

NORWICH PLANNING COMMISSION
Thursday May 11, 2021, 6:30pm

MINUTES

Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89339717735>

Meeting ID: 893 3971 7735

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

Meeting Opened: 6:32pm

1. Approve Agenda:

Allen moved and Lubell seconded a motion to approve the agenda as amended by reversing the order of item 6 (Appoint and Planning Commission Chair, Vice Chair) and item 7 (Planning Commission code of conduct, ethics) Motion carried 4 – 0 – 2. For: Allen, Loeb, Lubell, Romano, Abstain: Goodrich, Horwitz

2. Meeting Objectives:

- Appoint Planning Commission Chair and Vice-Chair
- Planning Commissioner code of conduct, ethics

3. Public Comment:

Stuart Richards informed the meeting that he made a written suggestion to amend the minutes of April 13, 2021 which have not been responded to. He then directed the meeting to correspondence included in the packet which included a formal complaint that the Open Meeting law (OML) was violated when Chair Horwitz responded to a blogger to correct inaccuracies and when Jaci Allen emailed all planning commissioners. Richards asked that the complaint be responded to. He suggested that the lack of an answer to the complaint indicated a denial by the planning commission that a violation had occurred.

4. Review and approve Minutes April 13, 2021:

Goodrich moved and Allen seconded a motion to approve the minutes of April 13, 2021. Motion carried 4 – 0 – 2. For: Allen, Loeb, Lubell, Romano, Abstain: Goodrich, Horwitz

5. Announcements, Reports, Updates & Correspondence:

- Updates: Francis directed commissioners' attention to the email exchange between the Town of Hartford and Norwich where Hartford informed Norwich that they are no longer available for discussions with the Norwich School District (NSD) on the NSD wastewater proposal.

6. Planning Commissioner code of conduct, ethics:

Romano introduced the item by remarking that at times emotional content clouded commissioner's ability to collaborate on doing the work of the town. This topic was important in the context of the following item, the appointment of the commission Chair and Vice-Chair.

Allen asked for clarification with regard to the documents included for this agenda item which included the selectboard Conflict of Interest Policy and the planning commission Bylaws.

Goodrich stated that he had circulated the Norwich Selectboard Code of Conduct in the past and he recommended that this discussion be informed by the Code of Conduct and Vermont statute that lays out the powers and duties of planning commissions (24 VSA §4325).

Lubell encouraged more dialog among commissioners on this topic and raised the possibility of using an outside facilitator, which might improve the effectiveness of the discussion.

Commissioners agreed on the need to continue discussing this item at future meetings.

After some discussion commissioners agreed to review the selectboard Code of Conduct via shared screen. Goodrich objected because this document was not included in the packet and did not appear on the posted agenda.

7. Appoint Planning Commission Chair, Vice-Chair:

Loeb moved and Lubell seconded a motion to appoint Jaci Allen as Chair. Motion carried 4 – 1 – 1. For: Loeb, Lubell, Romano, Horwitz. Against: Goodrich, Abstain: Allen

Romano moved and Goodrich seconded a motion to appoint Loeb as Vice-Chair. Motion carried 5 – 0 – 1. For: Romana, Goodrich, Lubell, Allen, Horwitz. Abstain: Loeb

8. Dialog with neighboring town planning commissions:

Lubell introduced this item suggesting that reaching out to the commissions of four neighboring towns to get to know each other as people, our 'pain points', and what we are working on and looking for any opportunities to work together.

Horwitz asked Lubell if he was at all concerned in light of recent communication from the Town of Hartford. Lubell replied that the point would be to establish dialog, if there were topics like wastewater that they didn't want to discuss that would be respected.

Commissioners agreed that Francis should provide contact details for the planning commissions/boards of Hanover, Thetford, Sharon and Hartford.

9. Other Business:

Allen raised the selectboard goalsetting exercise. She reminded the commission that the 2020 town plan includes a chart that contains action items. She wanted to resend that chart to the selectboard for their work on goalsetting.

10. Future Meeting Schedule & Agendas:

- Open Meeting Law complaint from Stuart Richards
- Update on town plan action items (including progress)
- Outreach for dialog to neighboring towns
- Listening session for commissioners (including role of Chair, staff etc.)
- How the commission conducts its business, (documents should include selectboard code of conduct and 24 VSA §4435)
- Update from NSD on school wastewater issue

11. Comments from the Public

Stuart said that the OML complaint was sent on April 26, there is a requirement that the complaint be responded to within ten days, to date there has been no response from either the selectboard or planning commission. He also stated it is incumbent on the planning commission Chair to not use planning commission stationery without prior discussion from the planning commission.

12. Goodrich moved and Loeb seconded a motion to adjourn. Motion carried 6 – 0.

Meeting adjourned: 8:12pm

Future Meetings:

Tuesday, May 11, 6:30pm Regular Meeting

Tuesday, June 8, 6:30pm Regular Meeting

Respectfully submitted,

Rod Francis

APPROVED 06-08-2021