

**SWANTON PLANNING COMMISSION**  
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*Tuesday, May 26, 2015*

**PUBLIC MEETING**  
**SWANTON PLANNING COMMISSION**

The Swanton Planning Commission held a public meeting at 7:00 PM on Tuesday, May 26, 2015 at the Swanton Town Offices, 1 Academy Street.

*Present:*

*Jim Hubbard*  
*Ed Daniel*  
*Andy Larocque*  
*Taylor Newton, NRPC*  
*Ronald Kilburn, Zoning Administrator*  
*Yaasha Wheeler, Secretary*  
*Adam Paxman, Swanton Enhancement Project*  
*David Jescavage, Town Administrator*

**Purpose of the meeting: To meet with representatives of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission to discuss revisions and updates to the “Swanton Town and Village Municipal Plan” which was previously adopted on August 31, 2010. Discussion will be focused upon the consolidation of existing Chapter 2 - “The Vision” and existing Chapter 4 - “Swanton in the Future”. This will include consolidation of the text of each chapter and the goals and policies of each chapter. The Planning Commission will also review recent findings and recommendations of the Swanton Community Visit and consider incorporating input of the Swanton Community Visit Task Forces into the plan. Northwest Regional Planning Commission will also complete an enhanced consultation with the Planning Commission.**

**1. Enhanced Consultation**

Mr. Hubbard opened the meeting at 7:09 p.m. Mr. Newton began with the “enhanced consultation,” which was statutorily required every 5 years to help a local Planning Commission review its Town Plan. He felt it would be helpful to review the last enhanced consultation.

Strengths:

- Comprehensive plan supported by data
- Strong goals and objectives
- Strong in economic development in terms of the statute
- Solid discussion of bike and pedestrian networks
- Strong housing section

Weaknesses:

- Not much discussion of elderly population
- Not much talk about access to health care facilities
- Plan does not contain policy for protection of air quality

Opportunities:

- Update downtown historic district to include omitted properties
- Inventory scenic views and vistas
- Minor changes regarding economic development to identify projects that could enhance economy
- Update the data

Mr. Newton asked if Swanton needed any future training needs or opportunities; what topics would the board feel was useful to learn more about concerning planning? For example, one could learn how to define and address scenic views, and how to protect them in the bylaws. Mr. Paxman suggested learning more about Brownfields studies. Mr. Hubbard felt that was a great idea, but was not sure how to apply the knowledge to preserve them. Mr. Newton said that scenic views, Brownfields, floodplain, or other topics could be covered by experts hired by NRPC to talk with the Planning Commission after the Town Plan revision. Mr. Hubbard agreed that would be a great opportunity to help identify long-term plans.

The Planning Commission discussed the benefits of meeting periodically with the Development Review Board, to have better feedback between the two boards. Mr. Newton agreed that communication was very helpful.

Mr. Newton summed up that Swanton had a designated Village center; had there been any use of the designated center? Mr. Paxman asked if it was possible to see the designation and see if it could be expanded. Mr. Jescavage estimated that the next review would be due in 2017. Mr. Newton asked if expanding the Village center was a topic of discussion at the Swanton Enhancement Committee. Mr. Paxman said it had not come up yet, but he was interested to know the possibilities. The Planning Commission discussed the possible

benefits and problems with doing so: it would expand into residential areas, perhaps the Travel Service Area is sufficient for a “growth center”, etc. Mr. Newton said that a state-defined Village designation was a fairly small area, usually the cluster of historical buildings around the green, to be available to certain funding.

Mr. Kilburn drew attention to the local news article regarding “hookup criteria” created by the St. Albans City Council for accessing St. Albans water and sewer (criteria to which FCIDC reportedly objected). The Planning Commission predicted that the criteria would “kill” the potential for taking advantage of that service, and discussed the particulars of the article.

Mr. Newton provided a quick overview of NRPC’s services, reminding the Planning Commission that NRPC could help with transportation planning, hazard mitigation, emergency management, and other similar needs. Swanton was represented by Harold Garrett and Ross Lavoie for the Town, and Chris Leach and Neal Speer for the Village.

Mr. Hubbard stated emphatically that the Village should not be lost, noting that the job base had not grown as the population had. How could you promote business? Mr. Newton said that it was a question other municipalities asked; all of them wanted to know how to keep workers in their town, instead of having them work elsewhere. It was a region-wide problem. Mr. Hubbard suggested that tax-free businesses (like New York) would be a good incentive. Mr. Newton agreed that Vermont was fragmented town-to-town, with no regional policies like New York had, and recommended talking to the legislators. Mr. Hubbard summed up: “All I care about is looking at Swanton’s future.” He listed ways in Swanton had done so, and said now Swanton needed help with letting those good works continue to survive.

