

**Minutes for Town of Pawlet Planning Commission  
Pawlet Town Office, Pawlet, VT  
Monday, April 28, 2014 at 7:30 p.m.**

**Members in Attendance:**

Wayne Clarke  
Lenny Gibson  
Gary Baierlein  
Eric Mach  
John Thrasher  
Harry van Meter

**Members Not in Attendance:**

Fred Stone

**Others in Attendance:**

Kathy Stephens  
Monica and Martin Kravitt  
Frank Nelson  
Hilary Solomon, PMNRCD  
Bob Morlino, Pawlet EMD, Health Officer  
Philip Ackermann-Leist  
Kathy Doyle, Clerk

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**Item 1: Approval of Minutes, March 2014**

The March minutes were accepted as written with the following change: Frank Nelson was not in attendance and he is not a member.

**Item 2: Comments from the Audience**

Monica and Martin Kravitt spoke about their efforts to restore an old orchard on Rupert Mountain Road. They are exploring the possibility of operating a distillery. They stated they understand that they would be exempt from filing an Act 250 permit as a large amount of water will not be required and because their project is agricultural. John Thrasher said any application would go to the Pawlet Development Review Board (DRB). John mentioned that a focus of the Planning Commission is to beef up the agricultural and agri-business section of the town plan. Lenny asked if the project is a home business would it need to go to DRB. Eric said that agricultural related industry is a conditional use so the application does go to the DRB. The Kravitts said they are not planning on new buildings.

In response to a question about when the town plan would be finalized, John stated that the goal is to complete the plan by August 2015 and for it to be adopted by November 2015. John noted that the Planning Commission just finished rewriting the Unified Bylaws which is the document that directly impacts zoning.

**Item 3: Zoning Administrator Report**

Eric reported that he received an application from Kathy Stephenson for a store in West Pawlet. He noted that the application will go to the DRB as a conditional use. The store would be located across from old school. Kathy Stephenson noted that it will be a general country store.

Eric said he spoke to the town treasurer. There is a couple thousand dollars left over in the budget which added to this year's budget amounts to \$3 - 4, 000 that could be used toward the rewrite of the Town plan. Eric would be willing to apply for a municipal planning grant.

**Item 4: New Business -- Hilary Solomon of Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District re: water quality issues.**

John stated that he believes water quality will be a major issue facing Pawlet for the next 5 - 10 years and thus the town is looking for direction on how to improve the town plan in addressing water quality.

Hilary Solomon noted that Fred Stone pulled out several sections of the town plan for her to look at. Hilary mentioned that the section on water quality in the introduction is "fairly vague" and she suggested that more information could be included to describe the condition of various streams in town based on chemical and geomorphic data. She referred to a section on page 39 about sewage which references a report by Dufresne and Henry. Hilary noted that she learned that folks from the State are planning to do an illicit discharge study of Flower Brook which will determine if detergent is in brook. The procedure involves flushing dye down toilets to see if a source can be pinpointed. Hilary suggested that a committee on wastewater issues might be convened which could involve state as well as local interests.

John replied that, if the state is to do a study, he will talk to the Select board about the issue. He noted that a focus of the town plan is safe potable water for everyone.

Hilary discussed the Natural and Scenic Resources section of the plan which describes various areas including the "North Pawlet Hills" and "The Pattern" which are of state and local significance. Hilary recommended that the plan might address these areas in more detail. She noted that Jens Hilke, Community Wildlife Program, VT Department of Fish and Wildlife helps towns examine wetland resources, wildlife habitat, threatened and endangered species to help the town figure out which areas the town values and why. Hilary provided a handout about the community wildlife program. Hilary noted that it would be good to map state and locally significant natural communities in town. John agreed that it would be a good idea to work with Jens Hilke and asked if Hilary would email him the contact information for Jens Hilke. Hilary also noted that Millie Archer, Vermont League of Cities and Towns is a water quality specialist who can provide information on model ordinances. John said the Planning Commission would reach out to Millie.

John commented that it would be helpful to get an inventory of what important resources exist in town -- for example what rivers are impacted and which are in good shape -- to help identify goals for 5 - 10 years. Hilary agreed to provide more information. John Thrasher stated that the town is trying to promote growth in the villages. Hilary said that VLCT has a section on low impact development.

Wayne asked if the State helps replace weeds along riparian buffers. Hilary replied that funding through the farm bill will pay a portion of the cost of native trees and shrubs and the US Fish and Wildlife Department will also contribute additional funding. If a project meets the criteria, 90% of the cost of a project can be covered. She continued that if land is not in agriculture, then the PMNRCD can help create a buffer along riparian zones. The District looks at the soil type and provides a list of appropriate native plants to plant that match the natural community type.

Martin Kravitt commented about erosion from Rupert Mountain Road into the brook that feeds the Mettowee River and asked if there is an organization that can help replant steep slopes. John noted that there are Better Back Roads grants to help minimize run off. Hilary said the town could submit a Better Back Roads grant, but that anyone could write the grant.

Harry asked about potable water. Hilary suggested that the town might consult with the health department. John suggested that Millie Archer might help with potable water issues.

Wayne commented that Lake Champlain was being used as measure of pollution. Hilary noted that the modeling that has been done has shown that agriculture is a significant contributor to pollution in the lake in addition to runoff from developed land. While development provides more phosphorous per acre, the total contribution from agricultural land is greater.

