

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Selectboard
Saturday, February 3, 2018 at 3:00 pm
Tuesday, February 6, 2018 at 7:00pm

First Town Plan Public Hearing 1A

Saturday, February 3, 2018 at 3:00 pm

Members present: Mary Layton, Chair; Linda Cook; Stephen Flanders; John Langhus; John Pepper.

There were about 45 people in the audience.

Layton opened the meeting at 3:06pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Irv Thomae worries about affordable housing for those who already live in Norwich. He emphasizes that more school age children will mean less taxes.
2. Stuart Richards discussed the budget and asked about the points that Claudette Brochu had presented in December and January. Pepper responded that while they had not been included in the F2019 budget they were absolutely being used by the Selectboard as instructive to actual spending in the upcoming year.
3. Claudette Brochu mentioned an article in the Valley News "Toward Fairness, Clarity in Vermont School Funding" and its possible impact on Norwich and taxes.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

1. Linda Cook shared concerns about the process leading up to this meeting and the follow-up meeting of Tuesday, February 6. She emphasized the importance of the public having its input be primary focus.
2. John Langhus discussed the FAQs and how they had come to be, noting that the very first one had not yet been seen by any of the other Selectboard members. He explained that this was all work in progress, nothing set in stone.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY:

1. Related to the question: "How does the Town Plan affect Norwich" and the use of the word sustainability, Dean Seibert shared that it was a useless term as it means so many different things to different people.

2. Stuart Richards felt that it is misleading to say the Town Plan is a guide vs. a mandate. When a conflict in zoning arises, it always goes back to what's written in the Town Plan. "It lays the foundation for future rules", to which Langhus agreed.
3. Ernie Ciccotelli shared a more detailed definition of sustainability.
4. Susan Barrett asked for the Selectboard to summarize the process and where we stood in the process? John Langhus summarized.
5. Frank Manasek discussed "sprawl" as another term that requires clear definition in the Town Plan.
6. Related to the question: "Will the Town Plan Increase Taxes?", Alex Turner asked where he could find the plan. The plan is available on the Town website and a hard copy can be printed upon request to the Town Manager's office.
7. Charlotte Metcalf shared her understanding that \$1.00 in new services costs \$1.14 in taxes, implying that leaving land as-is is the fiscal winner... Irv Thomae refuted this and shared that it was not correct and cited examples and sources saying as such. Irv reiterated that a larger school population will lower the tax rate.
8. Jeff Lubell pointed out that the COCS study deals in averages and has limitations in its usefulness.
9. Stuart Richards urged the Selectboard to read the Vermont Land Trust Study. He believes the Town Plan is a "pro-development" document. Mary Layton asked Stuart if he felt the Town Plan should ban any and all development. Stuart discussed caps as opposed to a full ban.
10. Dean Seibert discussed "hamlets" and "neighborhoods". Reminded us that there used to be 20 separate school districts in Norwich alone. He supports some development in those "neighborhoods" that require long drives to get to Norwich Village Center... believes they need anchors, and safe havens.
11. John Langhus took a few minutes to read the part of the previous Town Plan regarding Hamlets that was stricken from the new proposed Town Plan.
12. Charlotte Metcalf supported the concept of hamlets without commercial zoning. She supports a structure that attracts people who want to stay in Norwich.
13. Ernie Ciccotelli believes the Town Plan should include more limits, with consideration for farm land, # acres per lot (used example of 10 acre lots as being useless in many instances).

