

**Minutes for Town of Pawlet Planning Commission
Pawlet Town Office, Pawlet, VT
Monday, March 24, 2013 at 7:30 p.m.**

Members in Attendance:

Wayne Clarke
Fred Stone
Gary Baierlein
Eric Mach
John Thrasher
Frank Nelson
Lenny Gibson

Members Not in Attendance:

Harry van Meter

Others in Attendance:

Keith Mason
Paul Elsholz
Kathy Doyle (Clerk)

Item 1: Approval of Minutes, February 2014

Motion made to accept minutes as written. Motion seconded and passed unanimously.

Item 2: Comments from Audience

No comments.

Item 3: Zoning Administrator Report

No permit applications to report.

Item 4: New Business

Eric Mach wished to go on record to respond to recent social media about the Unified Bylaws. He feels that "the document is a good one, and while it might not be perfect, it will carry us through for next few years until we need to make changes again". He emphasized that the Planning Commission tries to get public input. Wayne encouraged people to come to meetings to voice opinions. John reiterated that the planning commission extends an invitation to folks to participate and noted that the meetings are open.

John announced grants available for planning including the Orton Family Foundation and CIRD (Citizen's Institute for Rural Design) which helps rural communities < 50,000 people enhance quality of life through planning. John noted that a Municipal Planning Day will be held on March 31 and if folks want to attend, they should talk to Deb Hawkins to see if town would pay registration fee.

John welcomed Lenny Gibson as a new member taking over the seat vacated by Karl Eberth. Fred moved to reinstate current officers. It was noted that a new secretary was needed to replace Karl. Lenny Gibson indicated an interest in serving as secretary. Fred moved that the following slate of officers be approved: John Thrasher as Chair, Harry van Meter as Vice Chair and Lenny Gibson as secretary. Gary seconded and the motion was passed unanimously. John asked if there were any objections to establishing the fourth Monday of the month as the regular meeting time. There were no objections and no other organizational issues to attend to.

Item 5: Old Business

John asked Keith Mason, Road Foreman, about road issues to address in the town plan. Keith noted that the "Complete Streets Program" incorporates roads into town planning, but he noted that Pawlet is not highly impacted by this as the town doesn't have athletic facilities, kids walking to school or bike routes. Eric said that any new development will need to incorporate "Complete Streets". Keith said this would mainly involve widening shoulders to provide more room for walkers, joggers and bikers. Eric asked if there were any plans to pave Rupert Pawlet Road, Keith said it is a Class 3 road now and it could only be changed to a Class 2 road if it were designated as a major connector and carried more traffic. Keith said he does not foresee the road being black topped as the town would have to pay for it since it is a Class 3 Road and no grants or state assistance is available.

John said there is pressure to promote growth in village centers outside of the flood plain. He noted that in West Pawlet the roads are narrow and parking is an issue. Keith agreed that there is not a lot of room there and upgrades could be part of the "Complete Streets Program". He noted that the town has talked about applying for a Vtrans grant to redo sidewalks in West Pawlet because when the State put in a wastewater treatment plant, the sidewalks were disrupted and so now there is a mix of slate sidewalks and black top. He noted that slate is not a good surface for sidewalks.

John asked Keith to identify priorities in the town transportation system. Keith said it was a priority to improve heavily used roads. He said there is substantially more traffic than 15 yrs ago. He noted that Rupert Mountain Road and Herrick Road get more traffic and the town is not keeping up with maintenance due to increased use. He noted that the town needs to look at maintaining the whole right of way. He stated that Pawlet fared well compared to surrounding towns during tropical storm Irene. Keith said brush cutting is an issue and the town needs a plan to get it cut back along right of ways. John said there is a big push for bike paths on Route 30 and asked if the Town Plan should focus on this. Keith said he did not anticipate bike paths in town and does not foresee that "Complete Streets" will impact the town significantly in the near future. Eric asked if Keith would be willing to review the transportation section of the plan and Keith agreed..

John asked if anyone had comments or concerns on the first section of the existing town plan. Fred said he had a concern on page 5 about major highways. Fred thought it should be noted that Pawlet is about half way between Middlebury and Bennington on the Seth Warner Memorial Highway. Wayne said he could ask the Historical Society to write something about the historical significance of Route 30. Eric noted that in other plans there is an extensive history section. Lenny suggested adding an objective on page 3 about long range planning vis a vis floods and other natural disasters. Eric said that is part of statute and needs to be there. Eric will look at Vermont Statutes online.

Lenny indicated that the bottom of page 3 should be changed to say "undertake new studies" as there are no "ongoing studies". John wondered if "update land use regulations and controls" should not be number one on the list of goals. Lenny suggested that capital improvements of infrastructure are most important and most neglected goal.

John said he thinks the town will focus a lot on how water quality can be improved given existing uses. Lenny noted that he thinks the utilities and facilities section needs more attention and that is where the town might address water and sewage issues. Fred said that he contacted Hilary Solomon and she will come to the next meeting. Eric said that he will ask Philip Ackerman to come to the following meeting. Fred said he contacted Don Campbell for language that might be added to the plan in the agriculture section. John said he would like to speak with Philip about the agriculture section before Donald comes to a meeting.

Wayne commented that he feels there needs to be an implementation plan to address goals such as an implementation plan for encouraging affordable housing. Lenny said progress was made on affordable housing by allowing accessory housing which was written into the zoning regulations. John stated that the planning commission does not have statutory authority to implement, but the Town plan is obligated to lay out a vision or goals for the town for the next five years. He noted that the town plan could be used by other members of the community to implement goals. John said that it is a tool for the Development Review Board or Public Service Board to evaluate what is important to the Town of Pawlet. Lenny stated that he believes language has been added to statute giving direction to the select board to pay attention to the town plan. Eric noted that the planning document is vague on purpose and not regulatory, whereas the Unified Bylaws is a regulatory document.

Lenny suggested that it should be noted on page 8 that a zoning map is available on the website. He noted that on page 10, the first full paragraph talks about roads and was written before the Unified Bylaws came into effect and so it needs to be revised to acknowledge the zoning regulations.

Eric suggested the town apply for a planning grant in September. Lenny indicated that since the town needs to have the plan completed by August 2015, there is not time to apply for a municipal planning grant. Lenny suggested that the PC ask the select board for money for editorial assistance. John asked if professional planning advice was needed to address water quality and renewable resources. He said that he would be happy to have an editor put it together, but would feel comfortable with planning assistance especially given social media. Keith asked about amount of help that could be expected from the Regional Planning Commission. John thought that the Regional Planning Commission could help the town with water quality issues but that he would like more expert assistance on renewable energy. Fred suggested that the PC select important concepts where they felt assistance was needed. John stated that the plan does an excellent job on history, physical characteristics and so a lot does not need to be rewritten, but he would like professional advice on some major concepts. Paul noted that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns could be another source of information. Lenny suggested that the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District could give advice on water quality. John would like to invite the energy committee to speak to the board. Eric asked if an emergency management plan could be added to the document. John replied in the affirmative.

John asked if there was a consensus about asking the Select Board for some funding. He suggested how money might be spent could be discussed at the next meeting. Eric noted that he would have a problem asking for money when the budget has already been developed. John asked if Eric would find out how much money is already in the planning budget. Lenny said he has the budget for previous plans.

Item 6: Set Agenda for Next Meeting -- April 28, 2014

Approval of Minutes, Comments from the Audience, Zoning Administrator Report, New Business (Invite Hilary Solomon to attend the meeting), Old Business and Set Agenda for Next Meeting

Minutes submitted by Kathy Doyle, Clerk.