

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of August 21, 2017

Meeting was called to order at 7:09 PM by Chair Hill-Eubanks.

- I. **Roll Call:** Present for the meeting were Brown, Hill-Eubanks, Rhodes, Ruttenberg, and Supplee.
- II. **Set/Adjust Agenda:** Add agenda item: Amendment to the zoning regulations.
- III. **Public Participation:** Attending were Carolyn Stevens, John Stevens, Stephen Hatch, and Kenneth Goslant. Also attending was Eric Vorwald from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission.
- IV. **Approval of Minutes:** August 2, 2017. Tabled, as they were not received by the Planning Commission in time for the meeting.
- V. **Report from Eric Vorwald, Planner, CVRPC**
 - a. **Summary of Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's report on the Northfield Town Plan:** Mr. Vorwald presented his review of the 2014 Town Plan, how it meets with state statutory criteria, and items that may need to be addressed in the Town Plan update. There are new laws that require the Plan include discussion of forest integrity/fragmentation and renewable energy. Generally, the Plan should include actionable items that can be used to implement the Plan; the CVRPC will check in to see the progress towards implementation. The Plan should reflect input from the community while meeting statutory requirements.

Additional planning will be necessary under the energy section in order for the Town Plan to obtain substantial deference when applications are reviewed for renewable energy siting at the Public Service Board. Any restrictions on renewable energy would have to be reasonable, clearly explained, and in keeping with the relevant land use district. The new energy laws are intended to encourage each town and region to help meet the state's energy goals by the year 2050. The town can decide which types of renewable energy to focus on to meet their goals, and how policies will allow those goals to be met. Discussed possibility of achieving energy efficiency standards as part of planning. Planning Commission will consider holding an educational forum on the state energy standards to answer further questions.

One state goal includes defining "outstanding," "significant," or "important" when used to describe historic or natural resources. Try to provide reasons for their importance (surveys, studies, history, etc). This would make the plan more effective at protecting those resources in the Act 250 process.

Accessory dwellings are discussed in the Plan but there is also discussion of housing off campus that is being used for students, rather than used for community affordable housing. This could use more detail, such as what

Norwich's plans are and how they intend to house their students in the future. In addition, the CVRPC is in the process of changing their housing distribution requirements – in the new regional plan the specific housing distribution section will be removed. We could put in a section to explain why the distribution plan is no longer valid for Northfield.

Flood Resiliency is a new statutory section required in Plans. Our Plan does have many items that address that. And we can incorporate by reference the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan into the Town Plan to meet the Flood Resiliency requirements. Question as to whether we would be addressing river corridor plans to meet requirements for maximum reimbursement under ERAF (Emergency Relief Assistance Fund). Northfield meets interim standards but Agency of Natural Resources is developing new maps and standards and we will likely not meet those. Laura Ranker at the CVRPC is the contact to confirm any details.

In order to obtain designation for a village center (and other state designations) Plan must speak to it (can be simple language and say that town will continue to pursue or maintain in areas where it would apply).

New requirement for Forest Integrity. Town must identify highest priority forest blocks. State wants to see that these areas will be maintained for habitat and connectivity and is working on guidance documents and maps of the areas. The Town Plan must have policies in place that will prevent adverse impacts to those areas.

Will need to update the general data and maps in the Plan. Discussed need for help in research and acquisition of data and statistics, for which the Planning Commission does not have staff at this time. CVRPC will help with some of the data updates and can offer mapping. The Plan is in good shape to meet statutory requirements. If there are studies that could contribute to the Plan, the Planning Commission might consider incorporating them by reference to make the document more user-friendly. CVRPC can review each section as we draft it.

b. Municipal Planning Grant application:

Decide what to focus on. Updating the Plan can be the primary focus. Can also target certain areas of the Plan. A grant over \$8,000 requires a town match of 33% of the overage. For discussion purposes, Vorwald provided a sample scope of work based on a grant that town of Warren obtained. For example, Northfield could have a consultant do an analysis of current and future land use and maps, and a subsequent infrastructure plan and capital budget for those infrastructure needs could be based on that. Could also analyze needs for a goal such as economic development and housing in certain areas. The consultant could look at critical areas of focus, and then look at the rest of the Plan to ensure it meets statute.

Commissioners voiced support for getting input for the Plan from community members and groups. The granting agency encourages obtaining community input.

Ruttenberg moved that the Planning Commission apply for a planning grant. Rhodes seconded. Discussion as to how to draft the grant. Deadline is Oct 2. Grant application would have to be approved by the Select Board. Ruttenberg, Brown, Hill-Eubanks offered to work on the grant application and forward to the Planning Commission and the town for finalizing. Vote 5-0-0 to draft application.

VI. Amendment to zoning regulations:

Discussion regarding additional changes made to the zoning regulations that have not yet been incorporated into the final regulations. The changes include removal of the size limit on accessory dwelling units. Supplee provided a memorandum on the issues involved. Zoning Administrator Hatch asked that the Planning Commission incorporate those changes into the zoning regulations. Hill-Eubanks explained that the process for finalizing those changes to the zoning regulations must meet certain requirements under state statute and this needs to be resolved before further action can be taken.

VII. Work on updating Town Plan

a. Progress reports: time did not allow for this discussion item

b. Assign Town Plan chapters and develop draft work calendar: Discussed assigning each chapter of the Town Plan to one or more of the Commissioners, who will be responsible for the updates to those chapters. Commissioners will seek input from groups and individuals with knowledge and interest in each chapter's focus areas. Rhodes will work on Economy; Ruttenberg will work on Community Facilities; Brown is interested in PUD/PRD issues, which may be included in Land Use and other areas; Hill-Eubanks is interested in working on Natural Resources and Land Use. Assignments to be completed and finalized by the next meeting.

c. Continue Town Plan update: time did not allow for this discussion item

VIII. Other Business: Carolyn Stevens asked how groups such as the NCDN (Northfield Community Development Network) could most effectively provide input to the Town Plan update process. The NCDN is especially interested in the Economy and Housing chapters. It was suggested that the group review the Town Plan and suggest changes or language that they would like to see in the Plan. The group will also attend the Planning Commission meetings at which the chapters that they are especially interested in will be reviewed by the Planning Commission. These would include Economy and Housing.

IX. Next Regular Meeting: September 18, 2017

X. Adjournment: Motion to adjourn made at 9:13 PM. Motion carried 5-0-0

These minutes are subject to changes and approval at the next regular meeting, but are substantially correct