

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of October 1, 2024**

**6:30 pm at Brown Public Library Community Room
(also available remotely via Town Zoom Account)**

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm by Chair Royal DeLegge.

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Planning Commission members Royal DeLegge, Julie Lappin, and Elroy Hill. Also present were Clerk Mitch Osiecki; Jeremy Whalen, Conservation Commission and Town Forest Stewardship Committee; and residents Suz Sillinger, Gerard Lavanway, and Nancy Lavanway.

The Planning Commission members and Clerk were present at the Community Room. The guests attended remotely via Zoom.

Adjustments to Agenda: Discussion of possible road closures. Added after item VI – Discussion of Protecting Town Forest from Development.

Minutes: Approval of minutes of Sep 3. Julie Lappin moved to approve. Elroy Hill seconded.

Discussion: Royal noted a minor typo on page 2 – Mitch will correct.

Vote to approve, with edit. 3-0.

Public Participation: Discussion of protection of the Town Forest.

Royal welcomed the guests and shared research done by the PC on the topic. There are three approaches:

1. Change the current zoning district designation;
2. Place the Town Forest under a Conservation Easement;
3. Add an Overlay District.

Jeremy thanked the PC for engaging with the Conservation Commission and Town Forest Stewardship Committee on this matter. Jeremy shared some zoning history, noting that the Town Forest was formerly a separate zoning district.

In addition to the Town Forest, there is a second parcel of the same usage type as the Town Forest. This parcel is known as Dustin's Pasture and the hope is that similar conservation protections can also be extended to this property.

Royal offered a brief summary of the tradeoffs involved with the various approaches.

- Specific Zoning District – relatively easy to create and adjust;
- Conservation Easement – difficult to adjust or undo;

- Overlay District --- provides for a “happy medium” in that it can provide good development protection, but can be adjusted as town needs evolve.

Comment from Gerard Lavanway: Noted that town residents have consistently spoken in favor of protecting the Town Forest from development and he appreciates the PC’s willingness to pursue this goal.

Comment from Nancy Lavanway: Also supports protecting the Town Forest. Asked whether such protection would allow for forestry and/or hunting? Could such protections be extended to the neighboring Shaw Outdoor Center of Norwich University.

Royal responded that those are the sorts of details that will need to be worked through.

Jeremy suggested establishing a “working group” of PC, CC, and TFSC members to flesh out a path forward. Royal asked Mitch to serve as a liaison between the groups and help establish our working group.

Royal thanked the guests for their interest in this project.

New Business

Mitch shared with the PC that Norwich University has proposed that the Town discontinue two Class 3 Town Roads (Park Avenue and University Drive) to facilitate the construction of a new academic building – the Cyber Fusion Center.

The Select Board has scheduled a Site Visit of the area on Tuesday, October 22. The matter will be discussed at the Select Board Meeting on the same date. Additional information will be passed along to the PC as the project advances.

Other Business

CVRPC Update

Royal shared updates from the CVRPC:

- The CVRPC responded to a complaint alleging a violation of the state’s Open Meeting Law. After discussion, the CVRPC determined that no violation had occurred.
- There was further discussion of the readoption of the Regional Plan, including an amendment to plug what is perceived to be a loophole in the current plan.
- GMT is discussing possible cuts in service due to loss of federal funding. Also considering shifting to an alternate provider to make up for loss of service in Washington County. GMT focuses largely on Chittenden County, which is its primary service area. CVRPC is concerned about reduction of service in Washington County.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, Nov 5 at 6:30 pm.

Adjournment: Julie Lappin made a motion to adjourn; Elroy Hill seconded.

Motion carried, 3-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.