

draft
West Rutland Planning Commission (PC) Special Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes
February 5, 2024 6:00pm Town Offices, 35 Marble St.

Members Present: Sean Barrows (Chair), Michael Brzoza (Vice-Chair), Leona Minard, Jim Flint
Also Present: Jeffrey Biasuzzi, as Recorder and Zoning Administrator (ZA); Public in attendance identified on Attendance Roster (exhibit IV) attached.

Call to Order: Chair S. Barrows called the Meeting to Order at 6:05 pm and led the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance. The Meeting was open to Public remotely and recorded on Zoom software.

Agenda:

S. Barrows requested Motion to approve the proposed Agenda. L. Minard Moved to approve the Agenda. M. Brzoza seconded, all approved, and Motion passed.

Open Public Hearing on proposed Town Plan (TP) update:

- A. The Chairman opened the Public Hearing at 6:10 pm and introduced the PC Members and ZA.
- B. ZA J. Biasuzzi outlined the Hearing's procedure to the attendees.
- C. S. Barrows outlined the purpose of the draft Town Plan (TP) and its objectives.
- D. Those in attendance and wanting to participate were sworn in.
- E. The Chairman asked for questions from the attendees:

Lisa Wright opened the discussion by presenting three documents, which were entered in to testimony as: Exhibit I – "Public Comment on Proposed 2024 Town Plan" which compared elements of the 2016 TP with the proposed TP; Exhibit II - Explained forested blocks, their features, and maintaining the ecology; Exhibit III summarized VT Act 171, a planning regulation to protect forest and wildlife resources. She suggested that the "less reliable data" should be removed, citing the original Grampa's Knob windmill history as an example.

Christie Wright asked why emphasis on protecting ridgelines from industrial wind generation projects was removed. PC member M. Brzoza replied that he was not in favor of ridgeline development either, but stated protections were still in the TP. PC member J. Flint noted the 2016 Plan's language projected negative overtones to alternative energy development, potentially discouraging future project consideration. PC member L. Minard agreed that emphasizing "prohibited uses" was detrimental to the TP's intent to educate and interest the general public in the community. PC member S. Barrows noted the TP is stricter than the Regional Plan, which does not prohibit industrial scale (defined as generating over 100 kW) wind generation facilities.

Pat Tripanier felt that the proposed TP language is not strong enough. He noted that former RRPC Director Ed Bove had authored the 2016 plan's language to protect against ridgeline wind development, at a time when a large-scale multi-town project was being heavily promoted but strongly opposed by the residency. J. Flint noted that a Town Plans should not appear to be anti-development.

Steve Bania felt the TP should have plain language.

Joann Bania preferred the current language to prohibit Industrial scale wind projects be maintained. Leona Minard noted that the draft TP included (pages 40-41) language to prohibit industrial scale wind development.

Jennifer Fredrick felt the proposed language was "wishy-washy" and "too soft", and preferred stronger language.

Tom Burditt noted the current (solar) generation projects in Town. He stated that “Prohibited” was the past emphasis.

Jeffrey Biasuzzi noted the possible legal issue of discriminating between wind, solar, hydro renewable energy generation systems in Planning.

Leona Minard noted that the TP included exceptions for residential scale (max. of 50kW) wind generation.

Jim Flint is now considering, based on the public’s input, that the Energy Section might be attempting to accomplish too many goals, which distract from the Sections primary intent. He will review with the PC.

Pat Tripanier stated he wants the TP to only prohibit ridgeline wind generation development.

Lisa Wright acknowledged the TP language addressing Village Centers. She asked how the TP addressed the Forest Habitat and Wildlife Corridor, and Forest Connectivity issues (per Act 171). In the Introduction (page 4), Goals 5 & 6 included protection of natural areas and maintenance and improvement to quality of wildlife and forests. L. Minard noted there was reference in the Natural, Scenic, Cultural, & Historic Section of the TP. J. Biasuzzi noted that a separate Section on implementation of Act 171 might not be a required element for a Plan, and would seek confirmation on this question.

Tom Burditt asked if the PC’s intent was to prohibit commercial and industrial scale (over 50 kW) wind development, and will the TP language include discourage and prohibit language. J. Flint acknowledged that the language could be improved to clarify this intent.

Joann Bania asked if flood plains or wetlands could be used for energy generation? ZA J. Biasuzzi replied that current rules do not allow development in these areas.

Chairman Barrows asked for any additional questions or input from those in attendance. Hearing none, he asked for a Motion to Close the Public Hearing. J. Flint so Moved, M. Brzoza seconded, All approved and the Hearing was closed to further testimony at 8:15 pm.

The Members discussed the information received at the Hearing. The members identified language needing revision, and J. Biasuzzi was to seek outside opinion on the Act 171 issue.

Next Meeting: To complete the revisions and stay on preferred adoption schedule, the PC scheduled a Special Meeting for 6:00 pm on 2/8/2024 at Town Office. (This was posted in public location and Town website the next morning).

Adjournment: L. Minard made a MOTION to conclude the Meeting, M. Brzoza seconded, all approved and the Meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jeffrey Biasuzzi 2/8/2024

Approved: _____