14. Jeff Lubell and Stuart Richards performed a duet and furthered the hamlet discussion.
15. Frank Manasek offered further comments on the Hamlet concept as described by others.
16. Related to the question of the relationship between the Norwich TP and the TRORC Regional Plan, Marcia Calloway discussed her concerns that “top-down” ideas that impose structure on towns do not stick over time. Her concern about Map 11 is an example of a top-down approach. She further talked about the estimates that Windsor County will grow by 426 households between 2010-2030... and urged us to consider what we want Norwich to look like in the future?
17. Chris Moore recommended that people buy the Vermont Gazetteer for a lot of helpful information. He likes the Hamlet idea as discussed (no commercial). He asked how affordable housing could also retain the character of a rural community.
18. Colin Calloway shared appreciation for some full and frank conversations with members of the Town and Planning Commission. He believes that while the TP may not push development, it does not try to stop it either. He reiterates that there is no good reason for one area to be affordable housing, and the outcomes of segmenting certain parts of town as such are questionable.
19. Irv Thomae discussed the current affordable housing area known as Star Lake as a successful example of planned affordable housing. He believes that a Town Plan that excludes development represents “top down imposing” as much as one that supports development. Discussed property values, supply and demand, and what he believes to be exaggerated fears about the Dyke property off of Route 5 as a development target.
20. Ernie Ciccotelli discussed the need for organic affordable housing.
21. Claudette Brochu talked about the National Low Income Housing as a good source for statistics.
22. Jasper Moore said that he likes Norwich like it is, and asked why we don’t leave it like it is?
23. Chris Moore suggested a Dashboard that could be kept updated showing how our Town stats move over time. How much affordable housing is there today, as an example? He also suggested a Glossary in the Town Plan to define terms previously mentioned.
24. Stuart Richards asked how much affordable housing does Norwich “want”? Mentioned that MA/CT strive for 10%.

Steve Flanders departed the meeting at 5:08pm.

25. Jeff Lubell encouraged citizens to attend the Affordable Housing Listening session. He cited that in 2012, 16% of homes in Norwich were “affordable”, versus 56% in Windsor County as a whole.
26. Dean Seibert suggested that Affordable Housing for seniors is missing... it has been 30 years since the last senior housing project took place, and he doesn’t think he’ll be able to wait 30 more years. Also suggested that of the 10 key words in the Town Plan, 3 or 4 of them could be removed.
27. Linda Cook pointed out the two maps that conflict between the TRORC and Norwich Town Plan.
28. Jeff Lubell talked about the inconsistencies between TRORC vs. Norwich and the Selectboard agreed to invite TRORC Director Peter Gregory to Tuesday’s meeting as well as the 2/14 Selectboard meeting.

The Special Meeting 1A of the Selectboard was tabled at 5:20pm to be continued at 7:00pm on Tuesday, February 6, 2018.

Special Meeting of the Selectboard Part B

Tuesday, February 6, 2018 at 7:00 pm

Members present: Mary Layton, Chair; Linda Cook; Stephen Flanders; John Langhus; John Pepper, Herb Durfee, Town Manager.

There were about 45 people in the audience.

Layton opened the meeting at 7:06pm (delay due to technical difficulties)

DISCUSSION BY SPECIAL GUEST, PETER GREGORY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TRORC

1. Peter Gregory (“PG”) reviewed the Regional Plan and fielded questions and comments from approximately 15 citizens as well as a number of the Selectboard members.
2. Stuart Richards asked about the possibility of intense building in the Town Plan. PG responded that the Town Plan does not preclude intense building.
3. Jeff Goodrich commented on the housing needs, and PG talked about the 30 towns in his region, on both sides of the river. He discussed a quality of housing issue, as well as the large distances people are commuting to work.
4. PG discussed a Map dated 10/10/2017 that’s “been running around” and said that the map was an internal document and has no basis in reality.

