

Craftsbury Planning Commission Meeting

April 8, 2021 - Draft Minutes

Present at Town Hall: Ross Davis, Farley Brown. Present via Zoom: Linda Ramsdell, Emily Maclure, Annie Rowell, Lucas Schultz, Rudy Chase and Susan Houston (Select Board)

Meeting called to order at 7:06.

1. Approval of the March 11, 2021 minutes

Ross moved to approve, Annie Rowell seconded. Minutes approved unanimously.

Susie brought to our attention the work the select board and Michelle Warren are doing to comply with Open Meeting Law, and discussion ensued about items in "other business". Susie's understanding is that new agenda items must be added at the beginning of the meeting.

Emily moved and Ross seconded moving Hazard Mitigation Planning to the agenda. Motion unanimously approved.

2. Craftsbury Village Master Plan update and next steps - 15 minutes

Better Connections was not granted, so now we are looking for other sources of funding for the project, a description of which was included in our agenda. The Municipal Planning Grant could be a source of funding. The Better Connections project was budgeted for \$55,000, a Municipal Planning grant could fund \$25,000.. The Town of Glover has been through the process - Farley shared a document from their project. The Glover project was estimated to cost \$24,000 and they requested \$22,000 from a state grant.

Discussion followed about Federal recovery funding that might be coming to Craftsbury. There is concern that Craftsbury might not have the capacity to plan for and implement projects that could arise based on the Federal funding opportunities. Ted Brady is now Executive Director at Vermont League of Cities and Towns and we would like to invite him to our May meeting. Emily also emphasized that Paul Costello from Rural Vermont will be a good resource. We need more information about what Federal funding will be available. At this point we don't have a timeline or know what the money will be directed toward. We need to be ready and involved as more becomes known and funds become available. Emily will reach out to Paul Costello and Rudy will be in touch with Ted Brady. Farley will stay in touch with Alison Lowe. NEK Collaborative is hoping to pull together NEK towns to help navigate opportunities related to Federal funds. Susie is in communication with NEK Collaborative and will keep Farley and Rudy in the loop. People will keep lines of communication open and gather information. Rudy will invite Ted Brady to our next meeting.

3. *Craftsbury Town Plan update in 2024 and Act 171 - 15 minutes*

Farley suggests we start to focus on the Town Plan update in December.

A new requirement for the town plan: Act 171: Planning for Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors. Craftsbury has 25,408 acres. 69% of the town's land base is in forest and water. The Conservation Commission is looking at this act also and will take on this part of the plan. Farley brought to our attention the connectivity Collinsville provides. See this map: <https://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/BioFinder/>

Farley recommends that the Planning Commission gain more understanding of development patterns in Craftsbury.

4. *Sour Property discussion, Susan Houston - 10 minutes*

Planning Commission does not have enough information or knowledge to stand behind a recommendation for the town to purchase the property.

5. *Other business*

- Hazard Mitigation Planning

Alison Lowe emphasizes that the Planning Commission needs to be involved with this.

- Discussion about the potential an opportunity position could bring to the town. The Better Connections grant was not funded in part because it was not thought we had the capacity to manage it.
- Open Meeting Law requirements:
 - Draft of minutes must be posted to town website within 5 days
 - Agendas need to be posted 48 hours prior to the meeting (town website; town hall bulletin board)

Meeting adjourned at 8.22

Respectfully submitted, Linda Ramsdell

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Farley opened the meeting at 7:12 p.m. (Glitches with the Town Hall Modem and efforts to

“Zoom” the meeting contributed to the later start)

Farley welcomed Alison Low from the NVDA to begin the Public Hearing of the Craftsbury Energy Plan. Alison’s entire discussion was sent out to all of us on 3/14/21 under separate email; so I won’t repeat here.

The public hearing began at 7:15, and ended at 7:22p.m.

Farley then opened the regular Planning Commission meeting directly afterward. Dave moved, with Rudy seconding acceptance of the minutes from our previous month’s minutes. Minutes were approved.

Next, there was a discussion with Alison regarding the “Better Connections Grant”. We will possibly hear of the acceptance of this grant and it was suggested that forming a committee to oversee the disbursement of the funds would be a prudent measure. It was noted that Glover has a similar plan. Perhaps we can learn from them without reinventing the wheel.

Village Infrastructure Planning: Amelia suggested that a steering committee could be developed incorporating business owners, village residents, and the road safety committee in an effort to properly address the needs of the Village. Rudy suggested that Federal stimulus money may become available for projects such as Wastewater; Broadband; and other infrastructure projects. This is a developing story, and we should stay tuned-in.

