

**Minutes for Town of Pawlet Planning Commission  
Pawlet Town Office, Pawlet, VT  
Monday, January 28, 2013 at 7:30 p.m.**

**Members in Attendance:**

**Harry van Meter  
Fred Stone  
Eric Mach  
Wayne Clarke  
Gary Baierlein**

**Members Not in Attendance:**

**John Thrasher**

**Others in Attendance:**

**Frank Nelson  
Elizabeth Gibson  
Barbara O'Connor  
Sally Brown  
Steve Williams  
Bob Schoenemann  
Scott McChesney  
Kathy Doyle (Clerk)**

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**Item 1: Approval of November Minutes** (There was not a quorum at the December meeting, so no minutes were taken). November minutes were unanimously approved as written.

**Item 2: Public Input and Start Work on Town Plan Vision Statement**

Harry began the discussion by handing out a working draft (see below) of a vision statement for the town plan which was suggested by John Thrasher with other thoughts for discussion suggested by Harry.

**TOWN OF PAWLET TOWN PLAN VISION STATEMENT**

“To preserve Pawlet’s historical settlement pattern by encouraging residential and commercial growth in the two existing village centers and promoting a vibrant community both in terms of the social fabric and economic activity as well as the continued use of the outlying lands for agriculture, forestry, recreation and other accepted uses as designated by the Town’s Zoning Regulations.”

Written by John Thrasher  
Chairman, Town of Pawlet Planning Commission

**Additional thoughts**

Some goals to reach for:

- Encourage economic diversity, while maintaining our rural, pastoral landscape
- Maintain strong educational opportunities for our children and adults
- Protect and preserve our natural environment and resources
- Improve the quality of our air and water
- Encourage the efficient use of energy
- Enhance our recreational facilities for both children and adults
- Strengthen our agricultural and forest industries
- Plan for financing of providing safe, energy efficient, and cost effective public services and facilities to meet short and long-term future needs
- Encourage the availability of safe, efficient and adequate housing for town residents

Harry invited the public to provide input on the draft vision statement and goals. A series of questions pertaining to the Unified Bylaws regulating quarries and sand and gravel pits ensued. Eric stated that in the Unified Bylaws quarries and sand and gravel pits are a "permitted use" in the Industrial Zone. He noted that although slate quarries are found in the Industrial Zone, gravel pits are typically found in areas classified as "agriculture and rural residential" where they are a "conditional use" and thus require a permit. In response to questions, Eric commented that he believes gravel pits would need a closure plan and he noted that the Act

250 process would set limitations on conditions such as the hours of gravel pits and restrictions on load size. He clarified that gravel pits require both an Act 250 and town permit if they are a conditional use.

Harry asked if there is an issue regarding gravel pits that the planning commission should consider in the town plan. Barbara O' Connor responded that she wanted to better understand the issue. Elizabeth Gibson asked if there are any gravel pits that are less than 10 acres which therefore would not be covered by the Act 250 process, but instead addressed at the town level. Harry noted that the ten acre restriction is in reference to subdivisions, so all commercial gravel pits would fall under Act 250. Scott asked for clarification regarding whether or not a notice would be posted and abutting owners notified if there was a permit application for a gravel pit. Eric responded that an open meeting would be required and adjacent landowners would be informed. Barbara asked if all gravel pits in town have permits. Eric said they did.

Harry highlighted how the discussion of sand and gravel pits fits into the sections on natural scenic and historic resources in the town plan. He called attention to the first and third bullets on the handout *protect and preserve our natural environment and resources* and *encourage economic diversity, while maintaining our rural, pastoral landscape*.

Eric mentioned that sand and gravel are natural resources that are needed for most construction and that it is important that extraction not be prohibited, but he asserted that the town "wants to do it carefully". Harry added that it is important that sites be restored when gravel pits are closed. Scott noted that while it is difficult to close a quarry, gravel pits can be "fixed" afterwards.

Harry asked for input on the handout. Fred commented that the Board would like to get public feedback on the vision statement to guide the town planning process and he added that at the December meeting there was a discussion about the need for more emphasis on the village of West Pawlet. Fred expressed the opinion that new housing was needed to help pay for the septic system in West Pawlet. Frank Nelson noted that the original lot sizes in West Pawlet were created to accommodate a sewer system and that the current town sewer system is vastly underused and thus there is the potential for more development in West Pawlet. Eric noted that there are a few properties in West Pawlet that are exempt from the town septic. Frank added that previously many houses were multi-family dwellings in West Pawlet and the historic population density was higher. He noted that because of the (shallow depth to) bedrock, the solution was to create a town septic system. Frank asked what the lot size was for a building with 3 apartments and Eric replied that three apartments require 3/4 acre. Eric added that there are many vacant buildings in West Pawlet. Frank noted that the Farmer's Market in the Fish and Game building has helped to generate activity. Scott added that it hurts that there is no store in West Pawlet and that it would be nice to see places near the post office fixed up.

Fred stated that there is nothing in the town plan about how the town will address the quarry the town owns; Fred feels that there should be something in the plan regarding the town vision for the quarry. There was a question about whether or not the town could use crushed slate on the roads in town. Eric said the town uses a lot of slate on town roads, but crushing slate is costly and Gary added that crushed slate can get slimy because of the clay content.

