



Woodstock, Vermont

The Shire Town of Windsor County

TOWN - VILLAGE MANAGER GOVERNMENT

Town Hall • P.O. Box 488 • Woodstock, Vermont 05091 • 802/457-3456

PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING Draft Minutes August 23, 2018

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sally Miller, Sara Stadler, Susan Boston, Sam Segal, Eric Goldberg
MEMBERS ABSENT: One Vacancy, Michael Pacht
OTHERS PRESENT: Corwin Sharpe, Priscilla Pannell, Arthur Sherker, Veronica Sherker, David Hill, Jill Davies, Zach Ralph, Michael Brands

I. OPENING

Chair Miller opened the meeting at 7:30 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the August 1, 2018 were approved as submitted.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Village Zoning Rewrite

A number of neighbors attended the meeting to note concerns with the increasing number of Short Term Rental (STR) occurring in the High Street neighborhood. On August 22, 2018, another STR was approved on the corner of High Street and Golf Avenue.

Mr. Sharpe, 1 Golf Avenue, asked about the STR regulation rewrite and the timetable for completion.

Mr. Sherker, 8 Golf Avenue, addressed the STR approved the evening before. Golf Avenue is a dead-end and a very quiet street. Noise from renters will not be appreciated. At least there is some control of noise coming from the nearby Woodstock Inn, weddings are required to stop by 10:00 pm. There is no similar control for a STR.

Ms. Sherker noted the property is a stone's throw away. Densely populated neighborhoods such as theirs should not have STRs. The neighborhood is too tight, any noise and other abnormal behavior is amplified by the close quarters.

Mr. Sharpe, read a letter from Cyndy Kozara, a High Street resident. The letter noted the problems resulting from a STR permitted in 2016. There was too much noise from front porch gatherings that went on well into the night, bad behavior and language and too many guests on site. Although these things may be reported to the authorities, the issues would not occur if the STR had not been approved in the first place.



Mr. Sharpe noted that STRs cause a number of issues: 1) change of community character, especially with non-resident owners, 2) hardship on existing B&Bs, 3) increasing shortage of affordable housing, and 4) the regulations appear to be unenforceable as written. Hawaii has implemented a 14.5% transient accommodation tax that coupled with the room tax of 6% makes a steep burden for all STRs. As a major tourist destination, this has become a significant problem in the state.

Ms. Sherker echoed Mr. Sharpe's remarks that STRs are causing neighborhoods such as theirs to lose its small town character. They moved to Woodstock for peace, quiet and security. Now they feel they have to lock their doors.

Ms. Daniels noted that STRs are now illegal in San Diego.

Ms. Stadler stated they are illegal in Santa Barbara as well.

The Town Planner noted he has issued over 30 permits to STRs in the past few years and has had to respond to over 60 incidents of STR use. As time goes on more and more homes without a resident, full time or part time, are receiving STR permits. In the Town STRs do not require a local permit if located in a Five Acre Residential or Forestry zone.

The permit issued last night is for a nonresidential home. The owner lives in New Mexico. Another issue is that the owner has a large family and numerous friends that will be using the home without charge, therefore these "free" events are not calculated as one of the 6 rentals allowed per year. Four of the five STR permits issued to the High Street neighborhood are to nonresidential property owners.

Chair Miller asked the Town Planner to map all the permitted STRs to get a better understanding of the distribution and use pattern.

B. Energy Chapter Rewrite

Representatives, David Hill and Zach Ralph, of the Sustainable Woodstock Energy Committee (SWEC), and Jill Davies, Select Board member, reviewed the Town Plan Energy Chapter draft with the PC. Mr. Ralph noted the SWEC as a diverse group represents more than just Woodstock.

The group read the April 2018 draft of the document and discussed a number of suggestions and comments concerning the text.

The PC was hoping for comments on the mapping of three sites: preferred locations, prohibited locations and constraint areas as this has been the most difficult portion of the chapter rewrite. The group noted they did not have comments on the mapping process.

The group noted they had many comments but focused on the larger issues. The chapter should include reference to a national mayor's pledge that supported alternative energy incentives. The charts noting energy use need to be updated, the information is dated. The group stated a source with the Energy Action Network that has up-to-date 2018 data. Solar water heating is considered an ancient technology and need not be referenced.

Mr. Ralph stated there are 80 alternative energy sites in Woodstock.

Chair Miller noted the State does not allow inclusion of sites established before 2015.

In a discussion of biomass, which mainly means wood burning, it was stated that wood for heat production is good but that wood used to make electricity is not good.

