

## *Minutes of the East Montpelier Planning Commission*

***Approved 4/6/23***

March 16, 2023

PC Members Present: Zach Sullivan (Chair), Maia Stone, Richard Hall, Clarice Cutler (zoom), Nikhil Khosla, Gianna Petito (zoom), Mark Lane (zoom), Kim Watson (phone), Erica Zimmerman

Others Present: Deirdre Connelly

**Call to Order:** 7:07 pm

### **Changes to Agenda:**

Mr. Sullivan suggested adding a mention of the vote on rules of procedure and officers at the first April PC meeting, and a discussion about funding opportunities for infrastructure investments.

### **Public Comment:**

None.

Mr. Sullivan welcomed the new PC committee members and did a round of introductions. He mentioned that he will reach out to new members for orientation outside of the meeting.

Ms. Watson asked when the updated maps would be available on the website. Mr. Sullivan explained that he sent the updated maps to the Town Administrator and the town website should be updated soon.

### **Review Minutes**

The group reviewed the March 3, 2023 minutes and suggested a few edits for clarity, including one to better clarify the group's interpretation of the regs around senior housing.

Mr. Khosla asked if the group should work on editing the regs to address senior housing. Mr. Sullivan explained that the process for adjusting the zoning regs is long and involves formal hearings. Because the group just made a series of changes, they may want to wait a little while to batch the next round of changes together.

Ms. Petito asked if there was a formal definition for senior housing. Ms. Cutler stated that she didn't know if it is defined in state statute, but the East Montpelier regs do not define it. She further explained that she had looked at the town regs to see if anything is limiting senior housing and found that senior housing is not a listed housing type. She broadened her scope to include any housing types other than single family dwellings, and in the last meeting the group decided that because that the DRB hasn't seen many permits for senior housing projects, interpreting senior housing as multi-family housing could be a solution without adjusting the regs. Mr. Sullivan added that he did notice the regs are in conflict with state statute on group homes; East Montpelier doesn't allow group homes within a certain distance of each other. He pointed out that this rule is unenforceable, but because it doesn't seem to be causing problems at the moment it can be addressed in the next round of reg updates. Ms. Watson added that there was a push in town to develop senior housing around eight years ago. She commented that if a senior housing project went through it would most likely be presented as a PUD.

Mr. Khosla asked if there would be different tax implications for senior housing because the residents would not be utilizing the school. Mr. Sullivan stated that the tax status would be up to the town listers and would likely depend on how the housing is built and who owns it.



**Motion: To approve the March 3, 2023 minutes with tonight's amendments.** Made by Ms. Cutler, second by Mr. Hall. Passed 8-0. Ms. Petito abstained.

**Discussion of Rules of Procedure and Electing officers**

Mr. Sullivan stated that the PC elects officers and approves the rules of procedure at the first meeting in April. He reminded members to review the rules and consider whether they would like to run for a position. He added that currently he is the chair, Ms. Cutler is the vice chair, and Ms. Watson is the secretary. Ms. Watson added that the PC has a rotating representative at the Energy Committee and a seat on the Capital Improvement Committee and the DRB.

**Discuss pursuing funding opportunities**

Ms. Cutler explained that there are a few major opportunities for infrastructure project funding and wondered if there were projects or even feasibility studies that the town would be interested in tackling with some of the available funding. Ms. Watson noted that CVRPC had a meeting about funding opportunities for wastewater projects around five years ago, and she suggested working with CVRPC to understand the funding that is currently available. Ms. Watson added that two priorities for East Montpelier are wastewater and drinking water.

Ms. Petito pointed out that drinking water and wastewater continue to be listed as priorities in the town plan and commented that if ever there was an opportunity for these kinds of investments, this is it. She added that she knows a representative from the wastewater grant program who is willing to come to a PC meeting to talk. She also pointed out that the group could consider funding to update the older feasibility studies or create a cost-benefit analysis of water versus wastewater investment and get community input on the project ideas.

