

Norwich Planning Commission
Regular meeting – April 14th, 2026, 6:30pm

To be Held in person in the Tracy Hall Multipurpose Room and via Zoom

Zoom Information:

Topic: Planning Commission Regular Meeting

Time: April 14th, 2026, 6:30 PM

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81307504748>

Meeting ID: 813 0750 4748

888 475 4499 US Toll-free

AGENDA

1. Open Meeting; determine quorum
2. Approve Agenda
3. Public comment on items not on agenda
4. Correspondence on items not on the agenda
5. Chair's report
6. Affordable Housing revolving fund – Starlake Application for funds
7. Village Master Plan – Steering Committee
8. Housing Chapter delegation
9. Current Planning Commission Bylaws Revision
10. Approve minutes from March 10th
11. Adjourn

Enclosures:

Email from AHSC chair Jeff Lubell re: Starlake Application

Analysis of Starlake Housing Trust/Twin Pines Request for Funding Under the Affordable Housing Revolving Fund

Affordable Housing Fund Policies and Criteria

Email from Pam Smith re: Starlake Application

Norwich Village Master Plan Summary

Norwich Village Master Plan Work Plan Outline

Model Planning Commission Rules of Ethics and Procedures

Minutes from March 10th

Steven True

From: Jeff Lubell <jefflubell@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 29, 2026 4:48 PM
To: Jaan Laaspere
Cc: Steven True
Subject: Memo from AHSC to PC re Starlake Application
Attachments: Analysis of Starlake Housing Trust_final_2026_03_29.docx

Hi Jaan,

At the last affordable housing subcommittee meeting, the subcommittee voted 4-1 to recommend approval of the application from the Starlake Housing Trust and Twin Pines for funding from the Affordable Housing Revolving Fund.

Because the issues raised by this application are somewhat complicated, I prepared a memo analyzing the issue. The subcommittee's motion empowered me to finalize the memo and send it to the Planning Commission, which I am now doing through this correspondence.

There are two really two main issues:

1. Should the application be approved in light of the goals of the Fund?
2. Are adjustments to the Affordable Housing Revolving Fund guidance needed before the application can be approved?

The second question is a legal question that is beyond the capacity of the AHSC to answer. Accordingly, we focused mainly on the first question. The end of the analysis includes language the Selectboard could consider depending on which way it chooses to go under question #2.

Please let me know when this will be on the Agenda and I would be happy to participate.

Please include the attached memo in your packet along with the application and the fund guidance.

Thanks.

Jeff

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUND POLICIES AND CRITERIA

PREAMBLE: The question of whether to establish an Affordable Housing Revolving Fund in the amount of \$45,000 was put to voters of the Town of Norwich in an article included on the November 6th, 2018 ballot. The measure was supported by the voters. What follows is guidance for the management of the fund.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: The purpose of the Norwich Affordable Housing Revolving Fund (fund) is to facilitate the provision of housing in Norwich that remains affordable in perpetuity. The fund shall be managed in such a way as to attract additional support for affordable housing from other private, public and not-for-profit entities. In this manner, the impact of the fund will be quantifiably greater than the original \$45,000 commitment.

GOVERNANCE: The Selectboard may approve the disbursement of funds in support of an affordable housing project that aligns with the guidance contained herein. Such a project is to be led by a designated sponsor. The Planning Commission will review potential projects for compliance with the Town Plan and make recommendations to the Selectboard.

ELIGIBLE SPONSORS: Entities registered with the VT Secretary of State to conduct business in VT, 503 (c), and/or recognized affordable housing providers are eligible. A demonstrated track record in the development and/or management of affordable housing is required. Individuals and households are not eligible, and would need to partner with an eligible sponsor.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS: A proposal that demonstrates a need for the town's funding that cannot be readily met through other sources in order to provide two or more affordable housing units in perpetuity located in Norwich. Projects that demonstrate a substantial leveraging of the town's funding with other private and/or public funding sources for the creation of affordable housing units are preferred.

PERFORMANCE PERIOD OF FUNDS: The Town expects there will be a direct relationship between the duration (term) of the loan of funds and the number of affordable dwelling units any proposed project provides. The smaller the number of affordable housing units created, the shorter the required repayment period.

REPAYMENT OF FUNDS: The obligation is on the sponsor to show how the project will benefit from the use of the funds and to propose a repayment schedule that is both workable from the project's standpoint and consistent with the affordable housing fund policies and criteria. Repayment holidays, deferred payment schedules and balloon payments are all devices sponsors can propose to advance project viability.

INTEREST OWED ON USE OF FUNDS: An interest rate of one point below the prime rate as published in the Wall Street Journal (WSJ prime) per annum will be set on all dispersed funds unless:

- a. The Selectboard (or their designees) in reviewing the project determines that the public good justifies foregoing any expected interest payments (principal is not forgiven)
- b. The sponsor demonstrates to the Selectboard's satisfaction that the levying of interest on the repayment of funds would jeopardize the viability of the project

TRACKING OF FUNDS: Where a sponsor proposes a lengthy installment plan (more than three years) for repayment, and/or multiple payments, the recovery of the administrative costs associated with tracking payments will be considered when settling on loan terms.

