

NORWICH PLANNING COMMISSION
Thursday November 12, 2020 6:30pm

DRAFT MINUTES

Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82768594832>

Meeting ID: 827 6859 4832

Members Present: Melissa Horwitz (C), Brian Loeb, Jaci Allen, Jeff Goodrich, Jeff Lubell, Leah Romano, Ernie Ciccotelli
Public Present: Mary Layton, Stuart Richards, Linda Cook
Staff: Rod Francis

Meeting Opened: 6:34pm

1. Approve Agenda:

Allen moved and Loeb seconded a motion to approve the Agenda.

Motion carried 7 – 1.

2. Meeting Objectives:

- Appoint a member of the Planning Commission to the Green Fleet Working Group
- Debrief on the Town Plan Process and future strategies
- Update on Town Plan Action Items
- Update on Village Designation

3. Comments from the Public:

Stuart Richards commented that Norwich has a long history of OML violations, and it seemed to him that the planning commission has chosen not to cure OML violations.

4. Review and approve Minutes October 22, 2020.

Commissioners discussed the minutes before Allen moved and Lubell seconded a motion to approve the minutes of October 22, 2020. Motion carried 5–2.

5. Announcements, Reports, Updates & Correspondence

- Correspondence: none
- Updates: none

6. Appoint a member of the Planning Commission to the Green Fleet Working Group

The Chair sought a volunteer from the Commission. Ciccotelli indicated an interest in serving on the Working Group

Goodrich asked that in future a more appropriate form of request would be that the Selectboard communicate with the Planning Commission, the Commission arrive at a decision and convey that back to the Selectboard, rather than conveying the request through the Town Manager.

Lubell responded that he appreciated the Town having professional staff to do these things, and that he did not share Goodrich's view on distinguishing between the role of boards or commissions and staff.

Stuart Richards asked who was forming the 'committee' and who was on it. Chair Horwitz responded that there was Selectboard member, 2 members of the Energy committee and a citizen at large. Mary Layton and Francis confirmed that the initiative flowed from an action item in the 2020 Town Plan and the discussion of Town Plan action items by the Selectboard.

Romano asked whether there was some urgency to making the appointment now.

Lubell moved and Goodrich seconded a motion to appoint Ciccotelli to the Green Fleet Working Group. Motion carried 6— 0.

7. Debrief on the Town Plan Process and future strategies

Goodrich raised the issue of whether there had been enough time to prepare for this agenda item. Other Commissioners responded that the matter had been put off several times and that this item was flagged at the end of the last meeting as coming up, and that the agenda for this meeting had been approved at the opening of the meeting.

Commissioners decided to proceed with the item.

Mary Layton asked if Commissioners thought there was a need for a special meeting of the commission to discuss process.

Goodrich agreed there was, stating that he was deeply concerned about the way the commission conducts its business.

Chair Horwitz directed the discussion to the first question on the provided list: What were we attempting to accomplish with the Town Plan?

Wide-ranging discussion included the following points:

- the direction to produce a new plan in twelve months came from the Selectboard following the failure to obtain approval for the 2018 plan at the TRORC.
- that the direction and content of the plan was pre-determined
- the role of the commission was constrained
- sustainability was not mentioned
- the public only got to comment once the document was finished
- that they saw their work in the plan very clearly
- they felt they were able to contribute meaningfully at each stage of the process
- they appreciated the level of professional support
- they were pleased with the plentiful opportunity for public input
- the plan was done in good faith
- the relationship between staff and the commission was questioned
- the public was not engaged
- the plan was not done in good faith
- that what has been presented in this discussion includes subject (or position) differences and differences with regard to process
- that it has been disheartening to see some commissioners have tense verbal exchanges
- asked whether it was time for the commission to revisit the guiding principles to address the dysfunctional dynamic of the group
- this item should be added to future agenda

8. Report on Town Plan action items (Jaci Allen)

Allen reported the review is ongoing.

- A town Childcare Committee has been formed
- the Green Fleet Working Group is being formed
- that there have been more questions concerning a wastewater study
- the Affordable Housing Subcommittee is looking at publicly held lands in Norwich for possibly siting affordable housing project(s)

9. Update on Village Designation (Rod Francis)

Francis informed commissioners that the application had been accepted by DHCD, the staff review was positive, recommending approval and the decision to admit Norwich into the program is scheduled for the November 23 Downtown Board meeting, which he will be attending

10. Other Business

None

11. Future Meeting Schedule & Agendas

- Wastewater study future
- Update from Affordable Housing Subcommittee regarding public lands and an education program for 2020
- Discussion of process
- Ground rules for conducting meetings

12. Comments from the Public

Stuart Richards commented that people can disagree without being disagreeable. I submitted revisions to the town plan that were apparently ignored. When you get to the revisions of the Zoning and Subdivision regulations pay attention to what the public has to say, nit just in small group sessions but through survey responses from 2005 and 2018 where people clearly responded that they don't want to pay for municipal sewerage or have an increase in population.

Mary Layton thanked the commission for undertaking the debrief on the plan.

Meeting adjourned 8:34pm

Future Meetings:

Thursday, December 10, 6:30pm Regular Meeting

Respectfully submitted,
Rod Francis