

Special Meeting of the
West Fairlee (WF) Planning Commission (PC)
October 23, 2017
6:30 P.M.

Members Present: John Benjamin, Chair, Al Pfeiffer, Peggy Burden, Tom Baccei, Brian Stone, and Nancy Malmquist

West Fairlee Selectboard Members Present: Delsie Hoyt, Chair, Al Pfeiffer, Beverly Jo Ash, Fred Cook and Steve Malinoski

Others Present: from Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) Peter Gregory, Executive Director and Kevin Geiger, Senior Planner

Vermont General Assembly: Rep. Sarah Copeland-Hanzas

Welcome: John called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. making introductions and welcoming all participants.

Purpose of the Special Meeting:

- o To better understand the relationship between the State and TRORC and the relationship between TRORC and WF.
- o To better understand the latitude that the WF PC has in drafting its town plan.
- o To understand and appreciate TRORC's advice regarding a discussion of town taxes in WF's 2018 Town Plan.
- o To further consider Tom Baccei's proposed write-up regarding town taxes and whether or not it, or some variation, should be incorporated in WF's 2018 Town Plan or some other form of publication.
- o Selectboard members have been invited to listen to, and participate in, the discussion.

Overview and History: Kevin and Peter gave an overview of planning in the State of Vermont. They spoke about the growth and changes that have been made over time and how the legislative mandate has influenced planning. They spoke about how TRORC functions and what its authority and responsibilities are. There were comments and clarifications offered by Sarah and other participants.

Tom Baccei's proposal: Tom gave a comprehensive narrative of his research and thoughts concerning town taxes, and how and why they should be incorporated into the Town Plan. He emphasized the need to be proactive and communicate the reasons and need for taxes. He spoke about balancing growth with maintaining the lifestyle that this town offers. A broad discussion followed. Some of the points raised were setting priorities and goals and encouraging people to find a passion for, and take ownership of, initiatives that build community and move the town forward. Tom offered that he would write a preamble or separate statement in a manner designed to hold the attention of townspeople. He inquired if Brian would be willing to produce some illustrations to capture the interest of townspeople.

Delsie requested that information about taxes and tax implications be infused into each element of the Town Plan rather than including a stand-alone chapter to address taxes. She said that this method would help clarify for townspeople that every element, service and initiative has an impact on the tax rate and this suggested approach would help townspeople weigh tradeoffs if they want to stabilize or reduce the tax burden.

Further Discussion: There was further discussion about the PC's mission, that the PC, with assistance from TRORC and input from the community (i.e. open meetings, community surveys and open forums) creates a draft Town Plan and presents it to the Selectboard for review, public hearing(s) and its final approval.

Need to Stimulate Volunteerism in WF: This was addressed again; there is no easy answer.

At the conclusion of the meeting, John polled everyone about their reactions to this Special Meeting. The overall reaction was very positive. Much information was exchanged and it was the consensus that meeting as a group was valuable. Nancy summed up by pointing out that this Special Meeting was a "collaborative practice" bringing together four parties: the Planning Commission, Selectboard, TRORC and our State Representative to work toward a positive future for West Fairlee.

Adjournment: There being no further business, it was VOTED to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Burden, Acting Clerk