ELIGIBLE USE OF FUNDS: Funds may be used to cover reasonable "hard" and "soft" costs incurred in the acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of an Eligible Project except as provided for herein. These funds are not available for: markets studies, property appraisals, site assessments, engineering, permitting or design, legal review or any soft costs associated with the acquisition of real property or project management. These funds cannot be used for the payment of Norwich property taxes, education taxes, VT taxes or US taxes. Sponsors are encouraged to use these funds as a match for other funding sources. A project may include dwelling units that do not meet the definition of 'affordable' (below), so long as the project delivers the minimum number of affordable units required for eligibility under this fund.

DEFINITIONS:

Affordable: ~~This program will use the definition of affordable housing adapted from 24 VSA § 4303 (1).~~

(1) "Affordable housing" means either of the following:

(A) Owner-occupied housing for which the total annual cost of ownership, including principal, interest, taxes, insurance, and condominium association fees, does not exceed 30 percent of the gross annual income of a household at 80 percent of the highest of the following:

- (i) the county median income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development;
- (ii) the standard metropolitan statistical area median income if the municipality is located in such an area, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; or
- (iii) the statewide median income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

(B) Rental housing for which the total annual cost of renting, including rent, utilities, and condominium association fees, does not exceed 30 percent of the gross annual income of a household at 80 percent of the highest of the following:

- (i) the county median income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development;
- (ii) the standard metropolitan statistical area median income if the municipality is located in such an area, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; or
- (iii) the statewide median income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Perpetuity: means the longest possible time period permitted under state law, which will be enforced through legal instruments attached to the property title or other binding legal documents. The following specific provisions shall apply to rental and owner-occupied affordable housing:

- Affordable rental housing must be occupied, in perpetuity, by households with incomes at or below 80 percent of the highest of the three income standards specified in the definition of affordable housing. Housing that serves households with lower incomes is to be preferred where practicable.

- Owner-occupied affordable housing shall use a resale formula designed to share equity between the purchaser and the program to facilitate the accumulation of assets by the homeowners while maintaining long-term affordability. Unless good cause is shown to use a different resale formula, the resale formula shall be one of those commonly in use in Vermont. The initial occupant of owner-occupied affordable housing must have an income at or below 80 percent of the highest of the three income standards specified in the definition of affordable housing. Subsequent purchasers must have an income at or below the higher of: (a) 80 percent of the highest of the three income standards specified in the definition of affordable housing or (b) the income level needed to afford the price specified by the resale formula.

Analysis of Starlake Housing Trust / Twin Pines Request for Funding Under the Affordable Housing Town's Revolving Fund

March 29, 2026

NOTE: On March 23, 2026, the Norwich Affordable Housing Subcommittee approved these recommendations by a vote of 4-1 and authorized the chair to finalize the memo and submit it to the Planning Commission.

Background

On Feb. 9, 2026, Starlake Housing Trust and Twin Pines submitted an application for \$45,000 under the town's Affordable Housing Revolving Fund (Fund). This memo provides an analysis of this application and a recommendation that it be granted.

The original Fund was created by Norwich voters more than 20 years ago. The funds have been reauthorized several times – most recently in 2018, when Norwich voters voted to reauthorize the funds and allow interest to accrue to the fund. On April 24, 2019, the Selectboard approved a set of guidelines developed initially by the Affordable Housing Subcommittee and approved by the Planning Commission, for the expenditure of the funds. Accrued interest on the Fund now exceeds \$5,000 for a total fund in excess of \$50,000.

This is the first formal request for the funds.

This memo describes the extent to which the request is consistent with various provisions of the approved guidelines and makes a recommendation to the Planning Commission, which is responsible for issuing a recommendation to the Selectboard.

The Application

Starlake Village (Starlake) is a development in Norwich, established in 1992, consisting of 14 owner-occupied homes that were developed under a model designed to create owner-occupied homes that are and remain affordable over time through restrictions designed to balance residents' opportunities to build wealth and the preservation of long-term affordability. Owners of the homes buy the homes at below-market levels and take out a mortgage to pay for their purchase. When they sell the homes, they are required to sell at an affordable price calculated by sharing the home price appreciation; families keep some of the appreciation, while the rest stays in the home in the form of a lower purchase price, thus maintaining affordability over time. This category of homeownership is sometimes called "shared equity homeownership."

The Starlake homeownership association (the Starlake Trust) and Twin Pines (the original developer of the homes and the organization responsible for stewarding its long-term affordability) have requested funds to cover accrued capital needs related to the community water and wastewater systems. They submitted evidence of substantial costs to keep the water and wastewater systems in good working order, totaling about \$66,000 through 2028 and an additional \$173,000 through 2034. These costs were calculated a few years ago, so the costs may have gone up since the original assessment.

The applicants have a replacement reserve of about \$20,000, some of which the applicants note can be used as a match for the town's funding. (The Starlake Homeowners association currently builds its reserve by about \$2,000 per year.) The applicants have noted that the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board is open to providing an additional \$12,500 in matching funds.

