



**Minutes for Town of Pawlet Planning Commission
Pawlet Town Office
Pawlet, VT
Monday, March 23, 2015
6:30 p.m.**

Members in Attendance:

**Gary Baierlein
Paul Elsholz
Wayne Clarke
Lenny Gibson
Eric Mach
Fred Stone
Harry Van Meter**

Others in Attendance:

**Barbara Noyes Pulling,
Rutland Regional Planning Commission
Tom Atkins, West Pawlet
Marlee Mason, Pawlet
Keith Mason, Pawlet
James Dunn, Pawlet
Anne Maiello, Pawlet
Edgar Cleveland, Pawlet
Sally Cleveland, Pawlet
Timothy Hughes-Muse, Pawlet
Nancy Morlino, Pawlet
Bob Morlino, Pawlet
Scott McChesney, Pawlet
Frank Nelson, West Pawlet
Elizabeth Gibson, Pawlet**

Item 1: Public Forum on Planning Survey Results

Eric called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. and welcomed the members of the public who had come for the public forum.

Survey Introduction: Barbara Noyes-Pulling introduced herself to the audience and presented the five town maps that are included in the Town Plan. She explained the process for revising the town plan and discussed some of the preliminary results from the survey conducted earlier in March:

- Farming and agriculture have significant importance for Pawlet's future and protecting farms and farm land was by far the most important in all ranking choices.
- Volunteer activities make a significant difference. The extent to which the Town relies on volunteers should be part of the Town Plan.
- Renewable energy projects are probably going to be controversial, especially siting considerations, the role of the Town vs. the Public Service Board. Land use issues will predominate.

General discussion: The following discussion included questions from the audience and comments from the PPC members.

Nancy Morlino asked about the timeline for the Town Plan. Eric Mach talked about the schedule and said that the Town Plan needed to be completed by September and approved by the Select Board and Rutland Regional Planning Commission in October.

Bob Morlino wanted to know if there would be a section on emergency services, and it was agreed that there should be more on emergency services and hazard mitigation.

Paul Elsholz said that the Town Plan should address the issue of drones. He asked how others felt about drones and whether they served any emergency management purposes. Bob Morlino said that in larger cities they do, especially for dealing with forest fires and firefighting. In the case of Pawlet Bob did not see any large role that drones could play for emergency services.

Ed Cleveland brought up a concern regarding installation of fiber optics. If the power is out for a certain number of hours and you don't have cell service, then you don't have any phone service at all. Bob Morlino commented that the Town Plan needed to insist on cell service for town for emergency purposes. Discussion ensued regarding cell service for town; general consensus that phone service will be an issue with power outages.

Wayne Clarke brought up the issue of drinking water. People who depend on wells for water need power, some kind of emergency power during outages. A serious health problem, too.

Preliminary summary of survey results: Lenny Gibson summarized the survey results and prefaced his remarks by saying that this survey was not randomized or scientific but rather more like the Senator Doyle survey that voters had filled out recently when exiting the polls at town elections.

- Regarding the *growth rate of Pawlet*, has Pawlet become financially unlivable? People are moving out. Scott McChesney pointed out that there are few jobs here to attract new people. How can we create more jobs/cottage industries and encourage economic development? Lenny said that census data shows Pawlet was the only town in Rutland County that grew in recent years.
- Survey respondents said that the town should encourage *affordable housing for young families*. Change in Statute 117 means that a house can be converted to apartments and that additional dwellings can be built on one property. How would people know this? Scott and Eric pointed out that septic regulations are strict and might limit this. Keith said that septic is not a consideration in West Pawlet. Scott asked whether it's possible to partner with Habitat for Humanity to construct affordable housing, assuming the land is available. Extended discussion regarding affordable housing. Wayne talked about the need to encourage starter homes and asked about the feasibility of clusters of starter homes to meet acreage rules. Eric mentioned the empty apartments in West Pawlet; maybe some of those old places could be renovated. Does Habitat for Humanity do rehabs? Tim Hughes-Muse pointed out that we need jobs in order for people to move here. Scott said there are more affordable houses in Rupert and that interest rates are low, so the housing may not be as much a limited factor compared to jobs.
- Regarding *housing for elderly*, there is less available in town compared to 10 years ago but generally that situation is favorable, perhaps because older people tend to own their

properties. Wayne questioned where the elderly of Pawlet are going to end up when they can't stay in their homes anymore. Marlee talked about adult family care homes – when families can take in an elderly person and be reimbursed by the State for doing so.

