

WOODSTOCK PLANNING COMMISSION
Wednesday, February 3, 2020
7:30PM
ZOOM MEETING
MEETING MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sally Miller, Ben Jervey, Susan Boston, Susan Silberberg, Sam Segal, Sara Stadler, Mary Margaret Sloan

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Neal Leitner, Sherry Sousa, Ben Ford, Kerilyn Bristow, Mike Miller, Patrick Fultz

I. CALL TO ORDER

7:30 P.M.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 6, 2020

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Accessory on Farm Business (AOFB)/ Act 143 update

B. Town Plan – Amendments to Education Chapter updates

Sally Miller opened the meeting, welcoming the school board members in attendance, and stated she hoped everyone had received the most updated amendments, and asked if any planning commission members had comments. Susan Boston noted that the additional information provided from the last meeting gave a clearer picture of the school, and thought it took a good turn. Boston mentioned a part of the plan that noted the covid pandemic increased enrollment may become dated information, she also noted she kept the 2018 US news and world report, but also added 2020. Boston also stated Jason added a question, and she wondered if there should be a change made to that as well.

Sam Segal thanked everyone for the work done on the Education Chapter, he agreed to remove the language about covid and to reference the specific years instead. Susan Boston said that it can be shortened to “School district enrollment in the last several years, in particular 2021 have benefitted from an influx of new families.” Sam noted it could be shorted more in the beginning and to replace “years leading up to” and “the covid19 pandemic” with years 2017-2021. Susan Silberberg questioned removing the covid language and asked if having that in would work as a lever for state funding, showing that new residents may have moved due to pandemic, and may not stay. Sally Miller stated that the numbers were increasing pre-covid, so reflecting the last 3 years may be better. Sam Segal asked if anyone from the school could speak on enrollment. Sherry Sousa noted over the summer over 200 students were enrolled, on a normal year it is around 30-50 students K-12. Ben Ford spoke on equalized pupil. Ford noted that some families have come due to the pandemic, however others have come due to environmental changes, there were also families lost due to employment loss from the pandemic, and families opting to homeschool. Ford also said that some second home owners moved to Vermont as a primary residence recently and enrolled their children in school, but they could easily pivot back to their other homes. Sherry Sousa said that the school recently worked with a group out of Massachusetts to give 20 year projections in terms of enrollment, and one disturbing projection was that Vermont overall would

lose more 9% enrollment, but at WCSU during the same time there is a projected increase of 3.5% without changing anything, and that it is important to note that while other schools are projected to lose students, this district is expected to gain students. Ben Ford commented on a part about Act 46, and stated that enrollment projection trends could also lead to further consolidations within other towns growing the WCSU district. Sally Miller and Susan Boston questioned if the Highschool enrollment and transitioning homeschooling was relevant. Sousa noted that the school is in contact with families who chose home study, in hopes that they can return to the district, and they want to deeply understand why families choose to homeschool, and how does the district adjust their planning to become more attractive to homeschool families now as it makes a huge financial impact for the school. Sally Miller noted that 2021 enrollment is not much different from 2019/2020. Sam Segal noted he is fine with leaving the covid language for enrollment, as it will provide context. Miller asked if across the state other supervisory unions have similar enrollment changes with homeschooling. Susan Sousa said that WCSU is one of 17 districts that did not lose enrollment in the past year, even with the home study enrollment. Ben Ford noted that WCSU is in the top 4% for enrollment this year, and Sam Segal noted that should be added to the report, as it works as a counterpoint to families leaving the district due to the school.

Sherry Sousa stated that while some families state they leave at ninth grade, the report they had done shows a bump in ninth grade, and they typically bring in more students than students exiting. Sousa said she will share the links for the data from these reports, as well as the six month follow up report. Sousa also mentioned information was added on the New view lab, and there was a statement that it was initially funded by private funds, she thinks it is important to add that local funds continue to support the program, and taxpayers should be given credit for that.

Sally Miller noted there are academic achievement awards listed, and it would be good to have the years listed with those as well, Sousa noted these awards are from 2019-2020, but she is not sure what the year is on the US News and World Report. Sally Miller then asked about the reduction in Spanish instruction in grades 3-6, Sousa noted this is financial, and currently for this year the investment in Prosper Valley. Ben Ford said that the idea of the spanish program was to try to achieve a higher proficiency by increasing the context for the older students, so it was an intentional decision and not just a budget cut. Sam Segal said he felt like many people were let down by the way it was handled, and the current instruction at the elementary level is not adequate. Kerilyn Bristow agreed with Sam Segal. Ben Ford said it is on a list of items to be revisited. Sally Miller stated if anyone wanted to make any changes to that statement to let her know.

Sally Miller then brought up the action plan section and asked Susan Boston to speak on what changed, Susan noted it was unintentional. Sam Segal said that he does not believe all the substance abuse correction on the school, it is a community issue as well, and perhaps the Education Chapter is not the place for it, Sherry Sousa agreed, that the substance abuse is a community issue as well. Susan Boston asked if this is removed, does the Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and does that get removed. Susan Silberberg noted it could be shifted and still referenced, and all the chapters would be working together. Neil Leitner stated he looked at other town plans, and did not see substance abuse in the education chapters of the town plans, and agreed with Segal and Silberberg that it can be shifted. Sally Miller then asked if this survey should still be addressed at the school level, Sherry Sousa said it is a very important document which aids in funding for the school. Sam Segal asked if point b in this section should be removed, Sally Miller also mentioned point c and adding the wording school "and community". Sherry Sousa clarified there is a

committee currently as mentioned in point c that includes health professionals, as well as law enforcement officers. Sara Stadler asked if the funding mentioned in point b is being used for this group, Sousa noted the funding is from a three-year state grant, and for the group there is no funding, and it is led by the high school principal.