Overall Purpose

At its core, the underlying purpose of the Affordable Housing Revolving Fund is to help ensure that low and moderate-income households can afford to live in Norwich. The request by the Starlake Housing Trust and Twin Pines advances this purpose. The requested funding would contribute to the ability of moderate-income homeowners to stay in their properties without having to sell to higher income households who have the money on their own to update the water and wastewater systems.

Applicant Need

It seems clear that applicants need the funding they have requested as their accumulated reserves fall far short of the costs of ensuring their water and wastewater systems are in good working order.

Use of the Funds

When the Fund guidelines were established, the paradigmatic use envisioned for the Fund was to help facilitate the construction of a new affordable housing development (or the substantial rehabilitation of an older structure that creates new affordable housing). The Starlake proposal is somewhat different from that paradigm. They are proposing funds to help maintain the affordability of an existing affordable housing development rather than the creation of a new one.

Interestingly, while there are several phrases in the guidelines that seem to reflect the assumption of new construction, the guidelines mostly talk about **providing** affordable housing. For example, the guidelines state: "The purpose of the Norwich Affordable Housing Revolving Fund (fund) is to facilitate the **provision** of housing in Norwich that

remains affordable in perpetuity” (emphasis added). The Guidelines also specify that: “Funds may be used to cover reasonable “hard” and “soft” costs incurred in the acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of an Eligible Project except as provided for herein.”

The guidelines do not define the term “rehabilitation,” but generally in the housing context it means repairing or improving an existing property, as opposed to building a new structure. Arguably, then, while this project does not fit the original paradigm directly, it does represent an expenditure for “rehabilitation” to facilitate the “provision of housing in Norwich that remains affordability in perpetuity.” So, its use is largely compatible with the eligible uses specified in the guidelines, even if it represents a use not originally contemplated when the guidelines were prepared.

Initial Affordability

The Fund guidelines call for homes to be affordable to and initially occupied by a household at 80% of the area median income. Starlake is aimed at a group with slightly higher incomes. Starlake’s guidelines initially called for it to be affordable to households at 95% of the area median income, and now call for applicants for available units to have incomes below 120% of the area median income. The Fund guidelines recognized that over time, new homebuyers might need to have somewhat higher incomes than the original 80% of area median income due to the mechanics of how the resale formula works, so the increase in area median income is not entirely unexpected.

The precise affordability level of Starlake homes is unclear as no information has been provided about mortgage costs relative to incomes. On balance, it appears the units the applicant proposes to assist with the funds serve an income group that cannot afford to live in Norwich without assistance but does not meet the literal requirements in the guidelines for initial affordability.

Long-Term Affordability

The Fund guidelines also call for assisted units to be affordable in perpetuity. For owner occupied homes, this means they utilize one of the resale formulas commonly in use in Vermont. This requirement appears to have been met here, as Starlake uses the 75/25 split common in Vermont where the family can sell the home for its original purchase price plus 25% of the increase in appraised value (often plus capital improvements).

Loan Terms

The applicants have requested that the funds be issued in a loan that is forgiven over time. If that is not possible, they request a 10-year term with 0% interest.

The Fund guidelines specify a loan with an interest rate of one point below the prime rate, but gives the Selectboard discretion to charge a lower rate. The Fund guidelines do not contemplate that the loan would be forgiven. The term is not specified in the guidelines but the guidelines contemplate a longer term for a larger number of units assisted.

Leverage

While there is no formal match for the town's fund required by the Fund guidelines, the guidelines specify that "Projects that demonstrate a substantial leveraging of the town's funding with other private and/or public funding sources for the creation of affordable housing units are preferred."

The applicants have proposed to match / leverage a portion of the town's funds with their own reserve funds. Whether this is technically a match or not (usually a match is from an external source and not the applicant), it's clear this is a meaningful contribution to the project but not a large one. Should the state follow through in providing \$12,500 in matching funds, the two funding sources together would constitute an amount equal to about half of the funds requested from the town, which is more substantial leverage.

Analysis

As noted above, this is the first formal request for funds from the Fund in its entire existence. The funds do not do any good sitting in the bank. They are meant to be used. There applicants unquestionably have a need here for the funds. The requested use advances the underlying purpose of helping moderate-income households afford to live in Norwich. The funds are proposed to be used for rehabilitation (an eligible use) and provide affordable housing that is affordable over the long-term, which the guidelines also call for. While the proposal does not line up perfectly with all aspects of the guidelines, it seems consistent with the overall spirit of the Fund and its guidelines, and we recommend that the town find a way to use the funds to help the applicants.

Taking a step back from the immediate application, it is important to recognize that the Fund guidelines are very specific and appear better matched to a much larger fund. As noted in the town's housing strategy, the town originally intended to grow the fund over time. For a variety of reasons, that did not happen. While a larger fund – say \$500,000 or \$1 million – might make a material contribution to the feasibility of a perpetually affordable housing development, a \$45,000 fund is far too small to accomplish this. Developers of perpetually affordable housing generally do not need \$45,000 to advance their project as they have other sources of working capital. We need to find a use that is appropriate for the scale of the funding available – where \$45,000 can make a material difference. The requested use appears to be such a case.

