

***PLANNING COMMISSION***  
**Draft Minutes**  
**August 5, 2015**

**Members Present:** Sally Miller, Paul Highberg, Marilyn Spaulding, Nick Scheu, Sam Segal, Susan Boston  
**Members Absent:** Keri Cole  
**Others Present:** Ned Swanberg, Sacha Pealer, Renee Vondle, Byron Quinn, Michael Brands

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

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

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the July 1, 2015 meeting were approved as submitted.

**III. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. River Corridor**

Agency of Natural Resources river/flood specialists, Ned Swanberg and Sacha Pealer presented a power point presentation on river corridors. Ms. Pealer is the State's floodplain manager for this region and is very familiar with the Woodstock area.

Mr. Swanberg distributed an agenda which also listed numerous web sites with additional information. The agenda included: River Corridors, ERAF, New Floodplain Study - Ottauquechee, Woodstock Resilience Subcommittee, VERI - Woodstock, and contact information.

The River Corridor concept addresses the fact that rivers are not static, they move overtime. The intent is to map an area that covers the river's potential movement.

The ERAF stands for Emergency Relief Assistance Fund which serves to reimburse municipalities for flood disasters. It provides an incentive for adoption of certain State programs by increasing the percentage of reimbursement, up to 17%. The River Corridor program became official in October of 2014.

The USGS did a study of flood impacts immediately after Tropical Storm Irene for Killington, Bridgewater and Woodstock. The result is a comprehensive map of the Ottauquechee River. The map provides better information than the official FEMA flood maps and should be used in parallel with the FEMA maps.

The formation of a Woodstock Resilience subcommittee is encouraged. This would be part of the statewide CROS - Community Resilience Organizations. Peg Elmer, former Vermont Law School planner, has taken a strong lead in this.

The VERI (Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative) report for Woodstock is very close to completion. Committees have been active for the past two years gathering information and holding public hearings.

Mr. Swanberg used a photograph of a river valley to demonstrate various water body elements. Setbacks are good regulatory tools. Woodstock's Zoning Regulations have a riparian buffer requirement. The buffers are important for retaining river/stream bank vegetation.

Flooding is a good thing, it allows water to slow down and debris to be set aside. Flat areas along rivers are very important. In Vermont, especially the Ottauquechee River, there are few flat areas. Steep river walls allow water to gain speed and force.

A 50' edge in addition to a river's meander space is necessary to provide that extra distance of protection.

The River Corridor maps are not yet in their finished stage and still require refinement. Within a year this work should be accomplished. The Town Planner mentioned that the draft of the Village River Corridor Map shows that the corridor incorrectly goes well up the hillside east of High Street. These are the kinds of issues that need to be corrected

A Setback Buffer Corridor Floodplain Diagram was distributed for discussion.

Buffers are necessary for habitat and vegetation. They provide food, shade and bank stability.

A profile of a river channel showing different house placement scenarios was viewed demonstrating river movement over time and how building placement can be very expensive if done incorrectly.

Watersheds of less than 2 square miles are not mapped, therefore smaller streams get a standard 50' corridor. Larger water bodies require a thorough study which customize the corridor width to the specific need.

Mr. Swanberg noted a River Corridor protection regulation or ordinance is required by the State to receive the maximum level of reimbursement for flood damage. The Model 4 Flood Hazard regulations with river corridor language were suggested as a good fit for Woodstock. Standards of review are based on no adverse impacts. The area of review, draft river corridor map, still needs to be reviewed for potential modification.

Vermont Agency of Transportation has flown the Route 4 corridor and has mapped the area to 2 foot contours.

Existing structures would be grandfathered and be reviewed through non-conforming structure language.

Mr. Quinn, CC Chair, asked about the impact on agriculture as a 100' intrusion into an ag field

would be a lot of land. Mr. Swanberg noted that agricultural is exempt from local zoning regulations and river issues are dealt under separate Department of Agriculture rules.

Woodstock is number 12 in the State for the number of structures within the flood zone. There are 145 buildings in the flood zone, including both the Town and the Village.

Municipal roads and bridges need protection, as they are very costly to replace. Advanced planning efforts could help a town avoid unnecessary future expense.

Protect what works and avoid aggravating the problem - don't make it worse.

