

Notes from Guilford, VT Planning Commission

4.29.15 Public Hearing

Michelle Frehsee opened the meeting at 7:00 pm; the members of the Planning Commission present introduced themselves; Michelle described the process to date in developing the 2015-2020 Town Plan and the timeline for moving to adoption; she then asked for general comments from the audience prior to delving into the details.

There are eight members of the Planning Commission (Tanya Balsey, Andy Loughney, Harry Evans, Chuck Clark, Jackie Gaines, Hal Kuhns, Herb Meyers, and Michelle Frehsee). All but Hal were present at the public hearing. 40 or so members of the public attended - including four of the five Selectboard, representatives of the Conservation Commission, and various residents.

The response of the members of the public was unanimously positive. Good questions were raised; several excellent suggestions were made; points for clarification were noted. Some of the comments follow. (These are attributed but not exact quotes; the intent was to capture the gist of the remarks.)

- Bill Murray: the plan is really well written; it avoids jargon; in a time when the absence of zoning regulations can have a negative impact on a town's image, the plan enhances Guilford's credibility.
- Tim Harris: it gives a good overview and perspective. Tim referenced work that remains to be done, most notably in developing an implementation matrix and plan for action and measuring success.
- Steve Lembke: noted that Vermont towns are required to have plans. He said the Guilford Town Plan is useful for what it mitigates as well as for what it institutes.
- Dick Clark started an important discussion by noting the number of times that the Plan says "the Selectboard will..." Michelle and Linda Lembke (of the Conservation Commission) explained that Windham Regional Council advisors urged strongly for assignment of responsibility. Michelle further noted that in most cases the Plan requires the Selectboard to appoint others to take actions rather than mandating that the work be done by the Selectboard itself.
- Susan James (a former long-time Planning Commission member) applauded the effort to bring the Plan into the 21st century and to be open and frank about all the unknowns the town will face in the coming 10 – 20 years. She also asked that the Planning Commission and task forces designated in the Plan report annually to Town Meeting on the progress.
- There was a discussion about legal enforceability. Rick Zamore pointed out that the use of "shall" is enforceable in an Act 250 hearing. It was also noted that the Public Service Board is required to take into consideration Town plans when undertaking projects (and further noted that the PSB may indeed take note of but ignore the wishes of a particular community, regardless of whether the proposed project is covered in the plan). Steve

Lembke suggested the Planning Commission search carefully for “shall not” in the Plan document to be sure the term is used accurately.

- A number of residents expressed appreciation for the work put into the careful research and reformatting of the plan and for the way the Planning Commission integrated the numerous goals, including the top three, of the Vermont Council on Rural Development project in which so many in Guilford were involved. They urged the Planning Commission repeatedly to keep the positive momentum going. Andy Burrows said it’s an exciting, dynamic document that must be used as a guide, not shelved. Further, he suggested that the Selectboard use the Planning Commission as a resource going forward.
- It was noted that the Energy section needs some work.
- With regard to the Economy section, Bill Murray strongly urged the town to take advantage of the Vermont Yankee grants intended to increase employment in the area. This will require a strong Small Business Incubator Space task force. Tim Harris indicated that he would be interested in taking this on. The VY grant opportunities fall within a relatively short time span.
- Anne Rider, Selectboard chair, closed the public discussion by thanking the Planning Commission for all its hard work and a fine product and noted the feeling of enthusiasm and the energy in the town embodied in this plan.

Prior to closing the meeting the seven members of the Planning Commission present each spoke about the positive experience of working together on the Plan, different perspectives, experiences, and sets of beliefs notwithstanding. It seems that all are looking forward to the next phase in the process: creating a Town Plan Actions Matrix that details, among other things: actions, timelines, involved parties, a schedule for the discussion and possible implementation with appropriate representatives and residents, budget impact, funding resources, etc.