One concern is that the funding being requested goes only partway to solving their long-term capital needs problem. The requested funds, plus some amount of their accrued reserve and the Vermont state's contribution, should help them meet their near-term capital needs. But a larger bill is coming due within 8 years and it's not clear how they will meet that need. For this reason, it would be useful to discuss with the applicant whether the town's funding could be used to help leverage additional resources to provide a more comprehensive solution to the applicant's needs. Some options might include, for example:

- Using the town's funds as a match for a larger grant, such as the match proposed to be obtained from the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board.
- Using some or all of the town's funds to cover the costs of higher contributions to the property's reserve account by residents who cannot afford it. For example, if the residents raised their collective annual contribution to the reserve fund by an additional \$5,000 or \$8,000 per year, some of the funding provided by the town could be used to pay the additional costs for those residents who cannot afford the increase, while facilitating a faster increase in the fund.

It's not the town's role to be prescriptive about the exact way in which the town's funds are leveraged for greater impact but any such leverage would be a strong positive that would support a decision to provide the requested assistance.

Recommendation

We recommend that the application be granted and that the original \$45,000 plus any interest that has accrued in the fund (which appears to exceed \$5,000) be loaned to the applicants at zero percent interest. We propose a 12-year term with no payments for the first two years, followed by a ten-year repayment schedule. We believe there is merit to the request for the loan to be forgiven but are not sure the town has the authority to do so, given that the town warrant article specified a revolving loan fund. Potentially, the voters could, in the future, decide whether to forgive the loan, should the question be posed to them on the ballot.

The affordable housing subcommittee did not condition its recommendation of approval of the request on any specific conditions. It would nevertheless be useful to continue to encourage applicants to find a way to maximize the utility of the town's contribution by actively investigating opportunities for using the money as leverage to secure additional funds to help meet applicants' long-term capital needs. We present two ideas above, but the applicants may have other ideas for a match.

The town should further encourage applicants to develop a long-term plan for raising the funding needed to meet their long-term needs.

Postscript

If the Selectboard decides to fund the request, they will need to decide whether they have authority to do so under the existing policy or whether they need to amend the policy first. We do not express an opinion on that question.

If the Selectboard determines that it needs to modify the Fund's guidelines before it can approve the applicants' request, one option would be to first add a clause to the policy that says:

“The Selectboard reserves the right to approve a proposal that advances many of the underlying goals of the Fund even if it does not necessarily meet each specific requirement.”

If the Selectboard wished to approve the applicants' request without first modifying the guidelines, it might wish to consider a motion that looks something like this:

Having considered the Affordable Housing Revolving Fund guidelines approved by an earlier Selectboard on April 24, 2019 and the lack of any prior formal requests for the funding, and considering the pros and cons of the funding application by Starlake Housing Trust and Twin Pines, we believe the request satisfies enough of the guidelines to merit funding. Accordingly . . . “ [with the final terms of the award.]

Steven True

From: Jaan Laaspere <laaspere.planning@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 10, 2026 9:50 AM
To: Pamela Thompson Smith; Steven True
Cc: Kimo Griggs
Subject: Re: Starlake Application for Affordable Housing Reserve Funds

Pam,
Thank you for your input.

Steven, this should be included in the packet for next week's PC meeting.

Jaan

On Fri, Apr 10, 2026 at 9:29 AM Pamela Thompson Smith <psmith4203@gmail.com> wrote:
Jaan,

I write to voice my opposition to the Starlake request for a grant from the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund. Only the voters of the Town may establish a reserve fund. Once established, the Selectboard has the authority to disburse funds only in the manner stated in the purpose of the fund as presented to the voters. Below is the State statute governing reserve funds:

24 VSA § 2804: *At an annual or special meeting duly warned, a municipality may establish a reserve fund to be under the control and direction of the legislative branch of the municipality. The reserve fund shall be kept in a separate account and invested as are other public funds and may be expended for such purposes for which established, or when authorized by a majority of the voters present and voting at an annual or special meeting duly warned, for other purposes.*

As you can see, the funds can only be expended "for such purposes for which established." Thus, utilizing reserve funds that are clearly designated as being held in a revolving fund would be a violation of State statute if given as a grant. The correct way for Twin Pines Housing to request a grant from the Town for the Starlake project would be to gather at least 165 signatures of registered Norwich voters to place an article on a Town Warrant. This could be one of the outside appropriations we see on every warrant such as the Norwich Public Library, Norwich Historical Society, etc.

At the bottom of this email, I have provided the history of Fund #23 that I have compiled from Town Reports and SB minutes.

Pam

Fund #23 Affordable Housing

March 1, 2005 Town Meeting – Article 27: Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$45,000 to create a revolving fund to initiate contracts to acquire land suitable for affordable housing? This money will be returned to the General Fund at the end of three years.

