reflection toward the houses. They also took another reading from the parking lot as Christian Blake had concerns about his property; it was also significantly lower. Last Saturday night the BFUHS had their first game under the lights and it went off very well. Hodgkins went to the homeowner that had filed the concern about the lights and asked her to help witness the lights. There will be no more than 46 events each year under the lights.

NEW BUSINESS (Discussion / Action):

Act 250 Business, If Any: There was no new Act 250 business to come before this meeting.

PSB Business, If Any: There was no new PSB business to come before this meeting.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS (Discussion / Action):

Town Plan Updates: Medeiros advised that the PC members will be making the transaction from Draft #4 to Draft #5 however they continued to work on Draft #4 at this meeting.

Any Further Updates to Land Use Element (text: p.56):

Land Use - Policies: At the last meeting they addressed the question of separating residential, commercial and industrial because Planned Unit Development (PUDs) could allow them to have residential, commercial and industrial all on one parcel. Kingston suggested changing the wording from “through the separation of residential and commercial, industrial land uses“ to “through the regulation of residential, commercial and industrial land uses”.

Barnett / Vincent moved to approve the re-wording as suggested by Kingston to “To protect the quality of life through the regulation of residential, commercial and industrial land uses”. The motion was approved by a 6-0-0 vote.

Page 56 – Land Use Recommendations: Medeiros noted that they used the same recommendations for #5 and #6 as appear under Economic Development.

Statement on Projects Implemented Since Last Plan: Medeiros pointed out that any PC member can add to the list by going over Town Reports from the last four years as they narrate what has been happening. He is waiting to get a report from Westminster Cares and will contact the Conservation Commission. The Justices of the Peace, Recreation Activities Committee, Westminster Recreation Department, Highway Department, Fire Department, Conservation Commission, Historic Review Board, Revolving Loan Fund and Historical Society, etc. should be contacted for up-dates. There is an enormous amount of work done by volunteers. Kingston will check with Fletcher Proctor about the Revolving Loan Fund; Conklin will talk to the Historical Society and the volunteer Fire Department. Hodgkins mentioned the Westminster School as they constructed a new gym in 2008. There have been other projects. Kingston felt the new lights at the High School fields should be included. This is still open for more amendments. When the Public Hearings are held there may be other input from the residents.

Major mentioned that applying for Grants is a big part of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association. He therefore felt that mention should be made of this association’s work. Medeiros read the paragraph that Major submitted: “Since the last Town Plan, with the help of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association has added land and trails to its existing holdings including 55 acres on Bald Hill adjacent to the High School. Nearly all its lands are open for public, non-motorized recreational, conservation and educational uses including hunting.”

Discuss Recommendations (09/13) from John Bennett, WRC: Medeiros asked if any individual members of the PC want to look at his recommendations on his “To Do List”. Kingston noted that they had reviewed them. Medeiros said this is a last check. They may have to add a statement about a program of Economic Development; for example, “the following policies and recommended actions are intended to foster economic growth”. Bennett’s concern is that they are not doing something on their boundaries that is in conflict with what other towns are doing. He suggested the members look at other Town Plans. When the Westminster Town Plan is finished it will be submitted to the Windham Regional Commission for their review. Barnett had drafted some material on this and thinks it is in the plan. Medeiros will re-check to be sure they have responded to Bennett’s recommendations.

Implementation Element In Town Plan (Example): Page 57 - Medeiros is proposing some new text at the beginning of that section. He is suggesting deleting a lot because the list is long. It seems much better to have this in parenthesis after each one. WRC states that they should have a date for the implementation but Medeiros does not feel they should do that. There is a lot of routine business that is performed by the School Board, Selectboard, etc. but there are many other things like special projects. Medeiros proposed that beginning in the second paragraph, the sixth line, delete the last two sentences, then add “A) Each recommendation is expected to be implemented in a timely manner by the officers and agencies listed in parenthesis following the recommendation. Most recommendations are already being

