

Hartford Planning Commission Workshop

3/27/17

Approved Minutes

Attendance: The following individuals attended the meeting which was held at the Hartford Town Hall in Meeting Room 1 at 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction on Monday, March 27, 2017.

Planning Commission Members: Quinn Colgan, Toby Dayman, Robin Adair Logan, John Reid and chair Bruce Riddle.

Staff: Planning and Development Director Lori Hirshfield and Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Others: Energy Commission members Cathy Geiger and Erik Krauss.

Bruce Riddle called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Village Center Designation: Matt Osborn reported that the Vermont Downtown Board granted Village Center Designation to Hartford Village at their monthly earlier today.

Planning Commission Representative to the Community Resilience Organization Hartford: Matt Osborn reported that the Community Resilience Organization Hartford (CROH) is a Selectboard appointed Committee with the mission in making Hartford a more resilient community in preparing for and dealing with natural and man-made disasters. Lori Hirshfield added that the CROH is involved with implementing the Hartford Hazard Mitigation Plan and in general seeks to make Hartford more self-sufficient. Matt stated the Rich Kozlowski served as the Planning Commission representative to CROH until he stepped down from the Planning Commission last year. Matt asked if there was a Planning Commission member who might be interested in serving as the representative to CROH. John Reid volunteered.

Update of the Regional Plan: Lori Hirshfield started by suggesting that we skip discussion of the definitions and implementation sections and instead focus on the Working Landscapes and Energy sections.

Bruce Riddle noted that there will be two public hearings in April with the intent of presenting the Draft Plan to the TRORC Board to consider adoption at the June Annual Meeting. Bruce noted that the revised draft is much improved. Lori Hirshfield recognized Bruce for his work on the TRORC Board noting that the Board is now much more engaged.

Implementation Matrix: On page 37, John Reid recommended that the gaps in cellular and broadband service be changed from a low priority to a high priority. The Commission agreed.

Energy: Lori Hirshfield reported that the Hartford Energy Commission was involved in the review of the Energy Chapter. Lori noted that in order to have statutory deference with the Public Service Board, the Energy Plan must have an implementation plan. Lori reported that there will be a new energy staff position in the Hartford Department of Planning and Development Services starting July 1st.

John Reid noted that the municipality can designate areas that are not appropriate for renewable energy.

History and Development: John Reid stated that the population projections are low. He noted that Vermont Futures is recommending the need for more people and jobs in Vermont which would far exceed the population projections. Bruce Riddle suggested making a statement to that effect. Lori Hirshfield stated that it is important to revisit the projections frequently. She suggested low, medium

and high figures similar to what the Vermont Health Department did in the past that have been used in the Hartford Master Plan.

Working Landscapes: Bruce Riddle reported that there has been good TRORC Board discussion on this topic. He said that some of the more rural communities are concerned about not having places to grow if all of the forested areas and agricultural lands are protected. He added that the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is advocating the protection of large tracts of forests. Bruce noted that forests need to be managed to maintain biodiversity. He also noted that the Working Landscape Chapter will become part of the Land Use Chapter. For legal challenges, he noted that it is important that Plans be specific.

John Reid asked about the issue of forest fragmentation in Hartford. Matt Osborn responded that the issue was an important part of the 2007 Hartford Master Plan. For a large town, Hartford is fortunate to have several large unfragmented forested areas. The Master Plan recommended changes protection of core forest areas, rural character, natural resources and the working landscape. This led to the 2008 zoning changes that resulted in the following changes:

- Rural Lands Overlay District
- Wildlife Connector Overlay District
- Agricultural Overlay District
- Creation of the Forest/Conservation Zoning District
- Creation of the Rural Lands 10 Zoning District
- Smaller lot sizes in Rural Lands to encourage clustering
- Increased densities in the villages

Bruce Riddle noted that in the region, Hartford is used as model for rural land use policy and zoning. He stated that the TRORC Working Landscape Chapter is important since Act 250 uses the Regional Plan in communities where zoning is absent.

Regarding agriculture, John Reid noted the growth in the farming cottage industries and the farm to table movement. He asked if the Town had investigated developing a farmer's market. Matt Osborn noted that there are farmer's markets in Norwich, Hanover, Lebanon and Hartland. Lori Hirshfield said the Town has looked into it and the Newbury Market, which opened recently is planning to sell produce in the summer months. Cathy Geiger noted that there are local farms that have Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares and local produce is available at the Upper Valley Food Co-op and the Co-op Food Store.

It was noted in Figure 1, that there is far more land enrolled in forest than agricultural current use. Bruce Riddle responded that the region is losing open lands.

Bruce Riddle noted that ten years ago, farmers suggested the need for a meat processing plant and commercial grade space for food processing in our region.

Cathy Geiger recommended that the region could benefit from a biomass plant since it can process lower quality local wood while reducing transportation costs and emissions.

Bruce Riddle recommended that TRORC study the impact of the current use program on local budgets noting that it is critical to look at all facets of property taxes. He also suggested the banking of agricultural land that becomes available.

Bruce Riddle noted the section on changing forest health and some of the potential threats. Cathy Geiger noted the spread of poison parsnip along town roads and suggested that the Highway Department may be responsible for spreading the seeds of the plant.

Robin Adair Logan commented on the effective work of the Vermont Land Trust. Matt Osborn noted that the Upper Valley Land Trust has been very effective in our region too and that both organizations work well together.

Lori Hirshfield noted that TRORC staff changed a lot of the language from “shall” to “should” to provide more flexibility.

Lori Hirshfield stated encouraged the Planning Commission to submit any comments to staff who will then assemble comments and submit to TRORC. She concluded by noting that the public hearings are scheduled for:

- Wednesday, April 12 Bethel Town Hall at 6:30 p.m.
- Thursday, April 13 Thetford Town Hall at 6:30 p.m.

Lori also noted that a public hearing will be scheduled sometime in June for the TRORC Board to vote on the revisions to the Plan.

Cathy Geiger acknowledged the work of TRORC staff in responding to earlier comments and improving the quality of the Plan.

Lori Hirshfield stated that she will check on the deadline for comments regarding the draft. She noted that this is the time to get substantive changes to TRORC.

Adjournment: John Reid made a motion to adjourn. Bruce Riddle seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.