March 4, 2008 Town Meeting – Article 8: Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich extend for three years (i.e., June 30, 2011) the appropriation approved at Town Meeting on March 1, 2005 that read as follows: “Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$45,000 to create a revolving fund to initiate contracts to acquire land suitable for affordable housing? This money will be returned to the General Fund at the end of three years”?

March 6, 2012 Town Meeting – Article 12: Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich appropriate \$45,000 to recreate a revolving fund to initiate contracts to acquire land suitable for affordable housing, such amount being reasonably necessary for the support of programs to benefit Town residents? This money will be returned to the General Fund at the end of five years.

August 22, 2018 SB Minutes

6. Affordable Housing Fund - Layton moved (2nd Pepper) to approve the “Warning of Special Town Meeting, November 6, 2018,” which will place an article on the ballot asking the voters whether to reestablish an Affordable Housing Reserve Fund. Motion passed 4 yes, 1 no (Cook). Langhus moved (2nd Layton) that the Selectboard adopt the warning language as read by TM which asks voters whether to “re-establish a revolving Affordable Housing Reserve Fund with previously appropriated fund approved by Norwich voters to be distributed and administered according to a process adopted by the Selectboard in consultation with the Town Manager, the Norwich Planning Commission, and the Affordable Housing Subcommittee.” Motion passed 4 yes, 1 no (Cook).

November 6, 2018 Special Town Meeting:

Article 1. Shall the voters of the Town of Norwich re-establish a revolving Affordable Housing Reserve Fund with previously appropriated funds approved by Norwich voters to be distributed and administered according to a process adopted by the Selectboard in consultation with the Town Manager, the Norwich Planning Commission, and the Affordable Housing Subcommittee? Yes: 1575; No: 400

Norwich Village Master Plan 2026

Norwich will undertake a robust, inclusive planning process to develop a new Village Master Plan. The project will be led by the Norwich Planning Commission and conducted through the formation of a steering committee. A professional planning consultant will be hired to facilitate public engagement, analyze existing conditions, build scenarios and draft the plan for review. The process will include:

- Designing rich community engagements to gather input from residents, businesses, and stakeholders.
- Conduct workshops targeting a wide range of interests to ensure broad participation.
- Data collection and mapping of current land use, infrastructure, housing, and environmental assets.
- Review of best practices and model plans from similar Vermont towns.
- Iterative plan development with multiple opportunities for public feedback.

Project Deliverables

- A comprehensive Norwich Village Master Plan, including actionable strategies for growth, housing, infrastructure, community building, resilience., and historic preservation.
- Public engagement summary documenting outreach efforts and community input.
- GIS-based maps illustrating current conditions and future scenarios.
- Recommendations for zoning updates and capital improvements.
- Identification of funding sources and implementation steps for priority projects.

Intended Long-Term Outcomes

The Village Master Plan will serve as a roadmap for Norwich's sustainable growth and resilience over the next decade. This village plan will become an integral part of the full town plan re-write to be completed in 2028. Long-term outcomes include:

- Improved coordination of development and infrastructure investments.
- Expanded affordable housing options.
- Safer streets and multimodal transportation networks.
- Preservation of Norwich's historic village, rural character and natural resources.
- Increased community engagement and capacity for future planning efforts.
- Eligibility for state and federal funding to implement plan recommendations.

Project Location

The town of Norwich with a specific focus on the historic village center, surrounding village area and along the Route 5 corridor.

Project Management

The Norwich Village Master Plan project will be managed by a steering committee formed by the Norwich Planning Commission. The steering committee will include members with a broad set of perspectives and interests, including historic preservation, families and children, affordable housing, town government, economic development, and a regional view. The steering committee will design public outreach to ensure all opinions are included in this community planning exercise. Decisions regarding the planning process and deliverables will be made by the Planning Commission, with recommendations forwarded to the Selectboard for final approval.

The Planning Commission will champion the project, manage public engagement, and distribute information broadly once approved by the Selectboard. This management structure is designed to ensure effective oversight, broad community involvement, and successful completion of the Norwich Village Master Plan.

Public Outreach

Public participation is vital to the success of the Norwich Village Master Plan. Our goal is to inform and involve as many Norwich residents as possible throughout the planning process. In addition to traditional outreach methods—such as community surveys, press releases, articles in local newspapers and newsletters, updates on the Town website and social media—the Planning Commission will hold open meetings monthly, with dedicated Village Plan sessions for public input.

2026 Norwich Village Master Plan – Workplan Outline

DRAFT

Define project and create consultant RFP [April – June]

Activities:

Steering committee formation and education

Village historical context

Planning Areas within a Town Plan

Pre-existing conditions of planning elements - physical, regulatory, human & prior planning studies

Frame questions important to village planning

- Village area boundaries
- Bike/Ped/trail
- How much new housing, what kind and where?
- Economic development – how much, what kind and where?
- Village public activities now and preferences for future
- What is the infrastructure necessary to support the plan?
- What does resilience look like in the future?

