

SWANTON PLANNING COMMISSION
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April 8, 2015

PUBLIC MEETING
SWANTON PLANNING COMMISSION

The Swanton Planning Commission held a public meeting at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, April 8, 2015 at the Swanton Town Offices, 1 Academy Street to cover the following matters: To meet with representatives of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission and others to discuss the Municipal Planning Grant which was recently approved to assist the Swanton Planning Commission in accomplishing a revision and update of the "Swanton Town and Village Municipal Plan" which was previously adopted on August 31, 2010. The purpose of a municipal plan is to help guide decision-makers in charting the future of our community with assistance from members of the public in a variety of ways. Members of the public are welcome to attend and to offer input. The meeting on April 8th covered three chapters and topics from the 2010 "Swanton Town and Village Municipal Plan."

Present:

Jim Hubbard
Ed Daniel
Andy Larocque
Ronald Kilburn, Zoning Administrator
Yaasha Wheeler, Secretary
Taylor Newton, Regional Planning Commission
Adam Paxman, Village Trustee
David Jescavage, Town Administrator
Betsy Fournier, Swanton Recreation Department

1. Overview

Mr. Hubbard opened the meeting at 7:07 p.m. Mr. Newton presented a revised schedule, with different dates, because some of the previously-suggested dates conflicted with NRPC meetings. All Planning Commission meetings would continue to be held on Wednesday evenings at 7 p.m. The Planning Commission agreed to this change.

Mr. Newton stated that he felt Chapters 2 and 4 could be combined, since there were many similarities in their topics. He also suggested reorganizing the plan to flow more chronologically. The Planning Commission felt that was a good change. Mr. Newton suggested that the consolidation of Chapters 2 and 4 should contain a discussion on the Community Visit objectives.

Mr. Ed Daniel and Mr. Andy Larocque requested hardcopies of the revised town plan, since reading on a computer is not as comfortable for them. Mr. Daniel asked, How do we evaluate if we've met the goals as outlined in the town plan? Mr. Hubbard suggested that some goals (such as those decided upon at the Community Visit) were more immediate (3 – 4 years), while other goals were decades down the road. Mr. Newton added that the state legislature was looking at extending the revision of the town plan from the required 5 years to perhaps 10 or more years, with an evaluation of the goals to take place in the interim.

The Planning Commission discussed whether or not to revise the forward in the Town Plan, which was a letter written by Japanese students who visited Swanton and remarked on the historical town center. Mr. Kilburn said he would like to give input on the letter, since he recalled the visit and even had a video of it. The Planning Commission was comfortable leaving the letter in the plan.

2. Chapter I : Introduction

Mr. Newton asked if the Town and Village had capital improvement plans, and the Planning Commission replied that they did not. Mr. Newton informed the commission that such a plan was allowed by statute. He noted that most of the changes made in Chapter One were minor updates regarding the adoption and planning process.

3. Chapter III : Background: A Brief History of the Town and Village.

The Planning Commission discussed the rise in the popularity of biking in the area, and noted certain routes in Swanton that bicyclists used. Mr. Hubbard suggested that more signage to protect bicyclists could be considered. Mr. Kilburn added that a task force for the Community Visit involved biking and other recreational activities; the task force could be invited to a Planning Commission meeting to provide input. Mr. Newton said that biking should also be reviewed in Chapter 6 (vision). Betsy Fournier asked if the Healthy People, Fit Communities plan was implemented in the Town Plan. Mr. Newton explained that the municipal and regional plans interact with each other, and if the municipality wanted to be regionally approved, it had to be consistent with the regional plan. The regional plan was currently in draft form, had to be adopted every 8 years, and was developed through the Healthy People, Strong Communities grant. He noted that the Swanton Town Plan was regionally approved at its last revision, so, if there was no significant change to it, then regional approval should be no problem.

Mr. Daniel suggested mentioning “tourism” and “multi-seasonal, year-round activities” in the brief history, since Swanton has both. Mr. Paxman agreed, noting that one of the Community Visit task forces includes tourism. Mr. Daniel mentioned the new health center

that would be coming in to the old Aubuchon location. Mr. Larocque suggested adding information about Swanton's maple industry, since a number of businesses in Swanton were maple-related.

4. Chapter VI: Swanton Today: A Summary of Existing Conditions. This includes summarizing and analyzing data relating to several different topics, including: demographics (basic population), housing, natural resources, government structure and governance, education, energy, transportation and historic and cultural resources.