Ms. Davies noted the Town Hall is changing from oil heat to propane this fall. In the future, a wood pellet stove is proposed as the main source of heat with propane to be used a backup source.

Grid resiliency and power storage, via TESLA batteries for example, should be mentioned. In Australia, TESLA has designed a battery back system for the grid.

Ms. Davies felt the State insulation standards are not high enough. This needs to be reviewed, as the Town could impose higher standards. She also asked that solar be mandated for all new construction.

Chair Miller cautioned the Town Plan is a document that uses "encourage" type verbs such as "should" versus a Zoning Regulation which would use "mandate" type verbs such as "shall". When writing a town plan chapter, the verbiage is important.

Mr. Ralph asked how "rural character" is defined. Alternative energy should not be restricted by defining it as anti-thematic to one's rural character.

Reference should be made that alternative energy creates no additional air pollution and shall be carbon neutral. This led back to a discussion of biomass, as carbon is released when wood is burned and the forests are considered important for carbon storage. Additionally biomass production should not have a negative impact on local food source.

Ms. Davies asked that a municipal employee policy be developed to have doors closed and lights turned off at close of business day, as an action item.

There is no need to form a municipal energy committee as the SWEC can serve this purpose.

Chair Miller asked the SWEC to help develop language for the plan.

A discussion of Action item 1.1.4. led to a discussion of LEED standards. Should all buildings private and public be mandated to meet such standards.

Mr. Ralph noted a study is ongoing to work with the Town's waste water treatment facility. This is to enable a waste to energy conversion by using methane production which in turn operates an electric generator. A group, Biogas, from Finland will meet with the Town to show how this may be accomplished.

The Town is about to purchase its municipal electricity from a solar farm in Hartland.

A discussion of the mapping portion of the chapter took place. The prohibited and preferred sites are fairly simple to determine. However the constraint areas are very difficult. Currently the PC is leaning towards a local review process for constraint areas with the main intent being a visual assessment.

TRORC GIS Planner, Pete Fellows, map of scenic areas combined with promising solar sites was reviewed. A key question was how far from a road (buffer area) should solar farms be allowed. Based on the current map, the Taftsville proposal would have been approved. However, it is well known that the neighbors did not support the endeavor.

All PC members agreed a 500' buffer was too much and that a 100' buffer appeared to be not enough. The Woodstock Aqueduct Company's solar facility has an approximate 100' buffer. However, it was noted the WAC facility at 71 kW is a very small solar farm. It was estimated it would take 600 panels to produce 150 kW.

Chair Miller stated that if all homes in Woodstock had roof top mounted panels, it would only produce 10% of the State's target for Woodstock based alternative energy production.

A proposal was made to have all alternative energy facilities within 500' of a road reviewed by the DRB's via preliminary site plan standards in regards to screening, access, etc.

Mr. Ralph noted that wind energy is the more efficient alternative energy producer as solar is restricted to a short daily and seasonal window of optimum sunshine. The wind can produce all day and night long in the right conditions. A negative is the wind speeds in Woodstock are considered too low for the larger more efficient turbines. Two existing small wind turbines in the Woodstock area out produce all other solar panels by a considerable margin.

Ms. Davies stated the National Park Service currently creates 100% of its own energy, mainly through biomass - cord wood and pellets.

The energy chapter needs a preamble written in a warm welcoming manner. The SWEC group agreed to draft this as an opening paragraph.
The chapter needs a definition of commercial scale, 15kw to 150kw.

Mr. Goldberg pointed out that Green Mountain College heats the entire facility with steam heat via a large wood burning furnace. Why can't the Village do something like this?

The SWEC group will draft additional language for future review by the PC.

C. Integrated Agriculture

Mr. Segal asked for the updated Integrated Agriculture section. The Town Planner will send it out before the September 5, 2018 meeting.

Mr. Segal attended a farm event in Shelburne, Vermont which allows events tied to farm production. The farm was a large and established farming operation. It was able to handle the crowds and parking without a problem. It was very well organized. Food and music were offered.

The key to allowing additional events for a farm is to have a proper definition of farm. If the definition is too loose, the events would be allowed essentially on any property. Verified farming operations should be allowed the additional income of agricultural events.

Mr. Goldberg asked to list issues (noise, parking, lights, etc.) and write up standards and criteria that would review each of these. If the applicant passes the review process, a permit is granted.

The issue will be discussed more in depth at the next meeting.

IV. NEXT MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting is September 5, 2018.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael Brands, AICP
Town/Village Planner

