

WOODSTOCK PLANNING COMMISSION
Wednesday, May 5, 2021
7:30PM
ZOOM MEETING
MEETING MINUTES

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

I. Call to Order

II. Approval of minutes

III. Old Business

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

Neal Leitner started by discussing the legal counsel hired by the town and explained he will meet with TDRB and provide a decision tree for Act 143.

Sally Miller asked if there is another Act 143 AOFB application for Five Birds Farm, and asked if they are looking at this in the same way as with Five Birds Farm.

Sam Segal said he believes there should be a verification or definition of a farm, by meeting some set of criteria, then brought up the threshold for verifying the percentage of income that comes from farm vs activities.

Sally Miller noted that Act 143 does not make it clear for municipalities to make a clear decision regarding what portion of a business is an accessory. Sam Segal said regarding neighbor concerns about Five Birds Farm it was noise and traffic, so if the Planning Commission put in some sort of review on that it may mitigate neighbor concerns. Neal Leitner said he will update the commissioners with information from the TDRB meeting.

IV. New Business

A. Village Neighborhood Analysis

Neal Leitner updated the commissioners with a road plan to start neighborhood classification. The first idea was information from the listers will be gathered with how many units are in each lot, in

the village, which is found a descriptor on each property card, so they are going to look into other ways of doing this as there is no easy way currently.

Neal Leitner said he is going to ask Mike Miller how he got his number of units per lot information.

Sally Miller said she would be happy to manually collect the information, because it would be nice to have a spreadsheet with the properties and zones they are in. Sally also noted what the listers have may not be what is accurate, she then asked what information should be collected for the analysis.

Neal then said that he and Susan Silberberg had talked about a visual analysis, with a form-based approach using pictures of streets and blocks to get a visual density. Leitner brought up setbacks in some of the village areas, and how old are structures do not respect the current setbacks and how this can be improved. Sally said this can identify particular areas to focus on and brought up High Street and Pleasant Street as examples.

Susan Boston asked about lot size, Sally replied that is part of the Grand List. Mary Margaret Sloan brought up a resource regarding affordable housing and noted she believes it is important to acknowledge in the information gathered. Sally Miller mentioned she attended a seminar today by this same resource (Peace to the Valley) regarding affordable housing and there is another session on zoning she believes would be beneficial for the planning commission to attend, noting the seminars are at noon on Wednesdays during the month of May. Sally Miller noted the most interesting thing she learned today was tax base and how a large house on a lot of acreage is less contributing to the tax base than dense housing that has multiple units and mixed used buildings are higher than multi-family housing. Sally then asked Mary Margaret Sloan if there are specific things to look for, to which Mary Margaret replied she did not know.

Sally then again asked how the planning commission wants to focus the data she collects, as it is important to understand where Woodstock is now and what it means in terms of developing alternative housing.

Neal Leitner said he will speak with listers on differentiating between the town and village properties on the ground list. Neal also said the listers do not know the number of rentals. Sally noted some properties on the Grand List will stay listed as homesteads, however this list does not have that information.

B. Residential Building Energy Discussion

Sam Segal noted that affordable housing is a direct odds with stricter energy standards, he says it is really hard to build a house in Woodstock from personal experience it is about \$400-\$420 per square foot. CM noted material costs alone are 1.2 to 1.6 times the cost that they were one year ago. Sam believes it is not the best place to spend money and it is not for people in the planning commission position to force people to commit to spend their own money. He believes forcing people to spend money on this may be a mistake. He spoke on insulating houses with dents pack and active air exchange and active humidity control when most builders are not doing this properly, which would be forcing people to do premium work which in the long run may not benefit them.

Sally Miller said she agrees with Sam and believes it is a good goal if everybody could do it, and she is concerned about over regulation. She said the primary fact is there are residential energy standards currently people do not do so if planning commission could get people to bring things up to the current standards as opposed to taking on anything over and above, the commission will be one step ahead and anything beyond is just recommended.

Sam Segal recommended if someone can build a house with 2x4s that has dents pack insulation without being ears sealed to the point of needing active air exchange Woodstock should let them do it and maybe you can get a new house for 400,000 instead of 600,000 because you need a 2x6 wall, and add 50% more insulation, and have a roof that instead of costing \$15,000 has to cost \$30,000 and these are all real things people have to pay money for. Sam stated that this isn't saving the onset of global warming because the reality is that if your house doesn't ventilate properly, you are using excess energy to heat that house because you will have your windows open since it's humid inside. Sam said he does not believe with the planning commission's knowledge it is fair to enforce this on others until there are building crews that are able to accomplish these things properly. Mary Margaret Sloan asked if there is another way to approach this, she mentioned Jeff Martin, and asked if it would be possible to go back to him to get a third way, while Sam raises a good point that this is something important to the state. Leitner said that is a great idea and he will ask him. Leitner asked about the availability of HERS Raters locally. Sam Segal reply that Efficiency Vermont is one. Benjamin Jersey said he believes Efficiency Vermont is the way to do it now, but this is a tricky one for him because he is working on this policy in Massachusetts right now regarding state codes and zero energy building. However, he said it's a much different landscape there, then agreed Vermont does not have the technical contractors needed to install these systems, and believes the best method is a five-year plan at the state level with planning and funding for new construction standards that are achievable because there is training in place.

Sally Miller agrees the planning commission does not have the knowledge but to utilize Geoff Martin and explain to him the concerns of the planning commission. Sam Segal suggested that maybe Geoff can put together some sort of tool kit for prospective builders, to explain all the different things needed like pipe sizes outlet placement etc. so as a homeowner you know what to

look for from your builder, and effort is better spent educating people building the home to raise the general level of awareness. Ben Jervey said that Efficiency Vermont has a new build program. Sam said the builder has to go to Efficiency Vermont to get different stages signed off, but things come up at the end that need to be included, and he believes this is typical but it should not be, and also noted air exchange wasn't important to Efficiency Vermont but it is essential to the efficiency of the home.

Sara Stadler agrees a training program for contractors would be the best way to go.

Sally Miller said the real concern is making sure it's affordable and making sure there are not obstacles in the way of someone getting new housing either by renovation or new build, and make sure it's within affordability for a new construction. Ben Jervey noted it currently possibly could be done with a prefab build but not with local contractors affordably right now. Neal Leitner noted permits coming in are not all from high income homeowners, and one for example is for a modular build because stick built is so expensive. Neal Will speak with Geoff to produce something to give out when issuing permits. Sally asked to find out about HERS program and who else in the area can do it and what does that mean to have them involved in the building process. Sam said it is essential to have them involved even before doing the plumbing and electrical. Ben said he would be happy to meet with Geoff to put together a basic evaluation of new construction to Vermont code.

V. Other Business

VI. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 8:30PM