- *Education spending*: we should spend a little less on education. This is a school board issue.
- Pawlet should probably *encourage artists, crafts people and other entrepreneurs*; slightly stronger encouragement compared to last survey for 2005 Town Plan. Anne Maiello said that we need more “pop up shops” in town. Lots of unused space in village centers. Wayne mentioned such events as Art on the Green and possibly an October Fest on the Green. Anne pointed out that many artists and entrepreneurs have to leave the state to earn income. How can we encourage tourism so people will pay artists what they need to live on? Wayne said that we need magnets in the village centers, like restaurants, brewery. Scott agreed, saying that having Mach's brewery, the Station, Barn open during the day will generally increase the flow of people through town. Ed pointed out that even a marijuana dispensary could happen here at some point.
- *Farming and agriculture*: even more encouragement in this survey compared to 2005. Craft food industry is a factor here. Tim Hughes-Muse talked about his experience operating a sweet potato farm in Pawlet; he said that their farm had been expanding but there is not enough local demand or agri-tourism so they have to ship out. Hard to make a go of it in this part of Vermont. Beef may be taking off in Pawlet; it's trucked out, also, but we grow good grass in Pawlet and there are mobile slaughter units now. Other types of agricultural production: sheep farming, maple syrup.
- *Volunteer activities*: rated even higher this time.
- *Ranking of items*: 40% said that protecting farms and farmlands was most important. This was by far the most important choice.
- Lenny talked about the *demographics* of the survey: household size has declined. Another big change is an increase in digital awareness – more than 80% of the respondents said that they use email.
- Pawlet should definitely develop policies concerning *renewable energy technologies*.

Nancy Morlino asked if any nonresidential landowners replied to the survey. Reply: probably less of them, maybe none. The planning commission should look at the census data. Nancy said that second home families really appreciate the “farmscape” here.

Ed brought up water quality issues. Farmers don't have a clue about this. Water quality, Lake Champlain – these are huge issues. Discussion regarding phosphorous, organic fertilizers, lake pollutants. Extensive phosphorous discussion.

Tim Hughes-Muse wanted to know the PPC's position on conserving farmland. Eric said that a lot of land is already conserved via the Nature Conservancy and Vermont Land Trust. Don't want to conserve so much that there is not enough room for development. Wayne commented that we need to conserve farmland to keep Pawlet “Pawlet.” Otherwise, as in the case of Virginia, we will just have a patchwork of development.

Discussion regarding water quality of Flower Brook and upcoming study this summer to look at potentially problematic septic systems in Pawlet Village Center. Bob Morlino mentioned that the water quality of Flower Brook has improved as a result of changes in farming practices. Frank Nelson spoke to increased water temperature problems, global warming.

Suggest further public comments on planning process could be posted to town website and Eric encouraged more comments at next meeting on April 27.

Summary of forum discussion: Barbara noted the strong agricultural connection in Pawlet. Eric said that we need a stronger agricultural discussion in the land use section of the Town Plan and we know now that we have the support of the town. Lenny commented that if the Town Plan has strong language regarding agriculture, then in an Act 250 process agricultural use has to be considered. This should be emphasized in the Town Plan because commercial development is the biggest threat to agriculture. The Public Service Board has to consider the Town Plan when determining whether to issue a Certificate of Public Good.

Item 2. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting

The commission reviewed the minutes from the February 23, 2015 meeting. Lenny made a motion to approve the minutes as written, Harry seconded, passed.

Item 3. Zoning Administrator Report

Eric, as Zoning Administrator, reported that Tim Hughes-Muse had notified the Town that he's planning to build a shed to wash and store sweet potatoes, but since this is agricultural use no permit is required. He simply needs to notify the town and the Listers know about it.

Item 4. New Business

Harry Van Meter wants the PPC to consider amending the zoning bylaws to be more restrictive with regard to siting of solar panels.

PPC is still looking for a clerk. Position pays \$500/year.

Item 5. Set Agenda for Next Meeting – April 27, 2015.

Approve agenda with any changes; approve minutes of March meeting; community forum and other audience comments; zoning administrator report; town plan sections on flood resilience, survey and forum, new business; agenda for next meeting. (Note that town plan sections on energy and economic development are now scheduled for May meeting.)

Harry moved to adjourn at 9 p.m., Lenny seconded. All agreed.

Respectfully submitted by Elizabeth Gibson, Acting Clerk