

TOWN OF WESTMINSTER
SELECT BOARD / PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
August 24, 2015

Members Present Select Board: Sheldon Beebe (Chair), Toby Young, Peter Barrett, Craig Allen,
Paul Banik (Vice Chair) (Present at 7:24 p.m.)

Members Present Planning Commission: John Medeiros (Chair), Chris Vincent (Vice Chair),
Matt Conklin, Kathy Kingston

Absent Planning Commission: John Barnett, Randy Major

Others Present: Russell Hodgkins (Town Manager / Planning & Zoning Administrator); Chris
Potter and Phil Savoy, Development Review Board

1. CALL TO ORDER: Sheldon Beebe called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

2. ADJUSTMENTS TO AGENDA: NONE

3. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES: No minutes were present to vote on as this was a warned Special Meeting for the Select Board and Planning Commission to meet with each other on future progress for the town.

4. COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC COMMENT: Public was present but it was duly noted by Sheldon Beebe that this was a meeting between the board and the commission and was strictly to discuss progress and where the commission was heading in the future while the Select Board understood their plan. The public hearing to discuss the Town Plan is set for September 10, 2015 if public discussion is needed at that time comments should be made.

5. NEW BUSINESS (Discussion / Action):

What was the rationale behind the zoning changes from 2007 to present?

A): Zoning District Changes: The Select Board questioned when the zoning district changes were made. At some point from 2007 to the present commercial and industrial districts changed according to the maps that were made available at the meeting. Per Craig Allen from a zoning perspective in the past it was understood that all commercial would remain on the east side of Route 91 as it is easy to access from the off ramp. John Medeiros stated perhaps expanding the commercial/industrial zones to Westminster Station and Kissell Hill could support development but without safe water and sewer the potential to attract business would be limited. Kathy Kingston was adamant that no commercial property could be developed in the floodplain per the state regulations especially with the new flood resiliency guidelines. Changing the zones restricts property owners and for some people this is their lively hood. There are other factors you have to take into consideration if the town spot zones. Shoreline protection, floodplain, flood resiliency and the agricultural overlay become factors.

There are multiple uses for commercial property for example the industrial park containing solar array projects and propane tanks on Route 5. Focus was on the Allen Brothers area as an example of multiple commercial uses in one area. Owners are in favor of a change in this area. Changing zoning will provide more options for owners to develop their lands. Peter Barrett stated East of Route 5 west from the railroad tracks near Allen Brothers has always been agricultural land and is not spot zoning. Taking value away from property owners that have paid taxes forever is taking away their right to sustain their livelihood. Options of swapping land that is in floodplain areas for other land that is buildable or can be farmed was mentioned as an alternative.

Toby Young commented that Brattleboro and Bellows Falls has the highest tax bracket based on infrastructure that is needed to support commercial/industrial. If supporting commercial/industrial costs more money this does not equate to lower taxes. Taxation cycles based on development, once it is built and infrastructure is in place to support the development taxes will be high but gradually level off stated John Medeiros. The town could look at expanding the commercial districts if there is the potential to have safe water and sewer. This would warrant a feasibility study in order to determine the need and where it will be located.

B): Major Change of 2007: Two Acre Parcels to Five Acre Parcels: Zoning was changed as two acre lots were not able to be subdivided as easily as five acre lots. Five acre lots prevent sprawl in town. Changing lots back into two acre lots would be difficult. Population has declined since 2007 and it is not feasible for families to build one residential structure on a five acre lot. Lots being less than two acres are difficult sometimes to get water/sewer on them. Windham Regional Commission is supportive of cluster development and supports affordable housing goals. A suggestion was made by John Medeiros to revise the Planned Unit Development section in the Zoning Bylaws to reflect “Family Living/Compound” where there could be two or three houses on one lot if they are family related and if the lot was five acres or more. The property could be one tax unit but different owners. Toby Young is concerned with this type of development specifically when people want to sell the property. Should our responsibility be with the towns zoning or the seller? Per John Medeiros as a Planning Commission they need to find the best uses for the land with the resources the Planning Commission has to work with.

Property is valued very high in this area and usually bought by out-of-state people. Local people can't afford housing in town. We need to assess each property and be sure it is being built on properly but we must take care of the people that are already in town. Flexibility on how to develop the property should be allowed.

C): Waterline Development: The question was raised how do we determine who gets water/sewer and where. Route 123 has a source which may have the potential to support the Town of Westminster. A proposed waterline could run to Kurn Hattin, Town Garage, north and south of the village. A feasibility study should be conducted especially if it can be funded by a grant. The study will determine whether developing a water/sewer line could increase development and at what cost to the taxpayers. This study will also determine where the commercial/industrial district would ultimately be located.

6. OTHER BUSINESS: Russ Hodgkins invited the Select Board and Planning Commission to stay and have light refreshments. He thanked the Planning Commission for fulfilling the responsibility to update the Town Plan.

7. ADJOURNMENT: Toby Young moved to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 8:20 pm. The motion was seconded by Peter Barrett and accepted by a 5-0-0 vote.

Matt Conklin moved to adjourn the Planning Commission meeting at 8:23 p.m. The motion was seconded by Kathy Kingston and accepted by a 4-0-0 vote.

Signature of Clerk

Date

Prepared by: Russell R. Hodgkins - ZA