implemented by necessity and/or as the ongoing application of a Town Plan policy. Some long-term projects may require a special temporary committee to study the obstacles to implementation, funding issues, and a strategy of steps to accomplish implementation according to a realistic timetable. The Westminster Planning Commission does not currently endeavor to provide realistic timetables for long-term projects except with the participation of the Selectboard and other panels of committed residents.” Add “B) The Planning Commission will examine three or four plan elements each year and submit a written report, preferably in September, indicating the recommendations that are being implemented satisfactorily, those recommendations that need attention or warrant revision in order to be more realistic, and any recommendations that are not being implemented and warrant guidance from the Selectboard as to what action should be taken.” The list on page 57 through page 60 will be deleted. Kingston explained that as you are reading the Town Plan you can see right in the recommendations who is responsible. In the current plan you see recommendations but have to go to the back to find out who are the responsible person(s) / group(s). Medeiros said they need committed people / committees; the sidewalks and bike trail have been a desire since the 70s. Hodgkins and Mark Lund had a discussion with VTrans about what is the right-of-way through this Village. It is approximately 150-feet. Today they told Hodgkins that it is 25-feet from the center line of the road (3-rod right-of-way) through the Village. When the Town wanted to do the sidewalk many years ago VTrans pushed them back to door steps because it was not going to go in the State’s right-of-way. Now they could have sidewalks in the Village but the State has given them 4-feet on pavement to walk. Medeiros pointed out that the list they are deleting is still a useful list. In the Energy element they need to put them in in parenthesis following a particular recommendation. Kingston felt that in order to do this they all need Draft #5. Hodgkins will have four copies available for the members at the next meeting.

Hodgkins advised that legal counsel has been adamant about the corrections, additions and deletions being very clear. The wording is still there but there are lines underneath, crossed out parts, etc. They all need to be on that draft. Barnett felt this will be very difficult. Hodgkins pointed out that their goal was to have a completed draft to give to the WRC, legal counsel and the DRB in January 2015.

Discuss Anticipated By-Law Recommendations (2015): Medeiros pointed out that when they are done with the Town Plan the PC has to go back to the By-Laws. Hodgkins noted that they are going through the By-laws every day and making notes on them; clarifying issues as they go along.

PC/DRB Collaboration Between Panels: It was agreed that all PC members will receive copies of the DRB Agendas. Medeiros would like to attend these meetings when possible. Other members were encouraged to attend.

Map(s) Work: Proposed Land Use Plan: Hodgkins pointed out that the PC has a request for a rezoning of a portion of the Bazin Farm from Residential to Village. The current zoning is two acres and the zoning change would be to one acre. They would like to have this changed to make the two houses eligible for a Homestead Tax. The farm would be a separate parcel. Medeiros has the maps and will bring them into the next regular meeting. Major made a request to see the research on the previous building of the two homes when it went before the DRB. The PC will also discuss various other proposed changes.

DATE OF NEXT REGULAR MEETING: November 10, 2014 at 7:00 PM: The next regular meeting of the PC members is November 10, 2014, at 7:00 PM.

OTHER BUSINESS:

SPECIAL MEETING: There was a consensus to schedule a Special Meeting for Monday, October 27th at 7:00 PM to work only on implementation.

ANCIENT ROADS: Replying to a question by Kingston, Hodgkins advised that they can only map the ancient roads at this time.

CAMP GROUND: Hodgkins advised that the newspaper article on the Christian Blake property was brought to his attention today. It stated that Blake conveyed land on the River to the Vermont River Conservancy for a camp ground. The Town has regulations for camp grounds but they have not yet been approached. Vincent suggested that the Conservation Commission be asked to look into this.

ADJOURNMENT: Vincent / Kingston moved to adjourn this meeting. The motion was approved by a 6-0-0 vote at 9:18 PM.

Signature of Clerk

Date

Prepared by: Regina Borden, Recording Secretary

(**Note:** These are unapproved Minutes. Corrections, if necessary, will be found in the Minutes of the November 10, 2014, Planning Commission meeting.)