Events: 3 - 4 steering committee meetings April 27 through mid-June

Output:

- Statement of Work for all phases, including specific RFP for consultant
- Definition of necessary background information
- Create framing questions and capture steering committee's initial thoughts
- Plan for informal public discussion during summer

Hire consultant – collect background [July & August]

Activities

Steering committee members engage informally with residents

~ 2 steering committee meetings over summer for updates on community conversations and consultant search

Output – Consultants hired & contract approved by Selectboard

Public engagement on all topics [September – November]

Activities:

Collect background data – traffic, housing, soils, infrastructure, sidewalks

Collect example village plans from other Vermont towns

Townwide directed conversation with publicity push - possible town wide survey

Events:

3 – 4 steering committee meetings including consultant
Two charrettes with maximum public participation

Output:

Articulated town's vision, priorities and needs to be incorporated into the draft plan
List of open questions and topics for possible follow-up

Draft, edit and approve village plan [January & February '27]

Create plan drafts for review by steering committee and Planning Commission
Public review, hearings and Selectboard approval

Create detailed list of follow up activities

PLANNING COMMISSION
Rules of Procedure
and
Rules of Ethics with Respect to Conflicts of Interest

Section I: Authority.

The Planning Commission of the Town of Norwich hereby adopts the following rules of procedure in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 4461(a) and 1 V.S.A. §§ 312(e), (f), and (h).

Section II: Policy.

These Rules are adopted to ensure consistent and fair treatment of applicants and interested persons and participants, orderly and efficient public proceedings, and compliance with state and federal law. These Rules shall also ensure that no board member will gain a personal or financial advantage from their work for the board, so that the public trust in municipal government will be preserved.

Section III: Definitions.

A. "Commission" means the Planning Commission.

B. "Commission member" means a regular member of the Planning Commission.

C. "Conflict of interest" means any one of the following:

1. A direct or indirect personal interest of a Commission member, a spouse, household member, child, stepchild, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, aunt or uncle, brother or sister-in-law, business associate, employer or employee, in the outcome of a cause, proceeding, application or any other matter pending before the Planning Commission.

2. A direct or indirect financial interest of a Commission member, a spouse, household member, child, stepchild, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, aunt or uncle, brother or sister-in-law, business associate, employer or employee, in the outcome of a cause, proceeding, application or any other matter pending before the Planning Commission.

3. A situation where a Commission member has publicly displayed a prejudgment of the merits of a particular proceeding before the board. This shall not apply to a member's particular political views or general opinion on a given issue.

4. A situation where a board member has not disclosed ex parte communications with a party in a proceeding before the board, pursuant to Section XII of these Rules.

D. "Deliberative session" means a private session of the Commission to weigh, examine, and discuss the reasons for and against an act or decision, from which the public is excluded. There shall be no taking of evidence or submission of testimony, nor need a deliberative session be publicly noticed. By motion and majority vote, the board may enter deliberative session during a hearing to consider a matter before it.

E. "Executive session" means a session of a public body from which the public is excluded, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313. Such private session may only be held for one of the reasons permitted by the statute, and no binding action may be taken in executive session.

F. "Ex parte communication" means direct or indirect communication between a member of the Planning Commission and any party, party's representative, party's counsel or any person interested in the outcome of any proceeding before the panel, that occurs outside of a public proceeding, and concerns the substance or merits of the proceeding.

G. "Official act or action" means any legislative, administrative or quasi-judicial act performed by any commission member.

H. "Public deliberations" means the weighing, examining, and discussing, in a public proceeding, the reasons for and against an act or decision, but expressly excludes the taking of evidence and the arguments of parties.

I. "Recuse" means to remove oneself from a particular board proceeding because of a real or perceived conflict of interest.

Section IV: Regular Officers.

The Planning Commission shall consist of nine regular members. After Town Meeting but prior to May 1, or at other times throughout the year as needed, the Planning Commission shall hold an organizational meeting and elect by majority vote, a Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk.

A. The Chair shall preside at all meetings, hearings, and deliberations, decide all points of order or procedure, and appoint members to any committee of the board. The Chair may administer oaths and may request the attendance of witnesses and the production of material relevant to any issue under consideration.

B. The Vice Chair shall assume the duties of the Chair whenever the Chair is absent, or at the Chair's request. The Clerk shall assume such duties whenever the Chair and the Vice Chair are absent, or at their request.

C. It shall be the duty of all members to review the minutes and other official records of Planning Commission meetings and actions, and correct and ratify these when appropriate and necessary.

D. The Clerk shall take minutes of all meetings, unless delegated to another member of the Planning Commission or staff.

Section V: Regular and Special Meetings.

Regular meetings to conduct business of the Planning Commission shall be held in the Town Offices at 6 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month, or as warranted. The person serving as Chair may cancel meetings at any time.

A. Special meetings may be called by the Chair, provided at least 24 hours notice is given to each member and the time and place of each special meeting is publicly announced at least 24 hours before the meeting.

B. A quorum shall consist of a majority of the entire Commission.

C. Members may participate by telephone or videoconferencing as long as the absent member can hear everything that is occurring at the meeting and everyone present at the meeting can hear the member.

