

Worcester Planning Commission
MINUTES
February 23rd, 2023, 5:30 p.m. via Zoom

Attending: Chani Waterhouse, Will Baker, Bill Arrand

Guests: Sam Lash, Stewart Clark, Sooz Arrand

Housekeeping

- Chani called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.
- No agenda revisions.
- Chani began to record the meeting. Recording can be viewed [here](#) using passcode ya=8R+5*
- Stewart Clark offered public comments. He suggested we comply with Act 174 to protect Worcester from rapacious energy development. Stewart has compiled a lot of information about meeting the requirements of Act 174.
- Minutes of January 26th were duly submitted, reviewed and unanimously approved.

Updates

- **Town Plan Approval** -- Chani offered congratulations and a report that the CVRPC Board of Commissioners passed a resolution that approved Worcester's town plan and confirmed Worcester's planning process.
- **Village Center Designation** -- Will is working through the checklist of application for Village Center Designation. No site visit is needed. Plans to meet with Richard Amore from state village designation board, who has invited rep from CVRPC, where next steps will be clarified. RPC is updating boundary map to match boundaries of past/expired designation. Anticipates writing application and taking photos to key to boundary map.

Energy Planning – Orientation from Sam Lash, Climate & Energy Planner, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission

Chani noted that the Planning Commission invited Sam to provide an overview of the process of developing an energy plan, and offer guidance to help the PC approach this effectively.

Sam shared some background and context. She is developing checklists that can help guide towns through the process and will share these with the PC.

Carrot in statute is substantial deference, but there are other benefits to have an enhanced energy plan, including access to incentives and other funding that will become available in coming years to transition to energy sources with less climate impact.

Comprehensive energy plan is required by statute, with most recent statutory update in 2022. Act 174 standards were updated in 2022. CVRPC is in process of updating regional plan as well

as regional and town level data. There is also significant funding available right now, making this a good moment to be embarking on this work.

Since last update of comprehensive energy plan, with implementation frameworks being revised, we have also seen legislation pass related to global warming and climate, including goals for reducing emissions by 2025, 2030 and 2050.

When integrating energy and planning, start by flagging all the components of the town plan that intertwine with energy, including transportation, housing, natural resources, land use and economic development. Identify potential conflicts and opportunities. Energy is used in 3 sectors of community / economy:

- Electricity (smallest energy burden of the three)
- Thermal (buildings / homes)
- Transportation

Efficiency VT found Worcester as the most “energy burdened” in our region. This metric compares energy costs with residents’ incomes. In next 5-10 years lots of funding will become available for energy switching / development aligned with state, regional and town goals.

Act 174 establishes a set of optional municipal and regional energy planning standards. Communities that meet standards receive a determination of energy compliance and “Substantial deference” in PUC process around siting of energy development. In practice, this primarily occurs around solar development.

Sam outlined the benefits of creating an enhanced energy plan. Basic requirements are analysis and targets, pathways (implementation actions), and mapping. Energy plan must align with town plan, regional plan and current statutes.

Main argument against putting an energy plan in place is that substantial deference has limits. Some may feel it’s not worth the effort. Sam suggests that a town could get an energy plan done in a year, once the data is available from state / region.

Sam offered suggestions for how to approach the work, volunteering to meet with the PC again and/or to invite Worcester into a cohort of towns working on energy plans concurrently. Suggestions included the following:

- Assess capacity and decide how to resource the work (eg: bring on new members, establish an energy committee). Identify a point person and clarify how town staff may offer support. Funding could be available to support hiring someone to move projects forward.
- Analyze current town expenditures on energy (thermal, transportation, electricity).
- Engage community to ID priorities.

Deferred until next meeting: discussions of next focus for PC, membership.

Matters Arising: none

Adjournment

Bill moved to adjourn the meeting. Will seconded. By unanimous approval, meeting adjourned at 6:43 p.m.

NEXT MEETING will be held March 16th at 5:30 on zoom.