

TOWN OF WESTMINSTER  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING (PC)

March 21, 2023

Members Present: Bari Shamas (Chair), Richard Crocker, Michelle Chmelar, Seroya Crouch

Others Present: Janice Leary-Jones, Recording Secretary

Call to Order: Bari called the meeting to order 6:31pm

Communications and Public Comment: None

Adjustments to Agenda: Adjustments made.

Acceptance of Minutes: February 13, 2023, Richard motioned to accept the minutes, Michelle seconded, unanimously accepted

Unfinished Business (Discussion / Action):

Original March 14, 2023 meeting rescheduled to March 21, 2023; a winter snowstorm and subsequent widespread power outages necessitated postponement of the meeting.

A. Town Plan:

Housing Chapter:

Southern Vermont Economic and Housing Forum; stated many social service agencies present.

Windham Regional Commission Housing Section presented housing needs of Windham County.

Michelle to share handouts from the above mentioned meeting to add to the minutes.

Richard has a call in to Sarah Danly to continue work on the Housing Chapter.

Large sized Affordable Housing was a major focus of the Housing Forum meeting (30 plus units).

Westminster will likely focus on ADUs. Zoning will need to better address ADUs, to ensure facilitation of this need of the housing sector. Recommendations need to be generated to change zoning and thereby assist with the ease of adding affordable housing units in Westminster. Suggestion made that perhaps this would be a good Town Plan Goal for Westminster. Perhaps organizing a Housing Working Group would be in the best interest of the Town. Completing a Housing Needs Study and then making the best recommendations for zoning for the Town of Westminster. Noted that including language similar to 'Villages keep Historic quality' while also supporting the creation of ADU units may be beneficial to the Town. Seroya mentioned the report recently published by the Town of Putney based it's recent series of Community Forums. There was interest expressed in the group that helped Putney with their forums, and the suggestion was made to invite a representative to speak to the Planning Commission. The next PC meeting was suggested as a possible date. A draft of the Housing Chapter is needed, and Richard will write something up before the next meeting.

Review Recreation Chapter:

Bari added information about the Grafton Outing Club, VAST network, Activities Committee. Questions about the Westminster Pool on Morse Brook Road were raised. Is it in operation? Who is the contact? Bari is looking for recommendations for what to include in the Recreation Chapter from the PC and the community.

Stated that the Town Hall offers licensure for hunting and fishing; this could be included in the chapter.

Henwood Hill Marsh was brought up as a potential inclusion in the Recreation Chapter. Mentioned that Alma Beals is on the Conservation Commission and would be a good contact for the Henwood Hill Marsh area.

Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association is included in the Chapter. There were queries about the Town Forest.

Stated that it is used for logging.

Potentially Bari will add information for cross country skiing trails in Westminster West and where to park after inquiring with landowner to ensure this is acceptable.

Michelle will talk with Chuck about hunting in Westminster to find out if there are details that should be added to the Town Plan.

Mentioned that canoeing/boating on the Connecticut River may be a good addition to the chapter. Hiking, biking, skiing, fishing, hunting were all recreational activities mentioned that are available in the Town of Westminster.

Economic Development: Not reviewed.

Education:

Michelle has ideas and resources for the Education Chapter, and will write up something soon.

Other Town Plan items:

Seroya mentioned the timeline of review for the Town Plan.

October 24th-Bari to talk with folks at Windham to find out what happens if the Plan is not complete by October 24th and ready for review and acceptance.

Some of the sections are able to be completed quickly. Michelle will help Richard with the Housing Section. PC is always able to fall back on the Town Plan that already exists.

## B. Election of officers

Bari discussed with Katrina Hamilton, and members are able to renew their terms. Richard and Seroya to email Katrina to renew their terms.

Election of Officers:

Bari Shamas: Chair

Richard Crocker: Vice Chair

Seroya Crouch: Clerk

Bari moved to elect the the officers, Michelle seconded, unanimous vote

## New Business (Discussion / Action):

A. Selectboard attendance: Bari will call tomorrow to find out about the Selectboard Meeting, which was likely rescheduled due to weather, is rescheduled. Michelle later in the meeting found out that the meeting is scheduled for tomorrow at 6:30, at Town Hall.

## B. Westminster news

Dan Crocker is now a Selectman. Dan Crocker is Richard's brother, therefore Richard wanted to mention this in the spirit of full disclosure. Katrina Hamilton is now the Select Board Chair.

## Other Business:

Bari introduced the topic of rewards, and the fact that the editing of the chapters is not very rewarding work in and of itself. Bari posed the question, what could be done to make the work more rewarding to complete. The Town Plan needs to be done 30 to 120 days before it is voted on in order to submit it to the Select Board in time. First step is to complete the final copy plan and then put it to public hearing (by the Planning Commission). There will be at least one Hearing, depending on public feedback and comments. There are two ways to get the Plan approved; the two ways are either by a Vote of the Select Board, or the second is by Australian Ballot. Currently, the Agriculture Chapter is out for public comment to the Westminster farmers.

WRC needs access to review the Town Plan.

The plan needs to be sent to the surrounding towns by August of this year.

Then, the PC needs to incorporate feedback from the WRC and surrounding towns.

The PC is legally required to have one hearing, but more could be necessary, depending on feedback.

The PC must submit the plan to the Select Board 30 to 120 days before it needs to be voted on by either the Select Board or Australian Ballot.

The Select Board is then responsible for comments and refinement.

Two Select Board hearings need to happen—all hearings need to have a 15 day notice.

October 14, 2023 it needs to be voted on.

Utilities and Facilities Chapter and Land Use Chapters are not yet assigned—PC plans to look at these chapters and see if they need to be updated. PC will ask Chuck to review the Utilities and Facilities Chapter and see what his comments are as well as checking in with the Select Board.

Comparison with Plans from adjacent towns, Windham Regional Commission will likely be a good resource for this mandate.

Discussion around what the Land Use Chapter is about then was parsed out—it includes how the land is used, resources, and zoning. Discussion that the Tables of census data need to be updated, referring to the 2020 census is the most likely resource. Asking Windham Regional Commission about the best resource may be helpful—Richard downloaded the information they had from 2018, but updated information is needed. Seroya will call WRC to see what information can be found.

Date of Next Meeting: April 10, 2023, 6:30pm

Adjournment: 7:31pm Richard moved to adjourn

Seroya, second, unanimously accepted

Signature of Clerk

Date:

Prepared by: Janice Leary-Jones