Minutes

Meeting of the Middlesex Planning Commission
Wednesday, February 21, 2024
6:00 PM
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, VT 05602

This meeting was conducted in-person at the Town Clerk's Office and remotely using the town's Zoom account.

Planning Commission Members
Nicole D'Agostino -- absent
Jon Leibowitz
Sandy Levine
Elle O'Casey
Mitch Osiecki

Vic Dwire, Select Board and Road Commissioner
Barb Whitchurch, resident
Greg Whitchurch, resident
Zara Vincent, resident
Zach Smith, resident (arrived 7:00)
Brittany Powell, resident (arrived 7:00)
Kevin Thompson, Zoning Administrator (arrived 7:10)

Call to Order
Chair Sandy Levine called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

Roll Call
Planning Commission members Sandy Levine, Jon Liebowitz, Elle O'Casey, and Mitch Osiecki were present. Nicole D'Agostino was absent.

Also attending were Middlesex residents Vic Dwire, Barb & Greg Whitchurch, Zara Vincent, Zach Smith, Brittany Powell, and Kevin Thompson.

Mitch, Elle, Vic, Barb, Greg, and Kevin attended from the Town Clerk's office; all others participated via Zoom.

Adjustments to Agenda
No adjustments to the agenda.

Minutes
Motion: Jon moved to approve draft minutes of January 17; Elle seconded.
Vote to approve: 4-0.

Old Business:

Neighborhood Infill Follow Up

The Department of Housing and Community Development is hosting a Homes for All Toolkit Trainer Summit on Thursday, March 14. The focus of this summit seems to be educating small-scale developers and homebuilders.

We will send an email to the Middlesex attendees of our October Infill community tour and let them know of the event. We will also pass along information about the ongoing Vermont Housing Improvement Program. Elle and Mitch will collaborate on language.

Comment from Barb Whitchurch: the design firm that attended the October community event didn't really seem to have a lot of experience designing/building projects for a rural community like ours.

Comment from Zara Vincent: (notes incomplete – pull form recording).

Bear Education

Mitch will talk to folks at Rumney about a possible grant for bear-resistant waste bins.

Elle will be away for about a month – mid-March to mid-April, but expects to be able to attend March meeting remotely.

Suggestion to involve the Conservation Commission in bear education efforts.

Discussion of whether a weekend or evening date might work best.

The Middlesex Energy Committee is planning to hold an Energy Fair at the Camp Meade campus in April. We could set up a table at that event to share information.

We could also set up a table at one or two Bandstand concerts in July/August.vailable

Jon suggested that in addition to tips om composting, we could also share tips on waste management.

Comment from Greg: partially due to climate change, bears are waking up earlier than usual. Since their usual food sources may not be available, bears are more desperate for other food sources.

Sandy will coordinate with Lauri Scharf about the Energy Fair. Tentative date: April 27.

Elle will put together a short one page flyer, possibly by Town Meeting.

Worcester Range Management Plan

The Middlesex Planning Commission submitted comments on the management plan to the ANR.

Public comments on the management plan generated stories in several publications (The Bridge, Seven Days, and VT Digger).

Middlesex and Worcester Planning Commissions have been invited to testify at the VT Legislature on Thursday (tomorrow).

Jon commented that he thinks our comments generated interest because we raised questions about Act 59, which is currently in discussion stages.

Walking Trails near Rumney

We have decided to reschedule this discussion because of a conflict tonight – the Development Review Board is using Town Hall tonight. We will for our April or May meeting date instead. Sandy suggested we shoot for the May meeting, on 5/15. Sandy will check with Nicole to see if that date works.

Suggestion that we may be able to recruit neighborhood landowners to find ways to assist.

There are several ideas we might pursue. Sidewalks are not likely to be a viable option at this time.

Road Planning/Paving

Sandy commented that she's not sure if the PC has a role to play here, but since this is a topic of interest to many residents, we can at least help facilitate a conversation on the issues at play.

We may be able to help educate the public about carious issues, such as which roads get paved and why some roads are poor candidates for paving.

Zach Smith, Brittany Powell, and Kevin Thompson joined te meeting at this point.

Sandy briefly recapped the conversation for the benefit of those just arriving.

Discussion of some pros and cons of paving roads.

Vic suggested putting out a Survey Monkey poll to get feedback/gauge interest and desires of the community.

Elle commented that it would be valuable to fill residents in on what's currently being done and what options might be on the table.

Elle added that people lead busy lives and that online democracy is how people interact these days.

Sandy noted that the Planning Commission has a history of taking on planning projects (Village Walkability and Wildlife, Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation to name a couple.

If there's a meaningful role for the PC to play, we'd be happy to do so.

Vic commented that climate change likely means that extreme weather events will continue to occur more frequently than in the past.

He added that while a January thaw is traditional in Vermont, the weather we experienced in December is something very different.

Vic suggested that something that might help would be to explore the use of frost-free road material. He cautioned that such material won't be cheap.

Elle suggested that the perhaps the PC can partner with the SB to find ways of engaging the community on these issues.

Mitch noted that surveys can produce useful feedback, but you have to take care to craft questions thoughtfully. Poorly worded questions won't generate useful responses.

Jon added that surveys can be a good way to start a conversation and engage the public. We should realize that even the best survey we conduct will not be scientific nor free from bias.

Sandy suggested that we explore engaging with the Select Board, Road Commissioner, and Road Foreman on ways we can collaborate.

Comment from Brittany Powell: She appreciates the PC's willingness to engage on this topic. She added that she got lots of feedback from residents in response to her FPF posts. She said responses were generally very respectful.

Brittany would be happy to work with the PC on furthering this discussion. She seconded Vic's comment that climate change is almost certainly contributing to worsening winter road conditions and that the problem will likely persist.

Comment from Zach: Also appreciates the PC facilitating this initial conversation. He realizes that there are no easy fixes. There is most likely lots of work to do, but he is eager to be part of this continuing conversation.

Comment from Zara: Molly Supple Hill Road is much improved in recent years. She's hopeful that similar improvements are possible for Center Road as well.

Town Meeting

In years past, many Middlesex groups (Conservation Commission, Planning Commission, etc.) would sometimes set up a table and share information about their work in the hall outside the room where Town Meeting takes place.

Not sure the PC will set up such a table this year. Sandy and Mitch will discuss.

Other Business

Project List Update

Sandy has updated several of the items on our Project List.

Correspondence

No new correspondence of note. Sandy received one email that she forwarded to the Zoning Administrator.

Next Meeting

Wed, Mar 20 – regular monthly meeting. 6:00pm (expect meeting will be hybrid once again – zoom or in-person at Town Hall).

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mitch Osiecki
Planning Commission secretary