

WAITSFIELD PLANNING COMMISSION

draftMeeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

- 1. CALL TO ORDER:** Steve Shea called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm at the Waitsfield Town Office.
MEMBERS PRESENT: Steve Shea (Chair), Peter Lazorchak, Ted Tremper, Russ Bennett, Hadley Gaylord Jr., and Drew Simmons. A quorum was present.
MEMBERS ABSENT: Kari Dolan
STAFF PRESENT: Vickie Trihy.
OTHERS PRESENT: Jens Hilke, Jamey Fidel, Phil Huffman, Ted Joslin, Elizabeth Cadwell, Leo Laferriere, Spencer Potter, Bill Maclay, Kara Herlihy (Valley Reporter), Alex Maclay (MRVTV).

2. FOREST WILDLIFE COMMUNITIES PROJECT

Jens Hilke of the Agency of Natural Resources Department of Fish and Wildlife showed slides outlining the resources the ANR can provide to the town and the town can make available to residents about identifying and protecting wildlife habitat. He noted that a natural resources inventory recently compiled by Arrowwood Environmental would be a useful tool and reference in updating the Town Plan's policies regarding natural resources.

The goal is not to emphasize regulation or prevent development, but to educate towns and individual landowners as to how development can be done with the most minimal adverse impact on wildlife. One major focus of the project is maintaining connectivity between suitable habitats, which can be accomplished by designing bridges, roads, and culverts that facilitate rather than interfere with connectivity.

Public awareness of the various wildlife communities can be enhanced by making maps available and helping people interpret them. The Town Plan update process can include sharing the newest information and formulating policies that reflect the town's priorities with regard to wildlife communities. The Town Plan can also include maps of specific wildlife communities, which can also be referenced in the zoning bylaws.

Jamey Fidel, a member of the project's steering committee, outlined the strategies the project has identified:

- Landowner outreach
- Dissemination of information via packets, web page, farmers' market display, cable program, demo projects
- Coordination with conservation committees
- Providing maps
- Technical assistance for interpreting maps in connection with development review and planning
- Outreach to septic engineers and realtors regarding mindful development for minimal impact

- Promoting conservation through easements
- Outreach through schools
- Coordination with energy planning, transportation planning

Jamey advised the board to use clear definitions and standards when implementing protective policies in the Town Plan and bylaws, stating as specifically as possible what the town wants to protect, referencing the wildlife inventory maps, and specifying what measures are to be taken.

A question and answer session followed the presentation. Drew Simmons asked if there were changes since 2005 with regard to natural resources that the presenters thought should be considered in the Town Plan update. Jens replied that the Mad River Valley's designation as a scenic byway was an opportunity to link protection of scenic views with preserving connectivity among habitats in the scenic corridor, and funding for protections of natural resources is available through the scenic byway program.

It was suggested that the PC weave the wildlife inventory data into the Town Plan, and prioritize protection of specific natural communities. Jamey recommended that the town adopt a more comprehensive approach to conservation, with more emphasis on non-regulatory actions that can be implemented. He suggested posting resource maps prominently in the town office, and providing natural resource information with permit applications.

Phil Huffman commented that the point seems to be to think of ourselves as a valley, a watershed, not just a town, and coordinate our efforts with neighboring towns to achieve some consistency.

Jens and Jamey are willing to help the PC conceptualize a plan and review draft language for the Town Plan and bylaws. Jens can help us create maps of whatever the town decides it wants to protect.

3. LIMITED BUSINESS DISTRICT ZONING—It was agreed to schedule a site visit for Thursday, Nov. 18th at 7:45.

4. OTHER BOARDS—Steve and Peter appeared before the Selectboard on Nov. 2nd to explain the proposed Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay District (AROD) amendment. The Selectboard will need time to read and digest the amendment and ask questions before they can schedule a hearing. One question asked by the Selectboard at their meeting was why the proposed amendment, which expands options for some nonconforming uses, was only being offered in the former Commercial Lodging District and not north of town. The response of some people at the Planning Commission meeting was that trying to implement a similar scenario north of town would be more complicated, given that the nonconforming uses that exist north of town have little in common with one another, unlike the former lodging establishments south of town that will qualify for the AROD.

5. OTHER BUSINESS—The board received notice from the Public Service Board of a proposed solar installation at Bill Maclay's office being reviewed by the PSB. The town is not authorized to regulate renewable energy installations that feed into the grid, but planning

commissions are notified in case they have concerns that they want the PSB to consider. Bill Maclay answered questions about the installation, which was reviewed by the DRB due to its location in the floodplain, and the Planning Commission determined that that review was sufficient.

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES. The board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of Oct. 20th and Nov. 3rd.

7. UPCOMING MEETINGS—There was discussion of the plan to have members make recommendations on Dec. 1st regarding their assigned chapters of the Town Plan. It was agreed to check in with Brandy Saxton regarding when she will be providing updated data for the chapters. The board would like to see the data in graph form, showing progression from 2005 to 2010, rather than just a new set of numbers. It was agreed that this time around the tasks noted in the plan should be more specific and weighted according to priority.

8. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.