Mr. Newton explained that much of the information was gathered from the 2009 – 2013 American Community Survey, which was not as accurate as a census, but did have some helpful information. He pointed out that, according to the survey, the number of season housing units was shrinking (Mr. Daniel thought that might be because many seasonal buildings were being converted to year-round use), and that a higher percentage of Swanton residents now rented. Swanton's population was growing slightly and also aging, with a growth in total number of housing units, but fewer people per occupied unit. He explained the difference between the 10-year census and the American Community Survey, and noted that his affordability analysis for buying and renting, using median household income, showed that Swanton appears to be affordable for those with a median household income. Mr. Kilburn remarked that, according to Mr. Newton's data, 15% of Swanton's population reportedly earned more than \$100,000 a year.

Mr. Newton said that he would save the discussion on flood resiliency, phosphorus, and water quality for the June meeting. Mr. Daniel reminded Mr. Newton to mention the adaptive reuse of agricultural/historical structures in the town plan, and the Planning Commission informed Mr. Newton of Swanton's quarrying activities that should also be mentioned in the plan. The commission directed Mr. Newton to speak with Reginal Beliveau, Village Manager, to gather information about the local government.

Mr. Newton and the Planning Commission discussed the need for language acknowledging the recent growth of renewable energy, and addressing its siting. Mr. Newton informed the commission of the regional changes underway in regard to renewable energy siting, changes which would hopefully give more deference to municipalities, consider preservation of prime agricultural land, and put in place decommissioning plans.

Mr. Daniel suggested that Mr. Newton should speak with Mrs. Fournier to get an update of Swanton's recreational community events, and should also update the information on library activities.

Mr. Newton said that no major changes were made to the section on education, save the observation that Swanton was following the rest of the state in declining enrollment. He would speak to the school about potential measures of success to add to the plan (how many Swanton students went on to complete college, etc.).

The Planning Commission decided to omit an inventory of Swanton Town and Village equipment, in favor of a dollar figure of the current inventory's worth.

Mr. Newton said he would track down information from the Village regarding Swanton's power source, kilowatts produced, etc.

The Planning Commission discussed Swanton's recreational transportation, such as biking and snowmobiling, and its three recreational trails (Missisquoi Valley Trail, Lamoille Valley Trail, and Fit and Healthy Trail). Mr. Newton would find out how many miles of recreational trail Swanton possessed. Mr. Larocque mentioned that Swanton's welded rail also upgraded its trail travel.

Mr. Newton said he would update the economic development information from Swanton's Grand List, and had already added some information regarding occupations from the American Communities Survey. Mr. Daniel suggested adding information about the historical railroad depot on South River Street, Mr. Hubbard mentioned the need for a public parking area for commuters or tourists, and Mr. Kilburn pointed out the proposed highway from Montreal. Also, Swanton needed a public information location in addition to the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Daniel said it would be helpful to know the number of Swanton residents who worked in Swanton, versus the number who traveled to another town to work, as well as the number of residents from other towns who traveled to Swanton to work.

Mr. Kilburn would work with Mr. Newton on updating the section on historical and cultural resources. Mr. Hubbard reminded Mr. Newton that the golf course at Champlain Country Club was within Swanton's borders.

Mr. Newton said that the Planning Commission would review the following sections of Chapter 6 on April 29th: local government, energy, economic development, and historical and cultural resources. They could also consider how to consolidate Chapters 2 and 4. He informed the commission that the state requirements regarding flood resiliency/river corridors had changed, though the changes adopted in Swanton's new bylaw revision were quite sufficient for the time being. Mr. Kilburn asked what could be done to address view protection, and Mr. Newton said that the matter could fit into the vision for the future in the town plan, and that "view sheds" could also be addressed under "natural resources." However, regulating view sheds were the prerogative of the bylaws, though they could be mentioned as a goal or objective in the town plan.

5. Any Other Necessary Business

The Planning Commission agreed to use the new aerial photograph of Swanton for the town plan cover.

Mr. Daniel made a motion, seconded by Mr. Larocque, to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes of March 11, 2015. Motion carried.

The Planning Commission signed the letter (dated April 7, 2015) from Mr. Allen Karnatz, Champlain Valley Regional Director, requesting the Planning Commission's support on behalf of Earl and Susan Fournier's application to Vermont Land Trust to conserve 96 acres of their property in Swanton. Mr. Hubbard, as Planning Commission Chair, signed the letter.

Mr. Hubbard made a motion, seconded by Mr. Daniel, to adjourn at 8:59 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Yaasha Wheeler, Planning Commission secretary

Jim Hubbard

Ed Daniel

Andy Larocque