5. Marcia Calloway asked why the Zoning Administrator presented the 10/10/17 map as the map that TRORC was insisting upon, to which PG could not provide an answer as he did not know.
6. Frank Manasek asked about the accuracy of the numbers and statistics related to housing needs.
7. John Langhus commented and asked related questions.
8. Ernie Ciccotelli asked where all of the claimed new jobs were coming from to which PG said he was not sure.
9. PG shared his opinion (not necessarily in agreement with other TRORC members, he said) that Town Plans should say what they mean and mean what they say. More description is helpful, especially if Act 250 or Energy "248" is in play. More specificity a plan has the more helpful it is. This is philosophical, he emphasized, not covered in the statutes.
10. Marcia Calloway shared related comments.
11. John Langhus asked about the top priorities of the Regional Plan, to which PG responded:
 - a. Reduce conflicts between State, Regions, and Towns.
 - b. Energy
 - c. Economic Development
12. Charlotte Metcalf asked how we get more people involved? PG said that with 35 people involved at this particular meeting, that was 33 more than most other towns. Usually a conflict was necessary to get people involved. He did not agree with it, but felt it was the unfortunate truth.
13. Stuart Richards asked about the 5,000 housing deficit cited in February 2017 from a "previous study". He asked if there are state or regional mandates ("no") and asked how many affording units a town like Norwich should have. PG felt these were important questions that a future Town Plan should consider better understanding.
14. Marcia Calloway asked about village designation, and PG discussed that, neighborhood designation, and the fact that most areas in the "orange" (near I-91 exit 13) were considered "interchange areas".
15. John Langhus asked questions about Act 250 and when it does not apply. PG explained that only in very narrow situations might that be the case... the policy is all about anti-sprawl.

16. Charlotte Metcalf asked questions that led PG to clarify that a state designated village center is completely separate of what a Town specifies as a Village Center.
17. Chris Moore asked about Caps to which PG said there were not many situations where caps were justified *{personal note: I found this confusing as related to the desire for specifics he had mentioned previously}*
18. Ken R. shared personal stories emphasizing that an affordable housing shortage definitely exists.
19. Ann Seibert asked if the TRORC takes into consideration the affordable housing that already exists. PG said this was a local discussion so TRORC does not. TRORC never touches zoning, only Town Plans. "Principal Retail is a Show Stopper", PG emphasized.

Peter Gregory departed at approximately 8:20pm.

20. Chris Moore asked if an adopted Town Plan means that it has been TRORC approved.

IDEA: If there's a conflict, what plan takes precedence? SB promised to follow up.

Chris also suggested that the maps should have more detail.

21. Phil Dechert explained that grants that might be unavailable to Norwich without a town plan were:
 - a. Fall municipal grants
22. Linda Gray gave an example of the charging stations at Dan & Whit's as an example of a grant Norwich would not currently qualify for.
23. Stuart Richards talked about the \$35M available for affordable housing that we would not be eligible to receive a portion of without a town plan.
24. Charlotte Metcalf supported Linda's comments on energy and worried a town plan passed too soon might take into consideration the current work.
25. Linda Gray said that she did not believe that the TP should wait for an Enhanced Energy Plan. There will be the right to amend the TP appropriately, or add an appendix as necessary.
26. Brian Tompkins from Farrell Farm asked what grants are really out there.
27. Andy Sheer talked about sewage hookup and the SB emphasized that the TP does not include any plans on hookup to other towns.

28. Ann Seibert said that historically hooking up to another town makes one very vulnerable. Discussed the evolution of septic systems as a possible solution.
29. Stuart Richards and Charlotte Metcalf commented further on sewage.
30. Colin Calloway discussed “Numbers from Nowhere” and “Victims of a Map” and further emphasized the importance of impact studies especially on wildlife... the need to cause no unintended damage.
31. Stuart Richards does not support sewage or its ongoing maintenance.
32. Andy Sheer pointed out that maintaining septic systems is required as well.
33. Brian Tomkins said that he is also a “sewer guy” and offered assistance if necessary.
34. Carolyn Frye reminded the SB and the attendees that Norwich is part of a region and that much of what we value about Norwich is in large part due to being part of the Upper Valley.
35. Linda Cook was concerned about the Saturday morning late release of the new presentation information of which she was unaware of the existence until the meeting and only twelve copies were available for the public. Cook and Pepper worked on the questions.

The Selectboard concluded by discussing next steps.

John Langhus moved to adjourn at 9:17pm. Steve Flanders second. Motion approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:17pm.

Approved by the Selectboard on February 14, 2018

Mary Layton
Selectboard Chair

Next regularly scheduled Selectboard Meeting is at 6:30pm February 14, 2018.

PLEASE NOTE THAT CATV WILL HAVE RECORDED BOTH SPECIAL MEETINGS OF THE NORWICH SELECTBOARD.