## **2. Town Plan**

Mr. Newton gave a quick overview of the work done in the past month. He pointed out the proposed goals and objectives for the “Vision of Swanton” chapter, and the implementation schedule, for his idea of revamping the short “Implementation” chapter. A lot had happened with the Community Visit in the interim since the last meeting. He had met with representatives of the Community Visit last Wednesday, and noted that the task forces had identified action steps toward meeting their goals. He tried to incorporate their information into the goals and objectives when they were broad, and as action steps when they were specific.

They began to work through the goals and objectives. Mr. Newton had attempted to eliminate duplication and to consolidate by absorbing Chapter Four into Chapter Two.

### **Land Use**

Mr. Newton read out the updated two goals for land use and their accompanying objectives:

- A. To preserve and enhance the rural qualities of Swanton Town and Village.*

1. *Maintain the historic settlement pattern of the compact village and clustered residential development separated by rural countryside.*
  2. *Concentrate development in the Village area and the Southern Growth District, while requiring lower densities of development in the rural areas of Town. Strip development shall be discouraged.*
  3. *Encourage the type, location, and intensity of land uses to be compatible with the environmental, infrastructural, and economic capabilities of the community.*
  4. *Public investment shall be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.*
  5. *Require the development of multi-use paths/sidewalks to provide increased pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to existing municipal infrastructure and to proposed development.*
- B. To live with respect for the land; make wise and efficient use of it, and preserve the Town's working landscape.*
1. *Promote and protect the long-term productivity of land for agriculture and forestry.*
  2. *Support actions of federal and state governments and land trusts to ensure that Swanton's primary agricultural soils are protected and conserved.*
  3. *Protect important natural features, including Lake Champlain, the Missisquoi River and other tributaries, the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, and significant natural, historical, and archaeological areas.*

He had added an objective under *Land Use*, taking a state planning goal from statute. Mr. Daniel was not in favor of the term "public investment." If the public was going to invest, the public should have a say in it. Mr. Newton suggested: "Development shall be planned so as to minimize pressure on agricultural and forest land."

Mr. Hubbard was concerned that the most development occurred on the cheapest land. How do you, as a community, continue to make sure that your land is preserved? Mr. Newton suggested that some PUDs could be eliminated from certain districts, and then perhaps up the minimum lot size on conventional developments. How did you keep a "bedroom community"? Mr. Newton explained some of the planning activities in Iowa, and how they addressed similar concerns. Mr. Daniel suggested taking B.2 ("Support actions of federal and state governments and land trusts to ensure that Swanton's primary agricultural soil are protected and conserved") and moving it up under Part A.

The Planning Commission discussed the term "public investment." Mr. Jescavage suggested identifying the type of public investment more specifically (e.g. public investment in water and sewer). They liked the language "public investments in community infrastructure."

### **Historical and Cultural Resources**

- A. *To protect the historic qualities of Swanton Village as a traditional New England settlement and recognize that these resources contribute to the Town's economic well-being.*

1. *Preserve the historic traditions and value that gives Swanton its special rural character (i.e. its small size and its quiet sense of place) and investigate the use of form based code in the Village.*

Mr. Newton explained the definition of form-based code, which involved establishing a certain aesthetic quality of building through Zoning Bylaws. It changes the emphasis in Zoning from the use to the appearance. This code would regulate the exterior appearance of buildings: placement of doors, number of windows, replication of old development, etc. Theoretically, it would make zoning so easy that more projects could be handled administratively. Mr. Hubbard asked how that would influence codes required by franchises. Mr. Newton said that the form-based code had worked wonders for Newport, and that the code could be applied only to certain areas of the municipality. He added that this investigation of form-based code could involve some of the offered training.

2. *Establish a Village Historic District in the Development Regulations.*

The Development Regulations shall address issues related to exterior architectural and aesthetic guidelines.

