

**Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Saturday, March 7, 2020 at 12:00 noon**

Sign-in Sheet: Lynnwood Andrews, Jack Cushman, Richard Stucker, Sue Pitiger, Irv Thomae, Jaci Allen, Arline Torman, Linda Gray, Betty Barba, Melina Stucker, Charlotte Metcalf, Jeff Lubell, Matt Buck, Carl Mautner, Stuart Richards, David Otto, K. William Clauson, Norm Levy, Tracey Hayes, Linda Cook, Kristin Maffei

Selectboard Chair **C. Brochu** opened the meeting at 12:01

R. Arnold appointed note taker for the Board

There were no public comments for items not on the agenda

John Langhus expressed thanks for the crowd's participation

Layton at 12:04 moved to open public hearing #2 on the draft 2020 Norwich Town Plan, Gere seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

C. Brochu asked if the Planning Commission and/or R. Francis, Planning and Zoning Director, would be making a presentation.

R. Francis offered a verbal summary of the work on the Town Plan. Outlined differences between 2018 and 19 versions of the plan; pointed out that major focus was on the Land Use and Housing Chapters; Energy Chapter is also the Town's Energy Plan, worked with the Enhanced Energy Working Group to meet the needs of Article 36; plan meets the State's planning goals; a resilience chapter was included in the Town Plan

Charlotte Metcalf summarized amendments from Marcia Calloway that were sent to C. Brochu and R. Arnold on March 7, 11:21 via email. Copies of the email were distributed to Board Members.

Charlotte Metcalf was similarly concerned about wetlands and shared information from Shayne Jaquith of Nature's Conservancy, previously worked with the State of Vermont during the era of Hurricane Irene. Metcalf referenced maps of tributaries that go into Blood Brook exist, no map for the streams that go into route 5 south below exist

R. Francis asked **Charlotte Metcalf** to read the last portion of M. Calloway's recommendations

J. Langhus responds that this information is largely what the resilience chapter looks to address

R. Francis asked for how the meeting is going to be conducted procedurally

L. Langhus suggested we have a conversation. **M. Layton** thinks we should hear all the comments first. **Brochu** agrees that we should hear all comments first

Arline Rotman stated that she appreciated the transparency and professionalism in which the Planning Commission conducted themselves during the writing of the Town Plan. They have been accessible, flexible, all good listeners, and respectful. Rotman is proud of Norwich. The ability to take goals that we all agree to, like the climate crisis, and put it all together has been impressive. Rotman stated that a town plan is an aspiration and provides a framework in which we talk about development, land use and responsible growth and the plan achieves that.

Rotman finds the maps in the Town Plan that show where there is room for development and where we need to protect our natural resources to be impressive. Rotman does not want to build roads where there are natural resources. There is going to be a need for some development and the map on page 19 makes it clear how limited that land is.

Stuart Richards read a proposed amendment that expressly prohibits any development which impose an additional tax burden on Norwich taxpayers, restricts any development larger than the size or scale than existing developments, and prohibits development that compromises the rural character. Richards acknowledges that the draft of the plan says this. Richards believes that the direction this plan takes to promote affordable housing needs to be spelled out.

Irv Thomae states that he does not want the Board to adopt the amendment proposed by Stuart Richards.

Thomae believes that the Board should do nothing to discourage a decrease in the school population. Thomae stated that there is no single factor that derives property taxes more than the school population. Thomae spoke about school classroom sizes at MCS presented during Town Meeting Day and believes this not the natural consequence of an increase in school population given the potential savings.

Thomae stated that school population keeps Norwich affordable for all. Thomae believes that encouraging more housing density is important for the survival for the middle class residents and homeowners.

Tracey Hayes pointed out that teacher to student ratios bumped up in a way that necessitated an increase in school sizes.

Jack Cushman takes issue with statements on page 9 in the right hand column in regards to forest carbon sequestration and requests technical revision. The January 2020 reports “Vermont Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and Forecast” and “Final Report of the Vermont Forest Carbon Sequestration Working Group” are the expected authorities and provide most accurate and up-to-date information.