D. All meetings shall be open to the public unless the Commission, by two-thirds majority vote, has entered a deliberative or executive session. The Commission may only hold an executive session pursuant to the reasons permitted by 1 V.S.A. § 313, and only after a two-thirds majority vote to enter executive session. Members of the public may participate by videoconferencing and as provided in these rules.

E. There shall be an agenda for each meeting. Those who wish to be added to the agenda shall contact the Planning Commission Chair or staff to arrange for a convenient time. The Chair shall determine the content of the agenda.

F. All business shall be conducted in the same order as it appears on the agenda, except that by majority consent, the Chair may alter the order of items to be considered and/or the time allotted.

G. The Chair shall rule on all questions of order or procedure and shall enforce these rules pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 312(h).

H. Speakers may participate throughout the meeting but only when recognized by the Chair. Such comment shall be limited to five minutes per speaker unless by majority consent the board sets a different time limit. The Commission shall apply consistent time limits to all recognized to speak. Each meeting shall have a period of time reserved for public comment. The Chair may extend or reduce this period of time as necessary.

I. Notice for hearings on the adoption, amendment, or repeal of bylaws and other regulatory tools shall be pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4444, as amended.

Section VI: Public Hearings and Order of Business.

Contested public hearings shall be conducted as quasi-judicial proceedings pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 310(8)(B). Hearings shall be publicly noticed in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §§ 4464(a)(1) and (2), as amended. Hearings shall not exceed two hours in length unless approved by a majority of members present.

Public comment may be offered during the hearing with the permission of the chair. The Commission shall apply consistent time limits to all persons recognized to speak.

The Chair shall conduct hearings in the following manner:

A. Open the hearing by reading the warning of the hearing.

B. Review the order of events, remind all present that the proceeding will be conducted in an orderly manner, and make copies of these Rules available upon request.

C. Request disclosure of conflicts of interest and ex parte communications.

D. Review the definition of interested persons in 24 V.S.A. § 4465(b), and explain that, pursuant to 24

V.S.A. § 4471(a), only an interested person who has participated in this proceeding may take an appeal of any decision issued in this proceeding.

E. Ask all who believe they meet the definition of interested person to identify themselves and to provide contact information. The Commission shall not make any determination as to party status in all proceedings. Anyone seeking to participate in a proceeding may do so, subject to these Rules and those established by the Chair, without regard to whether they meet the definition of an interested person.

F. Direct the applicant or their representative and all interested persons to take the following oath: I hereby swear that the evidence I give in the cause under consideration shall be the whole truth and nothing but the truth under the pains and penalties of perjury.

G. Accept written information presented to the Commission.

H. Invite the applicant or applicant's representative to present such application or proposal.

I. Invite Commission members to ask questions of the applicant or applicant's representative.

J. Invite interested persons and members of the public to present their information regarding the application or proposal.

K. Invite the applicant or applicant's representative to respond to information presented.

L. Invite more questions or comments from members of the Commission.

M. Invite more questions from interested persons and members of the public.

N. Allow final comments or questions from the applicant or their representative or members of the Commission.

O. Upon motion and majority approval, the Chair shall either adjourn the hearing to a time certain, or close the proceedings by stating that this is the final public hearing on the matter.

P. Upon adjournment of a hearing, the Commission shall then conduct public deliberations, or may vote to enter deliberative session. See Section III-D of these Rules.

Section VIII: Site Visits.

Site visits shall be open to the public; however, no testimony shall be taken and no ex parte communication shall occur. Site visits shall be held pursuant to the following conditions:

A. If, prior to a hearing, the Chair determines that a site visit will be necessary, the site visit may be scheduled prior to the hearing. Such site visits shall be publicly noticed in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §§ 4464(a)(1), (2).

B. If necessary, the Commission may recess a hearing to conduct a site visit at a property which is the subject of an application before the board.

C. If necessary, the Commission may adjourn a hearing to a time certain to conduct a site visit at a property which is the subject of an application before the board.

D. The minutes of the proceeding shall reflect that a site visit was held, who was present, and the nature and duration of the site visit.

Section IX: Service List.

The Clerk or staff shall create a list of all individuals who participated. The list shall include those who participated orally and those who participated in writing. All written decisions of the board shall be mailed to those on the list. The list shall include:

A. The names of those who participated in the proceedings.

B. A brief statement of the nature and content of participation by those who participated.

C. The mailing address of each of these persons.

Section X: Decisions.

The Commission shall make its decisions by public deliberation, unless by majority vote it has determined to make a decision in deliberative session. Deliberative sessions are not open to the public and need not be warned. Members of the Commission who have not heard all testimony and reviewed all evidence submitted for a particular application or proposal shall not participate in the proceeding. Absent Commission members may participate if they have reviewed recordings of the proceedings, and any evidence submitted, subject to the written consent of the applicant and all interested persons. The following rules shall apply to voting on decisions:

A. Motions shall be made in the affirmative.

B. The chair has the same voting rights as all members and can make motions.

C. All members present are expected to vote unless they have recused themselves.

D. Abstentions are strongly discouraged and shall not count towards either the majority or the minority.

E. For a motion to pass, it must receive the concurrence of a majority of the entire Commission, regardless of how many are present. 1 V.S.A. § 172; 24 V.S.A. § 4461(a).