Sally Miller asked Susan Boston to complete this draft so it is clean for a public hearing, with the additional information from this meeting, and the information from Sherry Sousa.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Affordable Housing Discussion

Neal Leitner introduced Mike Miller, a speaker whom he met through Charlie Kimball's affordable housing discussion. Mike Miller introduced himself as the director of planning and community development for the City of Montpelier, with a 20+ year background in the field. Mike Miller noted that Montpelier has had a housing task force that was started in the early 2000's. Mike Miller said the first thing he suggests is to make sure there is an assessment of what the town needs are, which he noted he did see from Charlie Kimball. Mike Miller said identifying the needs and issues will help moving forward, it can require adding housing at all levels, not just affordable, the more housing that is added allows more affordable housing to open up, however sometimes you are not able to add housing fast enough. Mike Miller stated a number of things had to go through zoning and evaluating the zoning making sure all the zones had the proper density regulations. He said going through neighborhoods when the assessment was being done that were loved, it would turn out that large percentages of the houses in these neighborhoods were non-conforming, meaning they aren't able to be built with the current setbacks, or they did not meet the densities, or lot sizes. Mike Miller said they went through and made a commitment that 90% of all the houses would be conforming within the neighborhoods, he worked with Brandy Saxton on this. Mike Miller said there are two key pieces to the process, first is assessment, and then taking it to the next level which is where some towns see issues, to take it to the next level a task force needs to be started to be proactive, this task force would look at things that are not zoning, and regulations, but things such as a tax stabilization program that can only apply to multifamily homes, this can allow developers to bring down their costs, so that they can offer the homes at more affordable rates. Mike Miller also spoke of a first time home buyer program, which worked with the schools to aid with enrollment, they work with Down Street for this it is a program called "Neighbor works". Miller then stated they have some other programs, and asked the board to ask if they have questions. The tools that he uses currently for Montpelier are AEU which is a pilot program operated by the state, having a community development specialist on staff that assists with grants and projects, housing preservation grants, homeshare programs, and a housing trust fund. Mike Miller said if a person comes in with a project, they begin working with the development specialist to identify barriers for the project so they can be proactive to help and get the project going with whatever is needed.

Sally Miller asked Mike Miller if he knew how much the assessments with Brandy Saxton cost, Mike Miller replied that it was done through zoning, but the cost was not high. Mike Miller said it could be done internally if someone in town had an understanding of breaking down the town into

neighborhoods. Sally Miller then asked how the neighborhoods felt about the changes happening, Mike Miller said it did have pushback from some neighborhoods. Mike Miller also noted that while Montpelier has about 50 neighborhoods, they are then grouped into zones. Susan Silberberg asked what the communication to the neighborhoods looked like, Mike Miller replied that a booklet with graphics was made and distributed, he also noted that rolling out information in smaller “bites” is easier and more effective. Sara Stadler asked if the local newspaper was also involved with assisting the process, and Mike Miller replied yes and no, it can depend.

Mary Margaret Sloan asked Mike Miller to speak on the success that they have had, and if it is due to the suite of tools he outlined is enough, and if more time is needed to get to the ideal outcome, or is he looking for new tools to add to the suite. Mike Miller replied that he is always looking for new opportunities, and while they have many tools available, the available land is what they do not have currently, but since the housing task force has been started they have been able to add a lot of affordable housing. Mike Miller said he is hoping the AEU pilot program he spoke about earlier will allow growth in Montpelier, by helping homeowners break up the larger homes they purchase to add accessory dwelling units. Mike Miller also spoke on a tool that was less successful which was a housing preservation grant that was designed to help lower income homeowners fix properties, because it turned out to be more of helping people stay in homes they were not able to afford.

Sally Miller asked the board how they think the issue should be approached about moving forward, with this information. Sara Sadler suggested members from all different boards and commissions come together who are working on housing, and have these people come up with some suggestions. Benjamin Jervy asked to hear about what some of the major impediments were with recent projects, as a new commission member it is not clear. Sam Segal noted that neighbors are the major impediment in the town. Susan Silberberg mentioned doing small surveys just to get some information to residents, and looking at a historical look at density in neighborhoods. Mike Miller noted that the other boards and committees will look to the Planning Commission to remove barriers for them to be proactive, sometimes it can be parking standards for example, and how the planning commission changes things can open up opportunities. Neal Leitner mentioned Act 179 and asked Mike Miller about this, and he stated it can go either way. Mike Miller noted that going from 1-2 Units to 4 Units does not have a great impact on things like traffic. Sally Miller asked the commission how they think they should move forward and asked the commission to think about it as well.

B. OTHER BUSINESS

Neal Leitner spoke about the Certified Local Government Program (CLG) and the historical district, it could potentially bring funds to help with renovations. Sally Miller noted she had not heard of this before he sent it, and Susan Boston said it seemed easy to become certified.

A. ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned at 9:15pm
