

## Norwich Planning Commission Minutes – August 22, 2023

Members present: Ciccotelli, Clement, Goodrich, Laaspere, Richards

Members absent: Crow, Pape

Public: Jack Cushman

Meeting opened: 6:34

1. Approved agenda (unanimous)
2. **Public comment on items not on the agenda** – None
3. **Correspondence** – None
4. **Chair report – P&Z files and maps**

The Chair reported on initial attempts to understand the status of background planning & zoning files needed to support the work of this new Commission. It has been difficult to assess availability without specific descriptions of target items. Members stressed the importance of the records of past discussions, previous edits, and unfinished revisions, along with original map files. Members expect there to be a large volume of information in these public records. The Commission agreed to this statement by consensus:

“The Planning Commission asks the Selectboard to take whatever actions are required to locate and make available any and all planning and zoning files. These public records are needed by several town groups to perform their duties.”

[Chair note – On August 24<sup>th</sup> I met with Brennan Duffy, Pam Mullen and Kyle Katz at Tracy Hall to review the planning and zoning files. A very large amount of information is available in dozens of folders and subfolders. These files are challenging to search given the volume, date range and relative lack of structure. To make efficient use of our staff’s time, it will be necessary to request specific files by topic or date. We discussed the original map files for the zoning regulations and town plan. The zoning maps, such as ridgeline district and scenic resources, date to before 2009 and it is not possible to find any source files from that long ago. The original GIS files for the maps in the 2020 town plan have not been located.]

### 5. Subcommittee update

The Land Use subcommittee held its organizational meeting on 8/15/23. Richards was selected as moderator and Pape as note-taker. It should be acknowledged that the draft minutes for this meeting were published one day late due to a misunderstanding of the OML time requirements.

At its next meeting on 8/24/23 this subcommittee will begin to review sections 1 & 2 of the current town plan to evaluate if the language is still relevant and if anything requires more discussion or possible amendment.

The readings listed in the packet for the upcoming meeting sparked a discussion of climate change with Jack Cushman advocating for the use of current, peer-reviewed documents. The PC Chair directed the group and the subcommittee to stay focused on the appropriate work of the Planning Commission and not debate wider issues such as climate change, which are outside our purview.

The Solar Siting subcommittee will hold its first meeting on 8/24/23.

## **6. Planning Commission staff**

The relationship between the Planning Commission and planning staff was discussed. The group favored a model of a robust and engaged Planning Commission with staff assisting and implementing, rather than directing.

Vermont statutes outline two options for planning in an urban municipality such as Norwich. One model, appropriate to a larger town, has a staffed planning department, led by a Planning Director, with a more advisory Planning Commission. Another option, also clearly outlined in VT statutes, describes an active and engaged Planning Commission supported by a Zoning Administrator who is nominated by the PC and appointed by the Selectboard. In this model the Commission collaborates with staff to do the town's planning work.

The Planning Commission passed a unanimous motion empowering the Chair to approach the Selectboard Chair to advocate for the "strong PC" model and discuss next steps. It was suggested that perhaps a small group of 1 or 2 PC members, the Town Manager and a Selectboard member could meet and propose options.

It was acknowledged that this represented a change from the model in place over the past few years and had important consequences relative to the posted job description and hiring process.

## **7. Planning Commission work plan**

Chair will continue informal outreach to other town groups. There has been positive feedback for the idea of collaboration and information exchange from the DRB, HPC, NCC, and the Listers.

## **8. Approve minutes of August 8, 2023**

Tabled until next meeting

9. **Public comment** - None

10. Meeting adjourned at 8:39

[Chair note – proposed upcoming PC meeting dates are September 12<sup>th</sup> and October 10<sup>th</sup> with subcommittees to meet between meetings of the full Commission.

The next Solar Siting Subcommittee meeting will be September 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:30]

APPROVED 09-12-2023