

Town of Chelsea, Vermont

Planning Commission

2023 August 22 Hearing Minutes

Meeting Information

Planning Commission Members: Bob Brannan, Chair
Gregg Herrin, Secretary
Ed Kuban
Justin Sauerwein
Absent – Neil Kennedy
Shenia Covey
Absent – Susan Hardin

Selectboard Members: Kevin Marshia

TRORC Representatives: Sydney Steinle

Community Members: None

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order on 2023 August 22 (Tuesday) at approximately 6:30pm, at the Chelsea Town Hall.

Public Comments

Comments and discussion focused on content provided as hand-outs to meeting attendees by Sydney Steinle:

- Copies of the current draft of the Town Plan
- Copies of a document titled “PC Hearing Flags” with considerations of modifications to the Town Plan, including updated graphs and data, specific changes proposed for various sections of the Plan, and tables with implementation details
- Maps as supporting figures for the Town Plan

Trail Project

A question was raised about alignment with any efforts the Town currently has to look at recreational trails within Chelsea. Kevin Marshia explained that so far there has just been one meeting where that topic has been raised, and that conversation focused on the town forest. David Paganelli, the Orange County Forester, indicated that the two forest parcels are ready to be harvested, and those funds could potentially be reinvested into having a trail system. The Town Plan should include wording to encourage recreational use of town lands.

Public Highway System

Bob Brannan pointed out that the content about bridges being in disrepair is no longer accurate, since the bridges referenced have already been improved, including sight distance, since the prior Town Plan was published.

Future Land Use

Kevin Marshia made a general comment that the Planning Commission should encourage development in the village area, but he flooding issues create a conflict of intent. At this time, there is uncertainty about what will happen to many of the homes on the north side of Route 110. After Irene there were several houses that were bought out by FEMA (out of 8 or 10 that were being considered).

Regarding proposed point #1 about development density, Kevin Marshia commented that it was unclear what a “principal structure” is, so it should be clarified if that includes something like a barn, or how that is impacted if a barn is converted into an apartment space. Ed Kuban commented that we should be favorable to development, since we need an increased tax base more than we need rural character.

Regarding proposed point #3 about farmland, Kevin Marshia commented that the suggestion seems overly restrictive without having a real impact one way or the other.

Regarding proposed point #6 about primary retail, Kevin Marshia indicated that this could be a real problem. If primary retail is not acceptable, it limits the ability for residents to be entrepreneurial and earn a living. Sydney Steinle pointed out that the Regional Plan already says it’s not acceptable, so it would put the Town Plan at risk of not being accepted if the Town tries to override that point. She also noted that the specific use has an impact on what is allowed, and the Regional Plan has clearer definitions of what “primary retail” means.

Regarding proposed Point #9 about new structures, Kevin Marshia commented that it would be nice to not just defer to the Regional Plan, which seems too restrictive. Sydney Steinle indicated that the best way to influence this point is to discuss the Regional Plan itself with higher level officials at TRORP. Gregg Herrin suggested that we could omit wording or have generic wording about deferring to the Regional Plan, without explicitly making statements that might be overly strict if the Regional Plan does get updated.

Justin Sauerwein asked if there is evidence that businesses would like to come into the village but can’t, and Kevin Marshia provided an example of a business that wanted to come to town but was controversially characterized as “strip development”, noting that this example was outside of the village extents. Justin noted that the “rural character” is impacted with businesses because it changes as traffic patterns change, and with a significant increase in traffic the area isn’t really rural anymore. He noted that the difference is that for farming, the primary traffic is related to exporting goods, not back and forth for retail or commuting.

Regarding proposed Point #11, Bob Brannon asked what area is referenced by “mobile homes in this area”. Sydney Steinle clarified that it is not referring to the flood hazard area, but is instead referring to the area noted as rural residential.

Review of Maps

Sydney Steinle brought paper plots of the various maps that are referenced in the Plan, and also displayed these maps onscreen.

There was discussion about land use, to confirm where the different types of land use were currently defined and displayed in the maps, but there were no specific questions or recommendations related to land use.

Sydney Steinle confirmed during the meeting that the town lands are accurately recorded, as Kevin Marshia was able to provide the SPAN numbers directly during the hearing.

There were several questions and comments related to various maps:

- Bob Brannan questioned whether or not the school district now owns some of the recreational fields
- Shenia Covey pointed out that the active Town Garage is now in a different place than what the maps currently show.
- Gregg Herrin asked whether or not the maps need to include all cemeteries, or just the major ones (for example, there are two small cemeteries located in the woods along Beedle Road).

Other Business

No new business was brought to the floor, since no public warning had been made regarding a standard meeting following the hearing.

Next Meeting

- Planning Commission** to identify who is responsible for the line items in the implementation table.
- Planning Commission** to review the rest of the changes as preparation for the next meeting.

Decision Summary: The next Planning Commission meeting will be on 2023 September 07 (Thursday) at 7:00pm.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:00pm.