

**Minutes for Town of Pawlet Planning Commission
Pawlet Town Office
Pawlet, VT
Monday, May 26, 2014
7:30 p.m.**

Members in Attendance:

**John Thrasher
Wayne Clarke
Lenny Gibson
Eric Mach
Harry van Meter**

Members Not in Attendance

**Fred Stone
Gary Baierlein**

Others in Attendance:

**Sue Laporte, Pawlet Energy Committee
Frank Nelson
Allen Turner
Hilary Solomon, PMNRCD
Kathy Doyle, Clerk**

Item 1: Approval of Minutes, April 2014

Minutes unanimously accepted as written.

Item 2: Comments from the Audience

Frank Nelson asked if genetically modified food (GMOs) might be dealt with in the town plan. John replied that the issue might be addressed in agricultural section which has not been discussed yet.

Item 3: Zoning Administrator Report

Eric Mach reported that he received an application for converting a woodshed to living space on Hickory Hollow Road. John Thrasher mentioned that wastewater may need to be addressed for this project.

Item 4: New Business:

Grant Application

Hilary Solomon (PMNRCD) provided information on a grant she plans to submit to the Ecosystem Restoration Grant Program. The project would address storm water issues and would tie in with the stormwater mapping that the state plans to do this summer in Pawlet. She indicated that the goal of the project would be to remove the "impaired waterway designation" for Flower Brook. She mentioned that most of the funding would be used to pay contractors. The grant is due June 4 and she requested a letter of support. John Thrasher asked if this project is phase 1 of a larger project. Hilary replied that this is two year project to develop a plan to determine what to do to address issues. Hilary stated that

developing such a plan would make obtaining capital dollars easier, but she indicated that she was not sure about how funding for private property would be addressed.

John asked if the board had questions. Wayne asked if the state would contribute all of the funding. Hilary said they would. Eric clarified that Hilary would write the grant and made a motion for the Planning Commission to provide a letter of support. The motion was passed unanimously. John agreed to draft a letter. John stated that while he acknowledged concerns about how the project might impact land owners, he believes creating a plan to address the problem is better than just having the state do water testing and requiring landowners take individual responsibility for correcting issues. John noted that it is beneficial for the PMNRCD to secure funding to address the problem. Wayne asked about potential loans to address issues. Hilary stated that there is a grant fund which provides low interest loans to do work. Hilary mentioned that she planned to attend the Select Board meeting the next day to request a letter of support and that she is also working on the water quality section of the town plan.

Energy Group -- Input on Town Plan

Sue Laporte stated that the Pawlet Energy group meets monthly and that the group will be looking at other town plans as prototypes to help craft the energy section of the Pawlet plan. She passed out handouts describing elements to be included in the Energy section. John asked if PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) might be mentioned in the town plan. Sue stated the PACE program would provide low interest loans from a revolving fund for energy upgrades, but a town would need to vote to become a PACE town. Under the program the annual energy saved would equal the annual cost to the homeowner for the improvements, like a mortgage. Lenny indicated that PACE loans stay with property when it changes hands. He indicated that one typical problem with funding energy improvements is that a home owner often loses money when a house is sold, but under the PACE program, the cost of improvements is passed to a buyer. Sue said that the Energy Committee was looking to get the PACE program on the ballot for next March. Lenny noted that it is cheaper to save energy rather than develop alternative energy. He suggested there be a strong statement in the town plan about energy conservation. Frank said an alternative to the PACE program is to create energy districts and go for bonding, so that everyone might be covered including people who do not qualify for credit. John agreed with Lenny that "energy conservation is a most important component". John stated that the town plan needs to identify what is important to the town and to establish goals to achieve over a 5 - 10 year period. Wayne asked about geothermal energy. John stated that it is important to address the town's position on alternative energy and to indicate in the town plan which types the town favors, as there are likely to be more applications for energy development in the future, so guidance from the energy group is appreciated. There was a discussion of the need for 3 phase power for solar collectors. Harry noted that there is a map showing 3 phase power. Eric stated that he supported wind power and that the development of wind power does not have to be on mountain tops, although other locations would limit the size and scope of projects that might be considered. Lenny mentioned the benefit of distributive generation, namely solar collectors on rooftops but noted there can be issues with older houses lacking the infrastructure. Frank said that it might be a good idea for the town to get a survey to understand the position of the town on various energy sources. Allen Turner suggested that a discussion is more valuable than a survey. Wayne mentioned impacts of wind power including low frequency sound and wildlife concerns, especially impacts on bats and birds. There was a discussion about obtaining information on the energy profile of the town. Wayne suggested that some information might be available from power companies. Lenny noted that corn and hay fields are important to the energy mix of the town when one considers the total input of energy to agricultural operations. He noted that agriculture fields are essentially fields where solar is being collected to grow crops and are also very much a part of the fabric of the town. John noted that Lenny's perspective is broader than is typically considered in the energy section of a town plan.

Other New Business:

John announced that at the Rutland Regional Planning Commission meeting on June 17th, the proposed budget and plan of work would be presented. He also announced the Spring Planning and Zoning Forum on June 4th. Lenny said he was thinking of attending the Forum.

Item 5: Old Business -- Discuss Sections 2 and 6 material from VPIC

Wayne Clarke presented a handout to facilitate a discussion on how much specificity there should be in the town plan. He provided an example illustrating goals, objectives, policy, and programs that he drafted following guidelines from the Vermont Planning Institute. He suggested the board use such a format to develop goals and sub goals. John raised the concern that since there are ten major topics required to cover in the town plan, when an item is addressed with a great deal of specificity other items can not all have a similar degree of specificity. He stated that he would prefer the creation of a bigger picture vision rather than great detail. Harry noted that there could be a compromise. John stated that he fears the town plan might be too long. Harry stated that he feels the current plan is too brief, but agreed you don't want a 400-page plan, but there could be more specificity than the plan has now. Eric state that vagueness is difficult to interpret and it is important to use specific language to give the plan "more teeth". John emphasized that the Planning Commission has no authority to do anything, so he would like to see the plan be more of a vision statement and that it is important to find the right level of specificity. Wayne noted that with the development of more specific goals and budgets the board would have to meet more frequently. Wayne said he would like to see an agreement on the specificity. John said that he was reluctant to make a decision on the specificity because he feels issues should be addressed on a case by case basis.

Wayne suggested that board decide which format to adopt for the town plan. John stated that he preferred keeping all information together for one issue, as he feels this is easier for the reader. There was a discussion about board members taking the lead on writing various sections of the plan. Harry suggested that members look at the required elements for next month's meeting to determine who might volunteer to take the lead on which topic. John agreed to come up with a proposed Table of Contents for the plan.

Item 6: Set Agenda for Next Meeting

Approval of Minutes, May 2014; Comments from the Audience; Zoning Administrator Report; New Business; Old Business -- determine who will take the lead on various sections of the plan; Set Agenda for Next Meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.