F. The Commission shall issue a decision within 45 days of the final public hearing.

Section XI: Conflicts of Interest

Participation, disclosure of conflicts, and recusal shall be governed by the following procedures:

A. Participation. A Commission member shall not participate in any official action where they have a conflict of interest in the matter under consideration. A Commission member shall not, personally or through any member of their household, business associate, employer or employee, represent, appear

for, or negotiate in a private capacity on behalf of any person or organization in any proceeding pending before the Planning Commission.

B. Disclosure. At all hearings, the Chair shall request that Commission members disclose all potential conflicts of interest. When recognized by the Chair, any person may request disclosure of potential conflicts of interest.

Nonetheless, after disclosing a conflict or perceived conflict, a member who believes that they are able to act fairly, objectively, and in the public interest, shall disclose the nature of the potential conflict of interest, and the reason(s) why they are able to act in the matter fairly, objectively, and in the public interest. This shall be noted in the minutes of the proceeding.

C. Recusal. Commission members shall recuse themselves from any matter in which they have a conflict of interest, pursuant to the following:

1. The applicant or any person may request recusal due to a conflict of interest. Such request shall not constitute a requirement that members recuse themselves.

2. A Commission member who has recused him or herself from a proceeding shall not sit with the Commission, deliberate with the Commission, or participate in that proceeding as a Commission member in any capacity.

3. If a previously unknown conflict is discovered, the Commission may take evidence pertaining to the conflict, and if appropriate, adjourn to a short deliberative session to address the conflict.

4. The Commission may adjourn the proceedings to a time certain if, after a recusal, it may not be possible to take action through the concurrence of a majority of the Commission. The Commission may then resume the proceeding with sufficient members present.

Section XII: Ex Parte Communications.

Ex parte communication is prohibited. Any Commission member who inadvertently conducts ex parte communication must disclose such communication as required below.

A. Disclosure. At each hearing, the Chair shall request that members disclose any ex parte communications. Commission members who have received written ex parte communications shall place in the record copies of all written communications received as well as all written responses to those communications. Members shall prepare a memorandum stating the substance of all oral communications received, all responses made and the identity of each person making the ex parte communication, which shall become a part of the record of the proceedings.

Section XIII: Removal.

Upon majority vote, the Commission may request that the legislative body remove a Commission member from the Planning Commission. Commission members may be removed at any time by unanimous vote of the legislative body. 24 V.S.A. § 4323(a).

Section XIV: Replacement

Upon majority vote, the Commission may request that the legislative body remove a Commission member who has been absent for two or more meetings in a twelve month period without prior notification of the Chair.

Section XV: Amendments.

These rules may be amended at any regular or special meeting by a majority vote, provided that each Planning Commission member has been presented a written copy of the proposed amendment at least 24 hours before the meeting at which the vote is taken.

Approved: Date:

Norwich Planning Commission Meeting

03/10/2026

Members Present: Ernie Ciccotelli, Jaan Laaspere, Vince Crow, Christian Spalding, Bob Pape, Mary Gorman

Others Present: Stephen True (Zoning Administrator)

1. Open Meeting at 6:33pm

2. Approve Agenda

Spalding moved, seconded by Pape, to approve the agenda

Motion passed 6-0

3. Public Comment not on Agenda

N/A

4. Correspondence on items not on the agenda

N/A

5. Chair Report

Laaspere state that he has had discussions with Matt Swett about working with the Selectboard to improve the visibility of town commissions and committees to promote awareness and participation and will keep the PC updated on this process

6. 2026 Priorities

The group discussed items that need to be prioritized over the next year. Working on items such as Capital Planning, the Enhanced Energy Plan, Solar Siting, Regional Land Use, and Housing can be useful to roll into the Town Plan update in 2028. The Municipal Planning Grant process will start this year, which will develop a mini town plan for the Village District.

7. Subcommittee updates

a) Enhanced Energy Plan Working Group

True provided an update on the recent meeting of the Enhanced Energy Plan Working Group, which includes Crow and Pape as the PC representatives. The goal of the group is to draft an update to the Energy chapter of the Town Plan to include an enhanced energy element to be included in the 2028 update. The group is looking at inputs and comparing the Town Plan to other towns with EE Plans in order to identify shortcomings in the current plan. The group will work with the Solar Siting committee to incorporate their input.

b) Solar Siting

The Solar Siting Subcommittee will meet on 3/17/26

8. Approve Minutes from 2/10/26

The group discussed edits to the minutes from 2/10/26 but a quorum was not met to pass a motion to approve. The minutes will be discussed at the next meeting.

9. Adjourn

Pape moved, seconded by Crow, to adjourn at 7:45pm

Motion passed 6-0.

Future Regular Meeting – 4/14/26 at 6:30 pm at Tracy Hall (also accessible via Zoom)

Minutes by Vince Crow on 3/13/25