

Norwich PC Minutes -10/10/23

Members Present: Ernie Ciccotelli, Vince Crow, Jeff Goodrich, Stuart Richards, Jaan Laaspere, Bob Pape, Kris Clement

Public: Elissa Close

Meeting Opened: 6:34 pm

1. Approve Agenda:

Goodrich moved, seconded by Ciccotelli, to approve the agenda.

Motion passed via consensus

2. Public Comment on items not on the agenda

N/A

3. Correspondence

Laaspere stated that VTrans is conducting a survey of towns along a proposed bicycle corridor on Route 5 in order to gauge interest and potential involvement in the project.

The group had consensus that this would be positive for Norwich and the surrounding communities, and that there are potential grants to fund the projects.

Goodrich volunteered to reach out to VTrans to determine the next step.

Elissa Close read from a letter to the Land Use subcommittee (see attached) stating the importance of considering the impact of development on nature and limit development.

4. Chair Report

Laaspere stated that the AHSC is aiming for the January deadline for the New Boston Rd planning grant.

The group had consensus to establish a Bike/ Pedestrian subcommittee in regards to the previously discussed bicycle corridor and long range planning for the town. Goodrich and Crow volunteered to join the subcommittee and were empowered by the PC to reach out to Paul Manganiello and Peter Orner with an invitation to join the subcommittee.

5.Planning Commission role, staff and process

The group discussed how to organize documents and correspondence so that it can be easily referenced. Laaspere will investigate the best method to publish the files online

Richards moved, seconded by Goodrich, the PC will use the following guidelines regarding correspondence.

- All opinions and information is welcome
- The documents must be relevant to the PC actions
- Use links to external documents when possible
- State a clear identity of the submitter and context of the material

Motion passed 6-0

The group discussed the vacant Planning and Zoning staff. The group had consensus that applicant should be willing to learn, open minded, is asset to the PC and can interpret and make decisions based on the LUR while being an advocate for the applicant, the town, and the DRB. Also that the PC is a at the forefront of finding a candidate and directing them

11. Adjourn

Richards moved, seconded by Goodrich, to adjourn the meeting at 8:44PM

Motion passed 7-0

Future Meeting

PC Meeting – 11/7/23 at 6:30pm at Tracy Hall (also accessible via Zoom)

Minutes by Vincent Crow on 10/12/23

Recent PC debate centering on what to name (or not) current changes in climate serves little purpose. We are entrenched in our 'camps' and can point to evidence in support of our point of view from any of a zillion sources, within or outside web-world. This information is unlikely to sway any of us from our tightly held viewpoints. While we dither, our expanding human impact on Nature continues to reduce wild places that once supported a diversity of creatures, insects, amphibians and birds, while diminishing quality of life for the humans, too. We should, instead, focus on limiting human development and its offsite impacts on Nature and each other. There are, in fact, others – many of them non-human – who are seeking homes, futures, health and life, who require space and healthy, diverse habitat in which to survive, just like humans.

An opinion regarding climate change/ crisis/ emergency isn't required to see that human development of land invariably leads to further development and offsite impacts that alter livability of a place for humans, but impacts non-human communities even more dramatically. Fewer wild places, green spaces, open meadows. The more subtle sounds of nature, overwhelmed by sounds of expanding human intrusion into areas once quiet and diverse with many types of living things. Dark nights give way to increasing lumens that blot out stars and force creatures into ever smaller, more compromised corners of the landscape or extinguish them entirely. Nature's wonderful diversity, upon which all humans depend, is reduced to a homogeneous drone of noise, light, cement and asphalt. In the long run, Nature will survive without us. We cannot survive without Nature. Technology will never build us an ecosystem of the diversity and beauty Nature has developed over millennia. Yet we do remarkably little to protect that which gives us life as we push for "progress" only in terms defined by and pertaining to humans.

Only my eyes and ears are required to convince me that human development proceeds at the expense of Nature: Creatures, small as bacteria and fungi, trees bigger than my house, and all the birds, amphibians, mammals and fish in between are impacted by diminishing habitat insufficient in size to sustain them. Fewer than a dozen monarch butterflies this summer, about the same numbers of fire flies this spring, in my back yard. This, the same location that hosted more than twice that number when I grew up here over 60 years ago. Lack of habitat, pesticides, invasives, light pollution are among the factors that impact these insects. All due to human presence. A beneficent touch or a toxic imprint on Nature? It matters how we treat the world in which we live.

