

**Hartford Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Meeting**  
**Town Plan Housing Chapter Update**  
**Draft Minutes**  
**May 31, 2023**

Planning Commission chair John Reid called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. He followed by reading the hybrid meeting script and conducting a roll call.

**Attendance:** The following individuals attended the meeting which was held at the Hartford Town Hall in Room 2 at 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction on Wednesday, May 31, 2023. The meeting was also available remotely and several people participated that way.

**Planning Commission & Town Plan Steering Committee Members:**

John Reid	Planning Commission, term expires 1/11/24
Bruce Riddle	Planning Commission, term expires 2/7/25
Toby Dayman	Planning Commission, term expires 6/28/24
John Heath	Planning Commission, term expires 3/22/24
Colin Butler	Planning Commission, term expires 7/12/24
Jesse Pollard	Energy Commission, term expires 12/13/24
John Haffner	Vital Communities
Andrew Winter	Twin Pines Housing Trust
Kim Souza	Selectboard Liaison to Planning Commission

**Staff:**

Lori Hirshfield	Director, Department of Planning and Development
Matt Osborn	Town Planner, Department of Planning and Development
Kevin Geiger	Director of Planning, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission
Kyle Katz	Planner, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission

**Others Present:**

Marie Alvin

**Minutes of the March 27<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Meeting:** John Reid asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of the March 27<sup>th</sup>. Being none, John asked for a motion to approve the minutes of 3/27/23. Colin Butler made a motion to approve the minutes of 3/28/23 Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee meeting. The motion was seconded by John Heath and approved.

**Public Comments:** John Reid asked if there are any public comments. There were none.

**Thoughts on the 4/13 Community Discussion on Housing:** Matt asked the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee if they had any thoughts about the 4/13 community discussion on housing including the breakout sessions. John Reid responded that discussion went well but splitting into two groups missed the interplay between the other group. He suggested for the next community discussion that each small group get to discuss the same questions. Andrew Winter suggested that each group have a secretary to report back to the larger group. Colin agreed with John Reid and encourages cross reporting. Colin added that we are seeing the same people show up to the community discussions.

We need to reach out to a more diverse group of people particularly younger people. In response, John Reid suggested talking about what neighborhoods look like rather than discussing specific topics. He also suggested that we consider timing of community events and venues. Jesse Pollard noted that a lot of younger people live downtown. He suggested reaching out to younger people at Junction Arts & Media (JAM), Upper Valley Aquatic Center and the Hartford Dog Park. Lori Hirshfield suggested rethinking venues and considering other ideas for outreach than what we've done in the past.

**Goals, Strategies & Actions:** Kyle Katz noted that the draft goals, strategies and actions were developed by going through the current Town Plan as well as notes from the 4/13 community meeting. There are three goals. The first one is about creating units. The second one is about creating neighborhoods and the third is about finding and retaining housing.

Goal 1: Diverse, quality, equitable, and affordable housing is available for all.

Goal 2: Housing is built in a manner that meets the needs of the community and facilitates neighborhoods.

Goal 3: Residents can attain and retain housing.

Kevin Geiger explained the following definitions of goals, strategies and actions:

Goals: are the broad, overarching desired future condition or direction under which the strategies and actions are formulated.

Strategies: are the rough ways in which goals are supported/achieved.

Actions: are how strategies are implemented, and typically have someone doing something. Actions should have an actor that does them or is responsible for working on them.

John Reid noted that new legislation occurred in Vermont that establishes certain zoning changes that municipalities will have to adhere to. He asked if we have to include that in the Housing Chapter. Kevin responded that the Department of Housing and Community Development will be providing guidance. We will keep it general. He added that Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission also is working with Hartford on the bylaw modernization project which will make recommendations to change our Zoning Regulations to encourage more opportunities for housing.

Kevin stated that the current Housing Chapter has a great deal of data. Their thought is to limit the amount of data noting that the meat of the plan are the actions. Municipalities are currently stepping into roles it hasn't before. He wants to make the Housing Chapter more precise with more specificity and a more active role for the Town. Kyle agreed noting that the goal is to create a more accessible Housing Chapter.

Regarding the draft list of goals, strategies and actions, Bruce Riddle suggested adding topics like housing resiliency and avoiding hazardous locations. Kevin responded that these will be hit on in other chapters. Bruce believes that they should have some mention in the Housing Chapter. Kevin stated that an on-line version could have active links to other chapters or materials. John Reid responded that he likes that idea. Kyle noted that we need to strike a balance.