Bob noted that many young people can't find a place that they can afford to purchase in town. Scott stated that many young people are leaving the area and it is important to consider what can be done to attract young people and encourage growth in town center. He noted that the reopening of the Station Restaurant and the West Pawlet Farmer's Market are good for the town. Frank asked about accessible apartments for Senior citizens and others. Harry noted that the issue of accessibility for handicapped and elderly related to the last bullet *encourage the availability of safe, efficient and adequate housing for town residents*.

Elizabeth Gibson expressed the hope the Planning Commission would look at what was included in the previous town plan and address whether or not goals were realized and if not what should be done. She asked about the nature of goals for the plan and Harry replied that the goals and objectives should be long term. Elizabeth felt that it would be important to look back and ask what has worked well and what has not. She asked about the village center designations of the West Pawlet and Pawlet villages. Eric replied that they have both received the state level "village center" designation. Elizabeth noted that there are tax incentives connected with village center designation and said that she feels that the designations should be emphasized for both Pawlet and West Pawlet in the vision statement.

Elizabeth Gibson questioned the language regarding maintaining "*historical*" settlement patterns in the draft vision statement, noting that if the town keeps building where it has in the past, buildings will be flooded. She would like to see the town plan take into account future flooding and stated that if not West Pawlet, the Pawlet village center is vulnerable to flooding. She stated that it is important to look at flood mitigation programs like wetland preservation as the Pawlet Village Center is where two rivers intersect. Harry mentioned that the issue of flood mitigation is addressed in the Unified Bylaws. Elizabeth suggested tweaking the language about "historic settlement patterns." Harry highlighted the difficulty in getting a zoning permit along Flower Brook due to floodplain regulations. Elizabeth noted that beyond zoning regulations, there are programs, grants, funding, and easements that she hoped the Planning Commission would pursue. She mentioned the resources of the volunteer organization Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions which could aid the town in achieving goals and undertaking initiatives. In regard to energy efficiency, Elizabeth stated that Pawlet should be part of PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) that offers energy efficiency incentives. She said that she hoped the town would recommend this issue be brought to the voters. Harry stated that the PACE program had been discussed in the energy group meetings.

Elizabeth expressed hope that the Planning Commission would look at what is good in the old town plan and work toward improving citizen participation at the community level. She noted that she would like to see more young people involved and that she thought it was good that there were young people farming in town. She stated that revitalizing agriculture is important.

Bob highlighted the fact that flood insurance has gone up and that the cost of flood insurance for a house in the flood plain in Middletown Springs costs over \$3000 per year. Scott asked about houses that are abandoned in the flood plain and associated safety issues and lower property values. Harry mentioned that there may be some opportunities to generate income salvaging post and beam properties. Eric stated that the town could take over properties if taxes are not paid. Harry said he was not sure what jurisdiction the Planning Commission has over derelict properties.

Fred noted that Elizabeth brought up the issue of small farms. Fred stated that no subdivision of farms is allowed for all the Vermont Land Trust properties in Pawlet. He stated that a lot of farms are not viable for dairy, but are more economically viable as small farms. He asked "should we wholeheartedly stand behind the land trust" if the town wants to encourage smaller 20 - 30 acre farms. Fred asserted that we need to strengthen the language to protect farm land, but it is important to not overprotect as smaller farms may be more viable. Bob suggested that there might be something in the zoning to promote smaller lots. Scott stated that it is key that land stays in agriculture. He asked could there be provisions for farm land to be divided into smaller farming units? Fred stated that it would have to be in the town plan that the town wants small agriculture as well as larger farms. Scott suggested that the planning commission address the objective with the Vermont Land Trust of supporting smaller farms.

Eric made a motion to tweak the vision statement regarding "historical settlement patterns". The motion was seconded and the motion carried.

**Item 3: Other Comments from Audience**

None

**Item 4: Zoning Administrator Report**

Eric reported that a permit application was submitted for the construction of a woodshed. The permit was issued. Eric will attend an upcoming workshop on Better Building by Design. He will report to the board on what he learns.

**Item 5: New Business**

Barbara O'Connor asked what happens to unlicensed cars. Eric said if there is a problem, the street address should be given to him.

Harry stated that two new layers provided by the Rutland Regional Planning Commission had been added to the town GIS (Geographic Information System): street light layer and a layer showing where 3 phase power is available. He noted that solar farms would need proximity to three phase power. Harry noted that he thinks the Pawlet GIS is well done and easy to use. One can go into the town website ([pawlet.vt.gov](http://pawlet.vt.gov)) and go into the mapping program and call up property boundary and get a lot of information.

**Item 6: Set Agenda for Next Meeting, February 24, 2014.**

Agenda will include: 1) Approval of minutes for the January meeting; 2) Public Input and complete work on Town Plan Vision Statement; 3) Zoning Administrator's Report; 4) New Business; 5) Old Business; 6) Set Agenda for next meeting.

Eric made a motion to close the meeting which was seconded and accepted unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Kathy Doyle, Clerk.