Alison Low updated our group about the Yellow Barn Project in Hardwick; and some of the individual companies and entities that are committed to the project, or have expressed interest. Project completion is scheduled for October, 2022.

Alison also discussed the Hazardous Mitigation Plan. FEMA funds may become available. Susie asked about details and the timeline, and a possible extension based on COVID related delays.

There was then some discussion regarding Craftsbury outdoor Center visitors parking along the Creek Road; and accessing trails. We discussed potentially posting signage where trails cross the road(s); as well as other potential parking areas and solutions.

Lucas suggested that Sheldon from the COC be invited as a guest to our next meeting.

We were informed that the Water District ordinance for the Common would not be taken up by the Planning Commission.

Farley then entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.
Dave Rowell made the motion, and Ross Davis seconded.
Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Rudy Chase

Craftsbury Village Project Description (from the Better Connections grant application)

The Craftsbury Village Project will result in a master plan - a blueprint for growth and public and private investment in the town's commercial core, Craftsbury Village (the Village). It will reflect the community's desires for its "downtown" village area and be embraced by businesses, tax payers, landowners and the community at large.

Wastewater treatment concerns and transportation and trails improvements have been identified by the community as infrastructure priorities. These, and other needs that may emerge from a robust public involvement process, will be addressed by the project.

Craftsbury has been thriving for nearly a decade due to the success of local farms, businesses and educational institutions and its growing appeal to visitors, second home owners, new families and retirees. Town offices, the town garage, solid waste transfer station, post office, elementary school, 2 stores, the Catholic Church, Pete's Greens farm stand, and more are located in the relatively compact Village area. (The nearest stores, gas stations and other services are between 10 and 24 miles away.) Village businesses are doing well and ideas for new and expanding opportunities are in the works, thus increasing pressure on Village infrastructure now and the need to plan for expansion in the future. In response the Planning Commission created a Village Infrastructure Commi@ee in 2020 to examine transportation, wastewater and other needs. This grant application emerged from the Commi@ee's deliberations.

Village parking, bike and pedestrian facilities, a trail network, public open space, individual property wastewater and drinking water systems have all evolved over time organically and without coordination. While this approach worked for many years, it no longer suffices. Traffic has increased as has the number of bikes and pedestrians. There are no sidewalks. Delivery trucks serving Village businesses and farm machinery compete for space in a narrow ROW. Parking is haphazard and unsafe and limits the size of events. An increase in multi family housing units within the Village area places additional pressure on limited parking .

Economic data and analyses, including the business mix and potential for additional businesses and jobs, and maps and information regarding natural resource constraints will all inform public discourse and decision-making. opportunities for improving bike and pedestrian safety, parking, access to existing and proposed trail networks and a plan for addressing current and future wastewater and water supply needs are the desired outcomes.

The town is working to upgrade important trail networks, but planning is needed to improve year round trail access to Village businesses and find the optimum locations for a pedestrian crossing of the Black River, a Village trail head and kiosk, and trail user parking.

Prior to the CtiVID crisis the Craftsbury School Board was considering how to address the Village Elementary School overcrowding - an issue that will persist if the town's student numbers continue to rise. Meanwhile the Select Board is grappling with Town Hall space challenges. While planning to address these two needs is separate from this project. Project data collection and public involvement will help inform those efforts.

Future Village development is restricted by limits on waste water and water supply. Community wastewater and water supply systems are in the earliest stages of consideration. There is also heightened local interest and state regulations aimed at protecting the Black River flood plain and other natural resources and addressing storm water and water quality within the Village boundaries. Understanding how these concerns may affect current and future infrastructure investment is needed.

ACT 171 AND PLANNING FOR FOREST BLOCKS AND HABITAT CONNECTORS

Act 171 amended Vermont Planning Statutes to encourage and allow municipalities to address protection of forest blocks and habitat connectors, while also supporting the local forest products industry. After January 1, 2018, municipalities seeking to have their plans approved by their Regional Planning Commission must include additional information on the future land use map and language that identifies state, regional or locally significant forest blocks and habitat connectors. The plan may also include specific policies on how the community will take steps to reduce forest fragmentation, enhance forest health, and support essential ecological functions.

Craftsbury Total Acreage = 25,408

Total acreage in forest and water = 69% of town land base

Connectivity Blocks:

Areas critically important for habitat connectivity across the Northern Appalachians. The area connects core habitat, allowing for genetic exchange.

Highest Priority = 1,044 acres (4% of town land base)

Priority = 2,683 acres (10% of town land base)

Interior Forest:

Habitat blocks that are especially important for the interior forest functions they provide.

Highest Priority = 10,748 (42%)

Priority = 3,104 (12%)