

Regular Meeting

West Fairlee Planning Commission (“PC”)

December 12, 2016

Community Building, 870 Route 113, West Fairlee

Members Present: John Benjamin, Chair, Al Pfeiffer. Vice Chair, Peggy Burden, Nancy Malmquist, Bryan Stone, Tom Baccei. A quorum was present.

Welcome: John convened the meeting at 7:00 P.M. Tom Baccei agreed to record the minutes of the meeting.

Minutes: The minutes of the November 14 Public Hearing and the November 14 Regular Meeting were approved.

Public Comment. There was no public comment.

Update on Municipal Planning Grant (“MPG”): John reported that he has been informed that we have received the MPG. He said that he believes that the grant is in the full amount for which the PC applied (\$9,830.), but that he has not yet received the agreement forms.

Report on December 5th Select Board Action on the Draft West Fairlee 2017 Town Plan (2017 Town Plan): John reported that the Select Board approved the Draft 2017 Town Plan without change. The Select Board set the date for its Public Hearing on the Draft 2017 Town Plan for January 2, 2017 at 5:30 P.M.

Discuss Next Steps in Town Plan Approval Process and Planning Commission Involvement: Members agreed that at least one Planning Commission member should attend the January 2nd 2017 Select Board Public Hearing on the Draft Town Plan. John said that he is planning to attend and that Al will be there since he is a member of the Select Board. The last step in the process of adopting the proposed 2017 Town Plan would be the vote by Australian Ballot. PC members agreed that they should make every effort to inform West Fairlee voters of the importance of approving the proposed 2017 Town Plan, encourage them to vote, and to help the PC spread awareness to others of the importance of voting to approve the proposed Town Plan.

Work session – Plan Strategy to Change the Approval Mechanism for Future Town Plans and Amendments: At the September 19th joint meeting with the Select Board, the PC requested that an additional question be put before the voters by Australian Ballot in March of 2017. At that meeting, John reported that the vast majority of municipalities and towns in Vermont have their town plans and amendments approved by their Select Boards. Therefore, the PC recommends that West Fairlee voters be asked to empower the Select Board to approve future town plans and amendments rather than having them approved by Australian Ballot. The current requirement for voter approval results in approvals being delayed until the annual town ballot voting in March of each year, or the need for a specially arranged vote at a different date. Waiting for the annual March voting cycle places undue time restrictions on the work of creating and approving a town plan or amendment. It can be problematic to organize and engage the residents and can involve additional expense for taxpayers. Possible concerns

by voters that a town plan or amendment could be approved by the Select Board against the wishes of the majority of voters, are addressed by three available, straightforward procedures that could directly lead to the voters making the final decision, including their ability to request the Select Board for a vote on a particular proposed town plan or amendment by Australian Ballot.

The discussion then turned to the question of communicating this ballot item to the voters, along with the reasons the change is being sought, and assurances that the voters have input and maintain control over the approval process. John stated that this information will be included in the Planning Commission report included in the Annual Town Report to voters. Members suggested that it be discussed in West Fairlee's Listserve, as well.

The ongoing issue of adequate communication with residents on matters of importance to the town was discussed. It has proven to be a problem getting significant readership for the daily Listserve emails, which seems to be the most promising means available. The Town's website is also a promising medium for town-wide communications, but ownership of administrative duties seems to be in question and, as a result, the website is not regularly updated. It was noted that the former Town Clerk took the initiative to set up and administer the website. Apparently, the current Town Clerk does not include website administration as part of her function. It was noted that compiling and mailing a newsletter is time consuming and expensive and that we do not have a local reporter for the Journal Opinion. Therefore, the lack of effective communications remains a problem.

Update on Bylaws / Rules of procedure: John and Nancy reported that new bylaws and rules of procedure for the Planning Commission are nearing completion.

Report on December 3rd VECAN (Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network) Conference: Tom attended the VECAN conference. A great deal of information and enthusiasm were available. A notable new tool, the Energy Dashboard (<http://vtenergydashboard.org>) is now available. It provides an extensive body of resources, stories about other groups work, statistics and plans which should be invaluable to us. West Fairlee has no usable wind energy and no three phase transmission lines, so no community scale energy generation seems likely here. Continued emphasis on individual generation and energy efficiency are therefore of extreme importance. While municipalities will have a greater legal standing under new law (Act 174), it will only come with passing an approved energy section in the Town Plan.

Adjournment: There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 8:20 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Thomas Baccei
Acting Secretary