John thanked Hilary for her information and Hilary agreed to provide more details on the water quality and condition of each waterway. Hilary also agreed to attend the next meeting to provide information on a grant to work with landowners regarding water quality issues and would send information ahead of time.

Eric introduced Bob Morlino. Bob agreed to serve as a contact for information about emergency management. Bob asked if there was a section on emergency services in the plan. John said they would like to include information on emergency services and said the town might call on him to improve that section of the plan.

John Thrasher asked if Philip Ackerman-Leist might speak about agricultural issues. John noted that the town has heard from conservation organizations that while the town is heavily conserved, the town plan lacks information on why agriculture is important to the community. John noted that the commission wants to make sure that information included in the plan reflects the town's concerns. John asked Philip for insight in terms of agricultural benefits that the town has and what might be included in the plan.

Philip said he was happy to share perspectives as he has been studying local food systems. Philip provided a list of things that can be done to support local agriculture including: support existing farms; diversify the types of agriculture; minimize barriers to new farmers; diversify infrastructure including processing and distribution; promote agricultural tourism which includes promoting the heritage of local food; and address forestry in addition to farm products, including a focus on value added forest products.

John asked about the future of small scale versus large scale farming in Pawlet; he noted that it seems like new endeavors in town are smaller in scale, while historically Pawlet has been focused on dairy. Philip replied that the more diverse the agricultural economy the better as the agricultural infrastructure would collapse if dairy was not around. He stated that dairy is important to vegetable farmers.

John asked what should be done about large conserved parcels if there is a need to not just focus on promoting large dairy. Eric asked if large conserved parcels could be broken up into smaller parcels or if cooperatives could be established. Monica Kravitt asked if large parcels could be leased out to other farmers. John said that his experience with the Vermont Land Trust is that there is a prohibition of any subdivision of parcels with easements. It was noted that in Washington County NY, subdivision of easements has been allowed if the land was sold to another agricultural entity. Martin Kravitt noted that another model is several farmers coming together to form a corporation where several families operate diversified farms on a parcel of land.

John asked Philip if he would be willing to review the plan and provide information on the agricultural sections of the plan and Philip agreed.

#### **Item 5: Old Business**

Wayne said he went through handouts provided from Vermont Planning Information Center (VPIC). He said the PC should read chapters 2 and 6 which discusses things the town must pay attention to in the

town plan. He said that the information he read says the town plan is supposed to provide specific enough information and also specifies that the town should use committees. Wayne said "if we want something that can be acted upon, we need more specificity". John said that he understands that there are 10 elements that must be included in the plan. He stated, "My perspective is summed up by section 2.3" and that the town plan is supposed to be a long term guide. He noted that many plans recommend further studies. John said while it is important for the town plan to state that agriculture is important and that the diversification of agriculture is a goal "in my opinion we don't need to determine the specifics" in the plan. John said committees can be important in assisting the board in writing different sections of the plan. John stated that the PC might form a committee of agriculture specialists to recommend language to include in the plan, but he feels the purpose of the town plan is not to come up with solutions. John commented that he feels the purpose of the plan is to provide a snapshot of what is there now and where the town wants to be in the future. He expressed the opinion that he does not think the town plan should focus on forming committees to solve problems. Wayne called attention to page 34 where it says items need to be specific and measurable. John commented that the town plan does not come up with a regulation, but rather identifies the issue that should be addressed in future bylaws. Lenny said the town plan can be taken to the Select board meeting to point out what needs to be done. John suggested that Wayne review page 24, Section 2.3 about using the plan. Wayne noted that he would like to bring this issue up again.

Harry raised the issue about submitting a planning grant. John replied that he thinks a planning grant could be worthwhile to help write each section of the plan. Eric said he would want to use the planning grant to help type and edit plan so that it acceptable to the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. John said he thinks the PC might come up with what is important, including goals and objectives for each of the 10 sections. This information could be presented to someone who can put it together in a coherent manner, as well as solicit more input from outside sources.

John acknowledged that Lenny said he would like to reach out to other parties. Lenny said the more you can get a group to talk about things the better, but that takes time. He noted that another thing that can be done is to send out surveys. Wayne said two people could go to a meeting and one person could record information. John said he has no problem reaching out to members of the community, but his personal preference is to invite professionals to give information. John said he feels if people want to come to the PC meetings to give their input they should have the opportunity to present. He said if other members are willing to solicit input, he would encourage others to do that, but feels he does not have time. Lenny said it might be good to invite the business community to come to a specific meeting such as the June meeting.

Harry noted that the Energy group meets next Thursday and that on the agenda is the energy section of town plan. John said he would like the Energy Group's input as renewable energy is a big topic in the next 5 - 10 years. It was decided that the Energy group could come to the May meeting.

Harry asked what the consensus was regarding asking the select board for funding. John said that it was too late as the budget is set.

John suggested for the next meeting that the PC read sections 2 and 6 that Wayne mentioned.

#### **Item 6: Set Agenda for Next Meeting**

Approval of Minutes; Comments from Audience; Zoning Administrator Report; New Business -- Hilary Solomon PMNRCD grant application and Energy Group input on town plan; Old Business -- Discussion VPIC material Sections 2 and 6.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.