

NORWICH PLANNING COMMISSION
Thursday, September 10, 2020 6:30pm

MINUTES

Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86340389705>

Meeting ID: 863 4038 9705

Members Present: Melissa Horwitz (C), Brian Loeb, Jaci Allen, Jeff Goodrich, Jeff Lubell, Leah Romano

Public Present: Stuart Richards, Doug Wilberding, Lisa Close, Pamela Smith, Claudette Brochu, Tom Candon

Staff: Rod Francis

Meeting Opened: 6:37pm

1. Approve Agenda
Loeb moved and Allen seconded a motion to approve the Agenda. Motion carried:5 – 0
2. Meeting Objectives:
 - Review Draft of Municipal Planning Grant
 - School Wastewater Update
 - Wastewater Next Steps
 - Report on Town Plan Action Items
3. Comments from the Public: Stuart Richards asked that the commission could stick to the facts, and maintain civility and avoid ad hominem attacks. He also asked for more detail in the minutes similar to the Selectboard minutes.
4. Review and approve Minutes: July 23, 2020 (8-27-20)
Horwitz read out proposed revisions to the minutes reflecting suggestions from Goodrich and Stuart Richards (provided via email).

Under Item 6 after the motion is recorded insert the following text:

Goodrich commented that looking forward recognition of appropriate OML process will be important. Especially in light of concerns he raised about OML while the commission worked on the Town Plan

Under Item 11 prior to the record of comments made by Roger Arnold insert the following text:

Stuart Richards commented that the commission appears to be contemplating doing its own 'sewer study'. In 2005 the Selectboard appointed a 10-member subcommittee to undertake a sewer study. The commission has many issues to deal with, and it is unlikely they can do a sewer study in a meaningful way. He questioned the need for another study, pointing to the conclusions of the 2005 study.

Lubell remarked that he didn't believe that members of the public tell the commission what should be included in the minutes, that the appropriate place for such comments is in correspondence.

Francis confirmed that the email correspondence dated September 9 from Richards arrived after the packet was posted, therefore it could not be included. It will appear in the next meeting packet.

Lubell moved and Allen seconded a motion to approved the minutes of August 27, 2020 as amended. Motion carried 5 – 0.

5. Announcements, Reports, Updates & Correspondence
 - Correspondence: See item 6 (below)
 - Updates; None
 - Reports: None
6. Review Draft of Municipal Grant: Francis led the commission through a discussion of the draft application submission. He also informed the commission that he has sought and received a letter of support from TRORC. Due to the guest for the meeting joining this item was paused.
7. Marion Cross School Wastewater Update. Tom Candon from the Marion Cross School Board spoke to the commission about recent work on resolving the wastewater issues at the Marion Cross School (MCS).
 - Pathways Consulting was retained to explore:
 - Replacement of existing wastewater system
 - Using the Piesch property for wastewater treatment
 - In collaboration with commercial property owners along Route 5 South connecting to the Hartford municipal wastewater system
 - Information received on each of these possible solutions include:
 - Town of Hartford requested an engineering study to establish the possible impact of the Norwich properties joining the Hartford wastewater system
 - A hydrology study has established that the existing wastewater site (the town green) cannot be made a viable location using conventional treatment designs
 - All options remain under active consideration including:
 - Eco-machines (such as the Sharon Rest Area on I89)
 - The Dresden School district property Route 5 South (either conventional or Eco-machine)
 - In response to a question from Lubell concerning timelines:
 - MCS board is working steadily towards a viable solution, but it is unlikely that a proposal will be ready for voters to consider before the warrant is prepared for Town Meeting in 2023

- Allen suggested that it is in the town's best interest to collaborate with MCS on finding a solution to the wastewater problem. She observed that wastewater is currently hauled from Tracy Hall. (Francis confirmed that it is trucked to the Hartford wastewater treatment plant). Allen asked if there was a possibility for cooperation between the town and MCS for hauling.
 - Loeb asked Candon about progress on the engineering study. Candon was unclear how advanced this study is given the interruption of COVID-19, but promised to follow up.
 - Doug Wilberding asked (via the Zoom chat function) whether in the future Goodrich will recuse himself from any votes or discussion given his conflict of interest (Pathways Consulting).
 - Stuart Richards thanked Tom Candon for presenting and suggested other possible town-owned land for solutions including Huntley Meadows or the area where the water wells are located.
6. (resumed) Francis resumed review of the draft MPG 2021 application. Lubell wanted to know what the specific proposal was seeking to achieve. Francis replied that this topic was selected by the commissioners at the last meeting, and explained the central role in applying the density factor calculator in producing the settlement pattern.

Lubell suggested including requiring the consultant to provide recommendations.

Stuart Richards referenced surveys (2005, 2018) indicating more intense development was not a broadly accepted objective in Norwich.

Lubell asked what was the purpose of doing a build-out analysis, which may be inflammatory if it showed total build out. Francis responded that it was a standard analytical tool and that it was important to undertake the exercise to establish the effectiveness of existing land use regulations.

Lubell suggested using scenarios as a way of presenting the findings. Loeb agreed with this suggestion.

Francis asked for the meeting to pause to respond to questions from Doug Wilberding asking:

- Who is the consultant?
- Is it Placesense.com?

Francis responded that the document before the commission was a draft of a grant application to be submitted by October 1 which will then be awarded some time in December or January. Assuming Norwich is successful the RFP or RFQ would go out in early spring be awarded some time later. Under no circumstances would a response be submitted or accepted by PlaceSense the consulting firm, operated by his partner Brandy Saxton, because this would be a conflict of interest.

Allen commented that the draft application references the Town Plan which seeks to protect rural character and protection of forest lands and natural resources.

Loeb moved and Allen seconded a motion that the sense of the commission is that this grant application is in furtherance of the objectives of the town plan and the commission is supportive of the application going forward. Motion carried 5 – 0 – 1

Stuart Richards referenced a 2016 study that suggested a density of eight units per acre for a 350-acre area which did scare people.

8. Discuss wastewater next steps. Allen responded that communication between the School Board and Selectboard will likely take place now, which will advance the issue.

Lubell posed undertaking a survey of people in the village district to find out their experiences and needs with regard to wastewater.

9. Report on Town Plan Action Items: Allen reported that since it had only been two weeks since the last meeting not much progress has been made.

Loeb reported that he has received communication from Mary Layton (Selectboard) on the topic of childcare and hoped to have more to report soon.

10. Other Business: None

11. Future Meeting Schedule & Agendas: Rather than meet the fourth Thursday of the month in November and December (because those dates conflict with holidays) the commission agreed to meet the second Thursday which would be November 12 and December 10, 2020. Agenda items will include:

- Town Plan Action Items for Planning Commission
- Village Designation Walk October 16 10:00am
- Selectboard Village Center Designation Presentation October 28, 6:30pm

Goodrich moved and Lubell seconded that the Planning Commission supports the (re)application for the Village Center Designation to the Downtown Board. Motion carried 5 – 0.

Doug Wilberding asked what the tax benefits of the village designation were. Francis explained the key features of the program were tax credits are used to restore, renovate or rebuild properties in the designated area.

Claudette Brochu pointed out that moving a motion to support the village center designation was problematic because the item was not on the agenda. Commissioners discussed the matter.

Lubell moved and Goodrich seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried 4 – 0 – 1.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:10pm

Future Meetings:

Thursday October 22, 6:30pm Special Meeting (review draft of MPG application)

November 12, 2020

December 10, 2020

Respectfully submitted,
Rod Francis

APPROVED 10-22-2020