Ms. Watson agreed with Ms. Petito and added that past wastewater studies focused on the village center, but it might be worth looking into the cost and feasibility of connecting Gallison Hill Road residents to Montpelier's wastewater system or North Montpelier residents to Plainfield's wastewater system.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the town had considered buying Crystal Springs water, which serves the village, and asked if anyone knew if that was still under consideration. Ms. Watson explained that the owners of Crystal Springs are not interested in selling.

Ms. Zimmerman pointed out that the Selectboard hasn't outlined a plan for spending the town's ARPA funds and suggested it could be another funding opportunity. Ms. Watson clarified that the Selectboard is discussing how to use ARPA funds and considering using some of the money for municipal buildings like the town garage. Ms. Cutler noted that, in addition to ARPA funds, there is also money available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ("IIJA") and state revolving loan funds.

Ms. Watson asked Ms. Petito what projects she thought the PC should prioritize for funding. Ms. Petito said she didn't have a specific project in mind, but she wanted to advocate for inviting funders to talk to the PC so the group knows what opportunities are available and what the timeline and process is for applying for these funds. She added that she felt the group needed more information before dismissing infrastructure projects as too expensive.

Mr. Khosla asked if there was a list of available funding. Mr. Sullivan said there is not.

Ms. Watson explained that two studies were done to explore the costs of hooking up the village center to Montpelier's wastewater system or creating decentralized wastewater systems. She added that the group could update those past studies or explore other areas that aren't fully utilized, like Gallison Hill or North



Montpelier. Ms. Watson noted that often these investments come down to the question of density, and that there has not been a lot of new development to warrant the infrastructure investment. Mr. Hall asked if the two past studies were available on the town website. Mr. Sullivan wasn't sure exactly where they were, but stated they are somewhere on the website.

Ms. Cutler addressed Ms. Watson's comment about new development and pointed out that the discussion comes back to how the state and the town want to promote growth in the village. She pointed out that if the PC follows the town plan's prioritization of development in the village center, it makes sense to say that the village center wastewater and drinking water issues are a priority. She added that even if there isn't pressure to address these priorities now, the group should be thinking ahead to future development.

Mr. Sullivan asked if there was a PC member willing to research the available funding opportunities. Ms. Petitto offered to coordinate bringing in guest speakers about the available grants for water and wastewater projects. Ms. Zimmerman also offered to help research.

Mr. Sullivan suggested the group defer the land use goal discussion to the next PC meeting and the group agreed.

#### **Updates from Energy Committee kickoff meeting**

Mr. Sullivan reported that the committee met for the first time and decided on a facilitator and secretary. They still have an opening for a leader with a larger vision and they are deciding whether that will be a rotating position. Mr. Sullivan added that it seems the PC will be involved with helping the Energy Committee write the energy plan for the town.

Ms. Zimmerman asked if the PC had a seat on the Energy Committee. Mr. Sullivan explained that the PC members were planning to attend Energy Committee meetings on a rotation. Mr. Sullivan will reach out to PC members once the next Energy Committee meeting is scheduled. Mr. Khosla asked how often the Energy Committee meets and Mr. Sullivan replied that they are meeting every two weeks to start.

#### **Discuss energy plan land use goals**

This discussion is deferred until the next PC meeting.

#### **Updates**

- **Capital Improvement Committee-** Ms. Watson reported that the committee is aiming to meeting April 4 to discussion funding for sidewalks and a town garage.
- **Energy Committee-** Update above.
- **Resilient Roads Committee-** No update.
- **Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission-** No update. Ms. Cutler reported that CVRPC is offering a fundamentals session that is free to participate. Ms. Stone offered to sit in on CVRPC meetings when Ms. Cutler isn't available to attend. Ms. Zimmerman asked how often CVRPC meets and Ms. Cutler replied that they meet monthly.

#### **ZA Report**

The group reviewed report; there was no discussion.

#### **DRB Report**

There was no meeting this month, the next DRB meeting is scheduled for April.

#### **Other Business**



None.

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

Meeting closed at 8:28 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly.*