

Westfield Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 22, 2024, 6:00pm
Westfield Community Center, 59 North Hill Rd., Westfield, VT

In attendance: Brian Dunn, Kitty Edwards, Ellen Fox, Loren Petzoldt, Pat Sagui
Selectboard members: Jacques Couture (remotely), Richard Degre, and Dennis Vincent
Town Clerk: LaDonna Dunn
Member of the public: Curtis Johnson

1. Call Meeting to Order

Pat called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm

2. Additions/Changes to the Agenda

Attendees agreed to move item 4 to the beginning of the agenda.

4. Zoning Bylaw revisions:

- Public engagement
 - Meet with SB
 - Review and Discussion draft responses to public comment

Ellen reviewed the main changes the Planning Commission has made to the revisions based on public comment including:

1) **Alpine Haven is in the Recreational-Residential District** and will remain in that District. The primary change for Alpine Haven will be that landowners are permitted to build two principal residences and two accessory residences (as opposed to one of each currently.)

2) **Landowners in the proposed conservation district can build residences through conditional use approval.** Conditional use approval will consider runoff and erosion control. Landowners can build two principal residences and two accessory residences (as opposed to one of each currently.)

Ellen discussed the reappraisal process used to create the land schedule for towns in Vermont that is based on fair market value. Also, the assignment of a land grade to parcels based on the physical characteristics of the land may discount the fair market value, and reduce the assessed value and property tax for land at high elevation. There is no evidence that zoning regulation reduces the fair market value of a parcel. The Planning Commission recommends that residences (and accessory dwellings) be allowed in the conservation district through Conditional Use Review after hearing public comment. Members of the Planning Commission described that Conditional Use Review is an extra layer of oversight to ensure development on steep terrain does not create a problem for “downstream” landowners. The ability to construct two primary residences and two accessory dwellings is an expansion of development options compared to the current Zoning Bylaw.

Curtis shared comments about the concerns he sees as a landowner of a high elevation parcel and that logging practices governed by the State are more influential than town zoning

regulation on the fate of our forest health. Curtis encouraged the Town boards to make a case to the State to revisit and better enforce the best management practices for logging. Jacques mentioned that logging can improve the health of a forest when it done well.

Curtis also shared concern that he and his brother Bruce, an adjacent landowner, did not receive the letter mailed by the Planning Commission to notify landowners at and above 1600 feet of potential zoning revisions. Members of the Planning Commission discussed that the mailing was not required as part of the adoption process, was intended as a courtesy, and if a mailing did not reach a recipient, it was not known or intended by the Planning Commission. Curtis proposed that future mailings have a Certificate of Mailing or are sent by Certified Mail.

Dennis discussed the basis for the 1600 foot elevation boundary for the conservation district. Ellen explained that it was the area where both land grades of more than 20% and the presence of high priority forest blocks both occur. Richard asked if the town could use the 2500 foot elevation that is used statewide. Ellen mentioned that there is very little area above 2500 feet. Curtis mentioned that this land is governed by the State along the spine of the mountains where the Long Trail exists.

Discussion of what the Town can control and what is in State jurisdiction illustrated that much of the land use at high elevation is not directly in the Town's control. Members of the Planning Commission stated that their work, and responsibility, is to make recommendations for the Zoning Bylaw that will carry out the Town Plan. The Bylaw revision (as changed responding to public comment) is a part of how Westfield can maintain the landscape that exists here. The public comment and the corresponding changes to the proposed revisions has resulted in a better Bylaw for the Town. Ellen expressed respect and gratitude for input and comments particularly from Curtis and Bruce that have improved the proposed Bylaw revisions.

LaDonna Dunn expressed that it is the responsible thing to have additional zoning oversight for parcels at high elevation.

Jacques expressed some concern about high density of structures in the Village with reduced setbacks that might lead to crowding, and safety concerns such as the spread of fire when structures are close together. Pat mentioned that the density is required by the State to encourage affordability. The Planning Commission will revisit the setbacks. The recommended setbacks will depend on the resulting building envelope given the State density requirement.

Pat asked the Selectboard if it would be useful to have another Planning Commission public hearing to present the changes that the Planning Commission has made based on public comment. The overall process for adoption of the revised Bylaw was also discussed. The Selectboard agreed that another Planning Commission hearing made sense and a public hearing was scheduled for Tuesday February 20 5:30-6:30 pm at the Westfield Community Center. LaDonna added that in addition to the required notice in the paper and at the town office, notice will go out of front porch forum, flyers at recycling, and facebook.

- Date for SB Hearing on Draft Bylaw

No date was set for a Selectboard Hearing. The Planning Commission will have a public hearing on Tuesday February 20 5:30-6:30 pm at the Westfield Community Center.

- Date for SB to adopt Zoning Bylaw revisions

No date was set for a Selectboard meeting to adopt the revisions.

- Prepare final draft responses to public comment

The Planning Commission responses are posted on the Town website.

- Homework

Ellen will provide the warning for the Planning Commission public hearing to LaDonna by Thursday, January 25. Ellen will prepare a new draft of the proposed revisions that incorporates the changes made based on public comment.

3. Approve Minutes

A. January 8 Minutes

Loren made a motion to approve the minutes. Kitty 2nd the motion and the minutes were approved.

- Business from Minutes

The Planning Commission reviewed draft responses to public comment, provided edits to Ellen and Planning Commission members provided consent approval by email to publish the responses to the Town website.

5. Village Wastewater Project – Report on first meeting with AES engineering Jan 19th, 2pm Pat provided materials from the meeting on January 19th. She noted that this is a long process. There will be a flyer at recycling to reach out to residents. Village residents will be asked to place a flag to mark where their septic leaves the house so the consultant can develop a budget for the potential project.

6. Other Business

No other business

7. Next Meeting

Monday, February 12 at 6 pm at the Westfield Community Center

8. Adjourn

Ellen made a motion to adjourn, Loren 2nd and the meeting adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Ellen Fox