Matt Buck points out that er pupil spending is not going down

David Otto expressed appreciation for planning, broadly, and recognizes that there are emerging perspectives and information. Otto wants to see the plan passed with the knowledge that there is room for improvement and more information can be made in the future

Surprised that the zoning code isn't more developed when he arrived to town, thinks some things can be approved upon, pleased to see new creative directions in place.

Wants Norwich to become clear where Town wants development and where Town does not want development. Noticed that 20-something new dwellings were built all outside the village, and states that Norwich should develop where there is transportation and infrastructure, and to want to preserve forest.

(Rod Francis clarified that 29 residential addresses added in an 8 year period using map from page 18)

Otto likes that the plan encourages cooperation with other towns and believes Norwich doesn't do enough of a good job with cooperating with other towns on housing. Believes Norwich should not limit growth unnecessarily. Otto thinks it's time to think creatively about more growth, particularly sustainable housing.

Linda Cook expressed thanks that Rod and the Planning Commission took time to listen to the public, and believes the plan is condensed and more understandable. Cook states that Norwich has such a wide variety of housing, from low-income to large mansions. If we want to keep it a diverse community, we got to help those who are land-rich but not cash-rich. Cook wants people to remain here and right now we are not in a level playing field for that.

Cook wants to find solutions that don't have people selling their land to live with other competing costs. Cook wonders if there is a program or incentive that keeps certain groups of people in town. Cook cautions that the impact of this plan will not be known until new zoning regulations come out. Cook states that we may see that we wished to take the plan in a different direction. .

Tracey Hayes wants to emphasize the importance of points 7.9 - 7.12 on pages 48 and 49 of the Town Plan. Wants to see the MCS septic as a joint collaboration between the School and Town. Hayes believes there were many non-school uses that contributed to the problem. Hayes believes that to only re-examine the 2005 wastewater is not enough to address this problem. Ideas that the School board is working on goes beyond the space of the green at this point, and Town support and expertise is needed.

Sue Pitiger states that if we want more workforce housing, we need to have a space to make it happen. Pitiger believes it makes good sense to look at Route 5 South to meet workforce housing needs.

R. Arnold left the meeting for 9 minutes to attend to an emergency received over email.

C. Brochu reads a message from **Chris Katucki** regarding preferred site status of solar projects.

J. Langhus asks about the inclusion of Steve Thoms on the title page. **J. Allen** informs everyone that his name is there to recognize his contributions, though he is now no longer a Norwich resident.

R. Francis suggests that we close the public comment portion of the meeting.

Langhus moved to close public hearing #2 on the draft 2020 Norwich Town Plan at 12:24, Layton seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Langhus thinks we should make Cushman change for page 9, right column. **Layton** asks if that is a technical change, **R. Francis** reads what would be considered a technical change. Board agrees by consensus that this change should be made.

Layton states that she is pulled in different directions about preferred site designations, believes it is instructive to have a letter from town boards, concerned we have lost some local control as the plan is written now. Layton points out that Colchester, VT has more guidelines.

R. Arnold asked if she needs more information. M. Layton clarifies that her specific question is whether or not the Plan should have more specific language to have local control

Langhus provides background information. Langhus states that before the most current regs, there was a discussion as to whether or not the state was usurping all local control because they have gone strong for solar development. In response the state added the preferred sighting regiment that are currently in place.

Langhus states that there are two ways for local control. The first is what Norwich does now, for a land owner to come to the Boards and say "I would like to develop part of my land for solar and I would like to be designated a preferred site." Langus states that in the past the board has listened to the application and voted.

The second way is to establish preferred site instructions in the Town Plan. When this is done, the Board will no longer be reviewing an application for a letter. Langhus suggests that we can adopt a procedure where the Board hears the application but does not vote on it. If a citizen is concerned, they would go to the state. Langhus states that the Town Plan implies that Norwich believes the state laws are protective and Norwich does not need to add to it.