Municipalities are encouraged to keep their road standards up to date. Replacing smaller under sized culverts with larger culverts would prevent future expensive road and bridge reconstruction. Municipalities need to be prepared for disaster situations. An emergency management plan can provide necessary guidance in the time of need. Woodstock has done well in this.

Towns should work to assure residents and businesses are insured. All property owners can purchase flood insurance, not just the owner located in a flood zone. Currently only 35% of property owners who need it have flood insurance. The cost of flood insurance is rising. By removing basement areas, one may significantly reduce their costs as insurance is determined on the lowest floor of the building.

The Town should add USGS maps to their flood regulations so these areas are also protected. The USGS maps are much more precise than the FEMA maps.

Mr. Scheu felt homeowners need to be educated on this subject as there are many aspects to understand. He also mentioned some Towns have a two tier level of riparian buffer review, which may be especially appropriate for the Village.

Chair Miller noted Sustainable Woodstock is bringing a stream erosion educational tool to the Woodstock Historical Society. The tool is essentially a large box filled with sand that shows how rivers meander and erosion is caused.

Mr. Highberg felt the river corridors appear to be larger than one imagines but not as large as the flood plain.

Tributaries are very important to provide additional floodplain opportunities as the Ottauquechee has very little floodplain for the size river it is.

Mr. Swanberg and Ms. Pealer left their contact information and asked anyone with additional questions to please contact them.

The PC thanked them for a very thorough and thoughtful presentation.

## **B. Siting of Solar Energy Facilities**

Mr. Sheu noted he has not yet had time to do a thorough review of the recently adopted Siting of Solar Energy Facilities.

The Town Planner stated he spoke with the Town Manager, Phil Swanson, concerning the inclusion

of a Route 4 Byway protection regulations that were adopted as part of the siting ordinance. They are not necessary and can be removed. The Town Planner also mentioned he attended the first meeting of the State Solar Energy Facility Siting committee at the State capitol. The initial meeting was more organization than substance. The Town Planner was pleased by the fact municipal issues and concerns were well represented by committee members. He will continue to follow the activities of the committee. The committee will present potential siting regulations to the Vermont Legislature early next year.

After discussion, the PC agreed there is no immediate need to rewrite the ordinance and will continue to work on them at the September meeting.

### **C. Village Sign Regulations**

The Town Planner distributed a data base table listing all freestanding signs placed within the Central Commercial district of the Village. The PC reviewed the information. The largest sign (24.88 sf) is on the Geoff Nichols property at 61 Central Street. It was originally placed before zoning. The second largest sign (14.5 sf) is the Woodstock Sports sign, originally placed before zoning. Two other signs (12 sf each) are placed for the P&P Restaurant - 1972, and Primrose - 1978. All other freestanding signs, 8, are equal to or less than the 10 sf regulated limit.

The PC noted Woodstock Sports currently has the second largest freestanding sign in the Central Commercial district.

After discussion, the PC noted the Woodstock Sports business is not disadvantaged via their signage as they have the second largest freestanding sign in the district.

**Mr. Sheu motioned with a second by Ms. Boston, that no adjustment to the current sign regulation is necessary until the rewrite of the Village Zoning Regulations which is scheduled to take place in 2016. The motion passed with a 6-0 vote.**

### **D. Other Business**

Mr. Sheu mentioned he had attended a TDRB hearing for the Woodstock Union High School's sign replacement to an internally illuminated digital sign. The regulations allow the change but state a requirement for a "static" sign. Static means no movement. Mr. Sheu was also concerned with color, motion and intensity.

The Town Planner noted the TDRB approval conditioned the sign to a no less than two hour change period to address the static requirement. The sign would also required a review once operational to view color and intensity issues.

The Town Planner noted the Regional Economic Development Official informed him that Hannafords Grocery chain is working to place a 20,000 sf store on the Gerrish East End Property. The Town Planner warned the official that traffic will be a major concern. Both local permitting and an Act 250 permit will be required.

Mr. Sheu stated he has viewed riparian regulations from other municipalities and was intrigued by a two tier review concept whereby the area closer to the water body is a high standard to address. This could be an adjustment to the Village Regulations as many properties have lawns straight to the river. The Brandywine Conservancy out of Pennsylvania has some good examples.

**IV. NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for **September 2, 2015 at 7:30 pm.**

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Brands, AICP  
Town/Village Planner