Lori stated that tonight, we want to get a sense of where we are with the goals, strategies and actions and whether we are ready for a June community meeting.

John Reid noted that the use of “the Town should” in several of the actions needs to be more specific. Lori noted that the actors change over time and that we should decide not to be specific about the actors or use a chart to designate them.

Bruce presented the following comments:

- a) Action 1, B, 1: Needs to be income sensitive.
- b) Action 1, B, 5: Need to mention new technologies to build houses.
- c) Strategy 1, C.: Need to include healthy buildings.
- d) Strategy 2, A.: Need to include creating neighborhoods and streetscapes.
- e) Establish new steep slope standards which require certain slopes to be removed from the lot when calculating density.
- f) The Town should pay for single residential and duplex connections to Town water and sewer.
- g) How does Action 1, C, 4 differ from Action 1, B, 1?
- h) Action 1, B.4 and Action 1, B, 7 are complementary.
- i) Action 2, A, 3 is not what Planning and Development should do. He suggested developing conceptual drawings for single-unit and duplexes that are affordable to build.
- j) Action 2, B, 1 and Action 2, B, 3 seem very similar.

John Heath noted that we should help homeowners with information so they don’t have to hire an architect.

Lori Hirshfield noted that it isn’t just about what the Town does. What makes a community and neighborhood is the people. Build the foundation for the community to build the structure.

Kim Souza would like to see incentivized impact fees. She characterized the services that people want and what is available amounts to the old adage about the chicken and the egg. She suggested describing desirable characteristics to incentivize development. John Heath agreed and noted that creating spaces walkability and parks are all important characteristics for a successful neighborhood.

Andrew suggested applying for more bicycle/pedestrian grants. Lori responded that we are already doing that. She noted that relying on grants is not getting the results that we want. Resources are limited. Matt agreed noting that it would be more effective if more local funds for sidewalks were allocated. He cited the success Lebanon has had in expanding sidewalks in the last decade by budgeting local funds every year.

Andrew suggested regional coordination with municipal facilities such as sewer in order to share the housing burden.

Bruce suggested considering the expansion of the Town water and sewer service area.

Jesse suggested including descriptions of neighborhoods. Matt responded that villages are described in the Land Use Chapter of the Town Plan. He also noted that in addition to rural areas surrounding Quechee and West Hartford, there are categories to cover other rural areas (Rural North and Rural South). Colin that we need to be careful with defining villages and not exclude areas.

Matt gave a brief overview of the major zoning changes that were made in 2008. The Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission conducted a build-out analysis in 2003 that showed that half of the future Town’s housing could be located in rural areas based on the Town zoning at that time. When the

results were presented to the public, there was deep concern that this was not a good use of resources and could significantly change the character of the Town. The result was the 2007 Town Plan which recommended increasing densities in areas served by Town water and sewer and reducing densities in the rural and creating rural overlay districts to protect natural resources. Changes to the Zoning Regulations were implemented in 2008.

**Next Community Discussion:** Lori asked the Planning Commission/Steering Committee if they think we are ready to host the third community discussion. John Reid responded that we had a productive discussion this evening but more discussion is needed before going back to the public. The Planning Commission/Steering Committee agreed. It was agreed to hold the next community discussion sometime in July.

Jesse Pollard noted that an update of the Town Charter is underway. He asked about the relationship of the Town Plan update to the Town Charter update. Lori responded that Title 24 of the Vermont State Statutes stipulates the planning process and components of a Plan. She suggested that once we have landed on what we want for the Housing Chapter, to have that discussion.

**Public Outreach Update:** Lori asked the Planning Commission/Steering Committee to go to JAM and check out the multi-media booth then let others know about it. Kim asked if the multi-media booth will be at the 6/21 Hartford Community Coalition Block Party. Lori responded yes. It will also go to each of the libraries over the summer.

**Next Planning Commission/Steering Committee Meeting:** There was discussion about a date for the next meeting. It was agreed to hold the next meeting on Thursday, June 29<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

**Date Member Terms Expire:** John Reid (PC) 1/11/24, Bruce Riddle (PC) 2/7/25, Toby Dayman (PC) 6/28/24, John Heath (PC) 3/22/24, Colin Butler (PC) 7/12/24, Jesse Pollard (Energy Commission) 12/13/24.