Layton asked for more information about the state laws.

Langhus stated that the discussion is robust and that Prime Ag is of discussion. Langhus point there is an argument right now that solar can be a way to preserve Prime Ag land or could be comingled with pasture. There is another argument that Vermont needs as much Prime Ag staying in the mix as possible and that this takes it out of circulation.

Layton states that she took a tour of the solar projects and acknowledged they are tucked away. Layton asks if we want more control about how it looks

R. Francis clarifies that there is no regulatory barrier to Norwich for creating this language. R. Francis states that an installation can't be on land that is current use if it is already forest. If an installation is proposed in a forest block, it is the applicant's obligation to meet the PUC's criteria. The applicant needs to meet the State's guidelines. R. Francis states that there is a low probability in Norwich that a highly valued aesthetic landscape will be at risk of solar development.

J. Langhus states that there is an economic argument. A project is not feasible without preferred sighting.

Linda Gray states that there is a bullet point in the Town Plan that demands the application reduce the visual disruption of the landscape. Linda Gray points out that three phase power is limited in Norwich and until GMP changes this Norwich is likely to see projects in the middle and small scale.

R. Francis mentions the Norwich Technologies applications on the Board's agenda for March 11. If we adopt the plan, that Norwich Technologies project may not need to be an agenda item because a letter will no longer be required.

Charlotte Metcalf states that the state mapping does not reflect all conserved land accurately, including some of her conserved land. Metcalf states that we should not trust state mapping for preferred sighting decisions.

R. Francis responds to Metcalf that maps are but one tool and state maps alone are not sufficient information to take action on.

R. Arnold states that there are considerable burdens for low-income access to solar, from incentives, to financing to educational resources. Arnold states that he wants to address equity, and cares less about rural character than rural poverty. Some municipalities create language in their Town Plans to encourage solar projects that allow for a certain percentage of low and middle income subscribers.

J. Langhus points out that when public entities go solar, the whole community goes solar, and reminds everyone of the financing work behind the Starlake Solar project.

Linda Gray points out that policy 3.2e encourages the development of programs that assist low-income households with weatherization. Gray suggests that the Board may want to consider using the Climate Emergency Designated Fund to assist with low-income solar projects.

C. Brochu asks how or where R. Arnold's suggestions could be incorporated.

R. Arnold states that a technical change would not be meaningful and that this might be an area that is beyond the Town's control at this moment but that the Town should be committed to addressing.

Linda Cook asks for clarification on the decision on preferred sight status. To Linda Cook's question, R. Francis says that the applicant would no longer need to go before the board seeking a letter of support. This doesn't prevent developers from asking the board for support.

Langhus moved to adopt the draft 2020 Norwich Town Plan with one technical change; namely, to delete the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th sentences from the 2nd paragraph of Chapter 2 (Land Use), section 2.6 "Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors," page 9. Layton seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Langhus moved to direct the Planning Director to submit a copy of the adopted Town Plan to TRORC for their approval. Arnold seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

R. Arnold asks if we have addressed **Marcia Calloway's** letter sent to C. Brochu and R. Arnold at 11:21 AM on March 7. **C. Brochu** states that she believes the issues were raised during the Planning Commission's public hearings and that no changes were recommended. **R. Francis** states that he has reviewed the memo as forwarded by R. Arnold and believes it to be a re-statement of previous statements and meetings. **R. Francis** states that it is common practice for a Town's Planning Department to create their own mapping and that this mapping is built from overlays from State mapping. There is no requirement to use the State's map. The mapping in the Town Plan meets all standards.

Francis states that the River Corridor Protection Program was reviewed in 2018, and it was decided that for various technical reasons and the potential impact on nearby landowners, that Norwich would instead look to meet the standards of the Emergency Relief Assistant Fund.

C. Brochu called for an end of discussion and for a vote at 2:09. **Langhus moved to adjourn. Gere seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 2:09 pm.

Approved by the Selectboard on April 8, 2020

Claudette Brochu
Selectboard Chair