There's money to be made from development – particularly in Vermont. No shortage of human voices add to the lobbying, negotiating, and legislating of development issues. Is it REALLY progress? At what cost, particularly to those who can't vote, or donate, write opinion letters, or come to meetings? Trees and soil bacteria won't be showing up at planning meetings. Forests, lakes, the air around us, each critically important to our health on this planet, yet...no voice, and worse no name. We just refer to these, collectively as "resources," and proceed to dig them up, pave them over, together with all their interconnected micro and macro level systems. Degrading them until they are gone. Hence my attempt to advocate for these critically important systems and the non-human individuals that are part of them.

Many of us in Vermont or other places with a bit of Nature still nearby, are here for the value it adds to our daily lives. When Nature has been extinguished in our once nurturing environment, we are pushed out to seek the next place that may bring us peace, beauty, and solace. In so doing we spread the 'cancer' of human development further across the natural world. We must strengthen protection for that which strengthens and protects us: Nature. That will mean, must mean, addressing offsite impacts and development. Unless we craft planning and zoning regulations that protect Nature, she won't be able to protect herself. We've proven too often that humans have difficulty limiting consumption. Wendell Berry observes that "control" is a favorite word of our industrial economy (traffic control, self-control, control of development, etc) yet we repeatedly set out to control that which we refuse to limit. "If we will not limit causes, there can be no controlling of effects. What is to be the fate of self-control in an economy that encourages unlimited selfishness?"

Climate change or not, I can see and hear uncomfortable changes around me that influence the livability of my home and surely that of the creatures sharing this place, too. Lacking clear and enforceable controls, our current trajectory leads to further destruction of Nature's marvelous diversity and leaves us with just another landscape like so many others in America: A homogeneity of human development, always at the expense of more wildness and places of solitude where the subtle sounds of nature can still be heard. We need wild places, Natural areas where we can appreciate other-than-human presence. Quiet reflection, to contemplate something bigger than ourselves, Nature or the stars, is not just idle fancy. Study after study shows its critical importance to our health. Those who push back will be called NIMBY, or worse. I suggest we look hard at who's really being selfish. I would suggest that we/ humans, collectively, have been extremely selfish at the expense of Nature for millennia. Crazy, since for all our technology we are unable to recreate the magic, beauty, and diversity of this web of systems on which we depend for our lives. Shame on us: today's youth are rightly incensed at our hubris.

Human pressure to develop Vermont, or any other place where there is a bit of desirable space upon which to build, will not stop. Likely will get far worse as increasing numbers of people around the globe become migrants for various reasons. Bulldozing and paving over what remains of our diverse natural world will not solve this issue – induced and perpetuated by humans. It will likely become worse if we continually favor human development over protection of Nature.

Having visited places where human development co-exists with Nature, I know it can be done, but it takes careful crafting of planning and development regulations that value and protect Nature as well as humans. Regulations that can be enforced; and the will to enforce them. Off-site impacts of any development play a significant role in manner and to what degree we impact Nature and one another. Limited development within guidelines suited to the location would be less problematic if we could live more quietly, with far less lumens at night, - just to give 2 examples of impacts that regularly set my teeth on edge and both of which have negative implications for Nature.

No discussion of "climate change" vs "emergency" is required and likely just slows progress toward workable solutions. Identification of enforceable, effective methods of helping those with insufficient courtesy genes to behave as if there was someone else living nearby-- both human and non-human 'someones,' would be a start. It will take creativity plus rules and regulations because humans have proven we can't do this without the help of such controls. But lacking this, I see no benefit in more development that would just sustain the model of "economic progress:" bringing in more business, creating more jobs, building more workforce housing, demand for more services, and so more houses, roads, malls, etc, with all the offsite impacts that accompany development. It is a dead end; an endless loop of consumption, extraction and destruction of Nature. Noise and lighting ordinances may seem onerous, but those places that protect such characteristics offer their human residents more than just houses. These are *homes* in communities with the individuality of a *particular* place; small and diverse enough to be loved and appreciated as different from 'Anywhere USA'. These places with varied characteristics where Nature's ecosystems and non-human residents have as much value as their human neighbors, are to be defended in strongest terms by those fortunate enough to live there.

We need planning and zoning documents that support and protect ALL of our community, non-human and human, and the ecosystems of which we are all a part.

Elissa Close
Partridge Hill

[to Planning Commission 9/28/23]