

Minutes of the East Montpelier Planning Commission

Approved 2/16/23

January 19, 2023

PC Members Present: Zach Sullivan (Chair), Clarice Cutler, Kim Watson (via zoom), Maia Stone (via zoom), Mark Lane, Gianna Petito (via zoom), Scott Hess (via zoom)

Others Present: Deirdre Connelly

Call to Order: 7:01 pm

Changes to Agenda: Ms. Watson requested an additional discussion about recruitment for open Planning Commission seats.

Public Comment: None.

Review Minutes

The group reviewed the January 5, 2023 minutes and made an edit for clarity.

Motion: To approve the January 5, 2023 minutes with tonight's amendment. Made by Ms. Cutler, second by Mr. Lane. Passed unanimously.

Discuss Potential Energy Committee Members for recommendation to Selectboard

Mr. Sullivan asked the group for their input on how large the Energy committee should be. He noted that when he last talked to the Selectboard they were envisioning a group of five to seven members. Ms. Cutler noted that a larger group can take some pressure off individuals. Ms. Watson suggested a group of seven to nine considering the amount of work that needs to be done. Ms. Petito asked if the Selectboard asked the PC to make a recommendation on the size of the committee. Mr. Sullivan explained that they asked for recommendations similar to the way the PC might offer a recommendation to fill a vacancy on the PC.

Ms. Petito suggested the PC might recommend five people for the committee and then allow them to recruit more members as they see fit. Mr. Hess supported this idea. Mr. Sullivan explained that he'd gotten the sense from conversations with past energy committee members that smaller was better and Mr. Hess agreed that a large group could be a lot for a new chair to manage. Ms. Petito asked if there was anything in the town charter mandating a minimum committee size. Mr. Sullivan explained that a committee needs at minimum a chair and someone to take minutes. Ms. Petito noted that her concern with a larger group was that it raised the number needed for a quorum. If only a small number of people actually have the time and energy to fully participate and the group can't make quorum regularly, they will be limited in what they can accomplish.

The group decided to move to a conversation about the individual candidates.

Motion: To go into executive session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) – the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee, provided that the public body shall make a final decision to hire or appoint a public officer or employee in an open meeting and shall explain the reasons for its final decision during the open meeting. Made by Ms. Cutler, second by Mr. Lane. Passed unanimously.

The committee entered executive session at 7:25 pm.

The committee exited executive session at 8:00 pm.

No action taken.

Motion: To recommend Andy Shapiro, Ben McCall, Austin Cate, Emily Levin, Stephen Miracle, Tom Fisher, and Rick Barstow to the Selectboard as members for the Energy Committee. Made by Mr. Hess, second by Mr. Lane. Passed unanimously.

Mr. Sullivan will provide these individuals with information on selecting leadership and a briefing on the open meeting law.

Discuss Prior Septic Studies

Mr. Sullivan reminded the group that the septic studies came up in past discussions about housing. Ms. Cutler noted that the projects seemed very expensive, and Mr. Hess added that the numbers are from 2007 or 2008, so should likely be doubled to reflect current pricing. Ms. Petito reported that she met with Lynette Claudon, who oversees the village wastewater grant programs, to get a sense of how projects are evaluated for these grants. Ms. Claudon mentioned that there is money available for planning work and the Agency of Natural Resources is encouraging towns to move forward with feasibility studies. Ms. Claudon offered to attend a future PC meeting to talk about funding opportunities with the group.

Ms. Petito mentioned that she thinks the question of whether a wastewater project is too expensive is hard to answer and can often come down to whether a town has the political will to take on the debt for a large infrastructure project. Ms. Petito added that if the PC and the town truly want to increase density and if wastewater is the barrier to increasing density, it is worth having a conversation about what it might take to invest in wastewater infrastructure for the town.

Ms. Watson noted that she was part of the feasibility study group and the group's main finding was that a centralized system didn't make sense for the town. She gave the example of Cabot, which has a centralized system that some homeowners choose not to connect to because of the cost. Ms. Petito asked what an acceptable cost might be. Mr. Sullivan suggested that there isn't a specific number for acceptable cost, but "too expensive" generally means the cost is high enough to discourage new construction.

Ms. Watson noted that contaminated drinking water is an issue of almost equal importance in the village center. Mr. Lane suggested that dealing with the drinking water contamination might make later septic projects more feasible. Ms. Cutler asked if the group should focus on pursuing state funds for the drinking water supply rather than wastewater projects. Mr. Hess noted that the Selectboard has discussed the Crystal Springs issue and it is very much on their radar. Mr. Sullivan asked if the group should focus more on the medium density zones rather than the areas right along Route 2.

Ms. Petito noted that if wastewater and clean drinking water are barriers to increasing density in the town, and if the costs for addressing those barriers are too high to feasibly tackle, perhaps they should not be priority action items in the Town Plan. Ms. Watson suggested revisiting this discussion during Town Plan revisions.

Discuss recruitment strategies for PC vacancies

Ms. Watson suggested PC members begin recruiting and networking to bring on new members. Mr. Lane noted he has talked to a few people, but all were too busy at this time. Mr. Sullivan noted that it is likely

too late for an individual to get signatures to get on the ballot, but mailed ballots have made write-in campaigns easier to run.

Updates

- **Capital Improvement Committee-** No update.
- **Energy Committee-** No update.
- **Resilient Roads Committee-** Mr. Lane reported that the committee will have a meeting open to the public on January 25th to discuss what they have done and plan to do about emerald ash borers and invasive plants
- **Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission-** No update.

ZA Report

The group reviewed the list of recent permits. There was no discussion.

DRB Report

There was no DRB meeting in January, but the group will meet in February.

Other Business

Mr. Sullivan reported that the legislature is considering doing away with single family zoning. He noted that if this change goes through it will not affect East Montpelier as duplexes are allowed anywhere where single-family homes are allowed in the town.

Ms. Cutler reported that she reviewed the regs with an eye toward senior housing and has some ideas to share at the next meeting.

Motion: To adjourn. Made by Mr. Lane, second by Ms. Petito. Passed unanimously.

Meeting closed at 8:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.