

Worcester Planning Commission

January 17, 2017 Meeting

Members Present: William Arrand, Marty Kovacs, Toni Keaning

Guests: Eric Vorwald, Regional Planning Commission; Suzanne Arrand, notetaker

The State of Vermont would like to have a plan for every town. Municipal planning grants can only be used for updating the Town Plan because our town plan expired in 2012 and has not been updated. The existence of a valid town plan affects the Act 250 process and grant eligibility. In matters of wind and solar farming, “substantial deference” will be paid to the policies of the town plan although this deference has not yet been tested. All statutory requirements must be addressed by the town plan. Also it probably should include non-regulatory items like having a future land use map and information about the town’s water service area. What about CSA’s (Community Sustainable Agriculture) in Worcester? Flood resiliency? We could refer to our flood hazard mitigation plan. Should we define “ugly”?

Updates for new manual for town planners will be released soon.

Eric handed out a summary (overview) of our town plan and details of what needs to be in it. Overall, our ten-year-old plan outlines the needs of the local community and the town’s policies. Eric says the “bones” of our plan are solid. The strengths of a good plan include the “vision” of the community, protection of public drinking water, protection of public lands and protection of the “view-shed”. A weakness of our current plan is the need for updated child care information and a description of the availability (or non-availability) of public transportation. We have to remember to update our maps and data.

A town plan can also include an exploration of future zoning ideas. Act 174 refers to regional energy. We could try to be proactive in meeting the state’s energy goals. On July 1, 2018 there will be a new law on protection from forest fragmentation. We could be pro-active by including language about that. What about mapping bike paths, trails, etc.?

Eric offered the aid of the Regional Planning Commission to help us with any needs we have to update it. For example, updating maps can be expensive. Does our planning group have any training needs? For example, Orange got help with a system to track development. The regional Planning Commission can look over drafts of our town plan and make suggestions for improvements. He also mentioned the Vermont Center for Geographic Information and the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) as resources for more information.

We need to re-submit our application for Village Center Designation which must be updated every 5 years in order for Worcester to be eligible for grant funding. To do this we must make

sure village center information is up-to-date in the town plan. Village Center Designation must be updated before the town plan can refer to it. The designation expired in January but we can be “re-listed”.

Future: Statute will require updating plan every 8 years instead of five. We will have to check over any reference to 5-years in our plan. There may be some changes in regulating some agriculture by zoning. New forestry regulations may have more “teeth” regarding erosion control. We may want to include some language on these items.

Our next meeting will be 6:30 on Tuesday, February 21 at the Grange