

## *Minutes of the East Montpelier Planning Commission*

***Approved 6/1/23***

May 18, 2023

PC Members Present: Zach Sullivan (Chair), Maia Stone, Nik Khosla, Erica Zimmerman, Gianna Petito (zoom), Clarice Cutler, Kim Watson (zoom)

Others Present: Deirdre Connelly; Energy Committee members Ben McCall, Emily Levin, and Andy Shapiro

**Call to Order:** 7:04 pm

**Changes to Agenda:**

None.

**Public Comment:**

None.

**Review Minutes**

The group reviewed the May 4, 2023 minutes and made a few edits for clarity. Ms. Watson commented that she worked on the last wastewater committee and can answer questions about it.

**Motion: To approve the May 4, 2023 minutes with tonight's amendments.** Made by Ms. Petito, second by Ms. Stone. Passed unanimously.

**Discuss Timeline for Energy Plan, Town Plan, Potential for Energy Plan Updates**

The PC and present Energy Committee members introduced themselves. Mr. Sullivan introduced the discussion and explained that the energy plan will ultimately have to be part of the Town Plan as an amendment or incorporated into the 2026 update to the Town Plan. Town Plan updates typically require two years of revisions to complete, so the process for the next Town Plan update will begin in the next year.

The PC and Energy Committee members discussed two approaches to the energy plan. One is to begin work on an energy plan that meets statutory requirements for substantial deference, but may not have specific and accurate data. This plan could be completed in approximately one year and be added to the current Town Plan as an amendment, and then later updated with more accurate data during the revisions for the 2026 Town Plan. The other approach is to draft a more complete and accurate energy plan over the next three years in tandem with the Town Plan revisions. Ms. Cutler asked if the siting information in the current version of the Town Plan would hold up in the PUC process. Mr. Sullivan explained that it isn't sufficient.

Ms. Levin explained some reasons for having an energy plan, which included siting so the town could have input on siting decisions and having a plan ready for implementation and to use when applying for funding opportunities. She pointed out that many funding opportunities are once-in-a-generation and the town could miss out on these funds if they wait too long to draft an energy plan. Mr. Khosla agreed with Ms. Levin's point about funding opportunities. Mr. McCall commented that he was in favor of pushing ahead with an energy plan in the next year to build on the energy and momentum of the current Energy

Committee members. He added that pushing for an energy plan that meets the requirements for substantial deference in the next year is also good for the PC and the town.

Mr. Shapiro commented that the default data that will be available from CVRPC is very rough and non-specific. He noted that the Energy Committee could build a plan that meets the requirements from that data, but it may not be a plan that will actually serve the specific community of East Montpelier. Mr. Shapiro noted that the Energy Committee received a mini-grant and could use some of the funds for information gathering to get some better data for the plan. Ms. Levin commented that timing is a question with the data, and that the Energy Committee needs good data to build a good plan. Mr. McCall added that the committee could create a placeholder plan from the CVRPC data in the next year, and then edit the plan with updated data for the 2026 Town Plan.

The group discussed the timeline for amending the current Town Plan before the 2026 update. Ms. Watson noted that amendments require at least one PC hearing and one Selectboard hearing. Mr. Shapiro asked how long it takes to incorporate feedback from the hearings into the plan. Ms. Watson explained that it depends on the feedback, and Mr. Sullivan added that if committees do a good job with public outreach while drafting amendments, the feedback tends to be minimal.

There was consensus that it would be in the best interest for both groups for the Energy Committee to work on an energy plan in the next year as an amendment to the current Town Plan, while also working on gathering better data for an update for the 2026 Town Plan. Mr. Sullivan asked for an informal show of hands for support for this plan. All present PC members supported it.

Ms. Levin added that the Energy Committee may be able to gather more data in addition to the CVRPC data in time for the initial energy plan. She also pointed out that many action steps in the energy plan don't require particularly refined data.

### **Discuss Energy Plan Format**

Mr. McCall asked whether the PC preferred a standalone energy plan to “tack on” to the Town Plan, or an energy plan that would be integrated into the energy section of the Town Plan and a few other relevant areas. Ms. Cutler noted that the PC had voted in the last year to integrate the energy plan into the Town Plan, but that was before the Energy Committee formed. Ms. Petito stated she would like to ensure the Energy Committee has some agency and independence in drafting the energy plan, and she also wants to minimize the administrative workload for both groups. Mr. McCall voiced support for an integrated approach because it would make it simpler to update in future years. Ms. Levin commented that she thought it would be fairly straightforward for the Energy Committee to draft the energy section and updates for the other relevant areas in the Town Plan. The present PC members agreed to this process.

The present PC members thanked Mr. McCall, Ms. Levin, and Mr. Shapiro for coming to the meeting. Both groups will be in touch about meeting together in the future.

### **Discuss work plan and responsibilities for work plan**

This will be discussed at a future meeting.

### **Assign town plan sections for initial review to determine need for updates with next town plan update cycle**

Mr. Sullivan suggested the PC begin reviewing the current Town Plan to identify areas in need of updates such as data, policy changes, changes to priorities, and any other areas that may need a little work. PC members will only flag areas for updates; they are not expected to draft suggested changes at this time.

The present PC members reviewed the table of contents on the Town Plan and chose sections they were interested in reviewing. Mr. Sullivan will send out the assigned sections and notes on what to look for via email. He will also send out an editable version of the Town Plan for PC members to use.

The assigned sections are as follows:

- Chapter 2: About East Montpelier – Erica
- Chapter 3: Town Government and Finance – Maia
- Chapter 4: Community Resources – Maia
- Chapter 5: Public Services – Erica, Zach
- Chapter 6: Infrastructure – Kim, Zach
- Chapter 7: Economic Development – Nik, Zach
- Chapter 8: Housing – Nik, Clarice
- Chapter 9: Natural and Scenic Resources – Clarice, Gianna, Kim
- Chapter 10: Land Use – Erica, Clarice, Nik

### **Updates**

- **Capital Improvement Committee-** None.
- **Energy Committee-** None.
- **Resilient Roads Committee-** None.
- **Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission-** None.

### **ZA Report**

The PC reviewed the latest ZA report.

### **DRB Report**

Ms. Cutler noted that the next DRB meeting is schedule for June 6. The town is still looking for an alternate Zoning Administrator.

### **Other Business**

None.

**Motion: To adjourn.** Made by Ms. Cutler, second by Ms. Zimmerman. Passed unanimously.

Meeting closed at 8:45 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Deirdre Connelly*