

PLANNING COMMISSION
Draft Minutes
October 8, 2015

Members Present: Sally Miller, Nick Scheu, Paul Highberg, Sam Segal
Members Absent: Marilyn Spaulding, Susan Boston, Keri Cole
Others Present: None

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The approval of the July 1, 2015 minutes meeting was continued.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. East End Discussion

The PC reviewed a number of maps of the East End and various East End reports including the 2000 A Master Plan for the East End.

Mr. Sheu suggested that Mr. Alsup may be looking for help from the Town/Village for infrastructure development such as sidewalks, etc.

It would be great to get more people interested in this project. The charette that precipitated the East End report was held over fifteen years ago.

Mr. Sheu noted the general worries of over development such as a convenience store and large pharmacy are overblown. The Alsup property is not large enough for these types of uses.

The Gerrish East End property was then discussed. What would be the best use for this property? A large store may not work as traffic impacts on Route 4 may prove to be unmanageable. Would a residential proposal fit the property as traffic impacts would be much less?

Mr. Highberg stated if the Town desires economic development, placement of fiber optic cable is necessary. David Brown, a local fiber optic proponent, is currently speaking to the Economic Development Committee in the next room.

Mr. Sheu agreed technology development is dependent on better internet speeds and capacities. The town needs to step up to the plate, and create budget funds to support this.

The Economic Development Committee can be very helpful in educating the Town and Village officials to be more supportive of new business. But it all comes down to money. Priorities need to be established and both Selectboard and Trustees need to show their support via the annual budgets.

Mr. Segal noted adequate office space is more important than high speed internet.

They both agreed improved internet would pay for itself.

Mr. Segal asked what can be done, given the fact Woodstock has a reputation for being somewhat anti-business.

Chair Miller noted the PC has been very flexible in working with businesses when they come forward. Over the years, the regulations have been rewritten to encourage development of the East End especially on the Alsup owned properties.

The Village is committed to an East End park and ride lot without consideration of the broader picture which includes other development in the area. The 20 lot park and ride may actually impede development as it squeezes the access to the rear of these properties. Another issue is where will bus parking happen if they can't park in the East End? Mt. Tom farmer's market parking lot was suggested.

It was suggested that the snow dump be used for bus parking. The apples and craft event conflicts with this potential use, but just for one weekend. Parking in the rear of the Pizza Chef parking lot may work.

Is there a parking issue or a problem parking? Columbus Day parking is an issue for that particular weekend but during the rest of the year one can always find a space to park.

B. Town Rivers Regional Energy Plan / Solar Siting Ordinance

Chair Miller noted the TRORC Energy Plan is being brought into focus. As a member of both the TRORC Alternative Energy Committee and the Sustainable Woodstock Energy Committee, she is very knowledgeable on the subject.

Mr. Sheu, discussing the Selectboard's ordinance on solar siting, noted he has not yet started the rewrite. The State has established a subcommittee to study the solar siting issue. It is meeting monthly with a final report due in March 2016. He suggested waiting until the State finishes its study to see what sort of consensus is created.

Chair Miller stated the currently adopted Solar Siting Ordinance bans everything and is not written well. It needs to be rewritten.

Mr. Sheu agreed, noting the ordinance is written is very negative language.

Chair Miller stated that there are community members willing to support a community solar farm if a good site could be found. The current ordinance may hinder this effort.

The TRORC staff has created maps showing potential areas which are good for solar or wind power. An important part of the puzzle is the need to be close to three phase power. Being a rural area, there are not many sites with this essential three phase power source.

There were many questions raised. How would an area get solar development? Who takes the responsibility? The land is much more expensive in Woodstock than in many of the neighboring towns.

Mr. Segal questioned what kind of criteria did TRORC use to find potential sites, noting that the Taftsville site is not listed although it has both three phase power access and south facing open fields.

Mr. Highberg asked if a zoning category needs to be established for solar.

Chair Miller noted regulations cannot be written to prohibit solar development.

Mr. Highberg clarified, regulations could point to areas that are more amenable to solar development.

Mr. Segal felt a softening of the solar siting ordinance would be a good thing, especially making it more solar supportive.

Chair Miller felt the Selectboard would listen to PC proposals.

At a minimum, the byway restrictions should be totally removed from the ordinance.

Chair Miller suggested using something similar to the Pete Fellows mid-ridgeline study. This was done for the 2007 Town Plan. The concept is to have the development screened somewhat but not totally.

Mr. Highberg asked if people understand climate change.

Mr. Sheu supported merging the view shed data with the solar siting ordinance. A map showing preferred areas of development versus prohibited areas.

Mr. Highberg asked if incentives should be proposed for the preferred areas of development.

Mr. Sheu felt the Town should step up and offer a tax break or other amenity for solar development on one's property.

Should incentives be provided for local community based solar arrays to handicap a commercial solar farm that sells power to out of state utilities?

Mr. Segal supported the fact that all solar development, no matter who does it, supports all of us. It is helping the environment and holding off climate change. He felt the Taftsville solar situation created a major negative image for Woodstock.

Chair Miller noted the Planning Commission works for the Town as a whole and regulations are written to address the desires of the Town residents, thus a compromise.

The PC will continue to review the solar siting ordinance to make it more amenable to solar projects.

C. VERI

VERI stands for Vermont Economic Resilience Initiative. This is a State sponsored program to conduct a study and write a report. The State has finished the writing of the report, now the regional commissions are following up with implementation portions of the plan. The plan is more concerned with businesses and economic development than residential issues. The report was sent via email.

Mr. Segal noted three items jump out, all of which relate to municipal level projects involving sewer and water infrastructure upgrades.

Chair Miller mentioned TRORC would send representatives to a future PC meeting to discuss the report.

One mentioned item was the removal of agriculture from the riparian buffer located just west of the trailer park.

D. Vacancy

Ms. Spaulding sent in a letter of resignation. The PC discussed the letter and the need to find a new member. Ms. Spaulding was thanked for the many years of work in her various official capacities.

Mr. Highberg stated both his eyes and ears are becoming problematic. He will not be able to attend meetings on icy nights.

Mr. Segal stated he knows some people who live in South Woodstock who might be interested.

Mr. Highberg suggested Michael Skuro who may make a good member, young and computer savvy.

Mr. Sheu stated his house is about to be placed on the market, and he may be leaving the community.

Next month the Town Zoning Regulations will be worked on.

IV. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday November 5, 2015 at 7:30 pm.**

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town/Village Planner