3. *Maintain our strong community spirit and reputation for being friendly and cooperative.*
  4. *Explore ways in which its historic and cultural resources can become an element of an economic development strategy.*
- B. *To encourage greater appreciation of Swanton's history and Native American heritage.*
1. *Identify and protect significant archaeological sites by maintaining and encouraging communications between the municipalities, the Swanton Historical Society, and the Abenaki Community. Such communication may expedite various local projects because the issues and needs are of common interest.*
  2. *Promote use of the Swanton Public Library as an important cultural, educational, and recreational facility.*
- C. *To encourage recognition and appreciation for the local arts community. (This was added to recognize the efforts of the newly-created Swanton Arts Council.)*
1. *Support the growth and work of the Swanton Arts Council.*

## **Economic Development**

- A. *Promote new business and industry startups within the Town's village, commercial, and industrial areas.*

1. *Support Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation to implement recommendations of the Franklin County Strategic Economic Development Plan.*
2. *Work with the Franklin-Grand Isle Workforce Investment Board to better understand and support local workforce needs and programs.*

Mr. Newton said that he had added this because the board was a great resource. Mr. Daniel suggested getting training about senior issues and incentives.

- B. *To foster a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities while maintaining high environmental and social standards.*

Mr. Kilburn asked to know the definition of “social standard.” Mr. Newton imagined that this referred to a vibrant downtown. Mr. Paxman suggested that “diverse” could be the keyword.

1. *Maintain and enhance Swanton’s role as a commercial center.*
2. *Maintain and enhance municipal services to accommodate a variety of businesses.*
3. *Encourage the rehabilitation of local brownfields and underutilized properties.*

Mr. Newton said that this had been brought up by one of the task forces.

- C. *To maintain and support a viable agricultural economy including agriculture, forestry, agritourism, and other related activities.*

1. *Encourage local businesses to manufacture products and source materials or ingredients from locally grown agricultural products.*

Mr. Paxman suggested the term “local vendors.” Mr. Hubbard agreed that promotion of locally-grown agricultural products was important, and Swanton should not put any limitations on that.

2. *Promote development of smaller farm tracts via required open space in planned residential developments.*

Mr. Hubbard agreed it was important to encourage cluster development to preserve open land.

3. *Support farmers in continuing acceptable agricultural practices in accordance with the “Best Management Practices,” a Vermont Department of Agriculture program.*

- D. *Strengthen tourism in Swanton.*

1. *Encourage and support various groups and organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, Swanton Historical Society, Friends of the Library, Abenaki Self Help Association, Tribal Council, Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, service clubs, churches, senior citizen organizations, and clubs to enhance Swanton as a cultural, recreational, and tourist center.*

Mr. Paxman added "Swanton Chamber of Commerce," for clarity.

2. *Support the work to develop a welcome center and increased wayfinding signage by the Swanton Interstate exit.*

Mr. Daniel mentioned a number of historic cemeteries for tourism.

3. Mr. Newton suggested added a third item, mentioning "Support the work of the Swanton Historical Society, and support Swanton's historical sites, including the Depot, the cemeteries, etc." Mr. Paxman discussed the idea of having a Welcome Center near the interstate. Mr. Hubbard agreed that there was a lot of traffic through Swanton that was not captured.

*E. To enhance the vitality of Swanton's historic downtown center and chart a path for future investment and promotion to capitalize on its unique assets and geography.*

1. *Encourage both public and private development, enhancement, and improvements in the Village.*
2. *Encourage private landowners to utilize benefits of the Village Center Designation program.*

### **Public Facilities**

*A. To provide public services and facilities adequate to meet the needs of present and future residents in an efficient and environmentally sound manner.*

1. *Plan for, finance, and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs of the community.*
2. *Ensure that all municipal departments have the equipment necessary to provide adequate service and acceptable response times to the entire community.*
3. *Ensure that adequate water for fire protection is available throughout the year in all parts of the community.*
4. *Continue mutual aid and cooperation among all emergency service groups.*
5. *Ensure an adequate potable water supply for all areas of the Town. The Planning Commission requested removing this completely. Encourage efficient use of treated water in order to make the most of the available capacity.*

Mr. Jescavage suggested using the term “municipally-treated water.”

6. *Support efforts to educate residents about solid waste disposal options, currently available through Northwest Vermont Solid Waste District, in order to reduce junk and hazardous materials from being disposed of improperly.*
7. *Maintain representation on the Northwest Vermont Solid Waste District Board of Supervisors.*

Mr. Newton decided to move this to the “implementation” documentation.

*B. Maintain and enhance existing recreation facilities and programs to meet current and future needs of the population.*

1. *Enhance the existing community facilities for recreational uses, including the Library and Maquam Beach.*

The Planning Commission discussed whether to mention specific recreational facilities, or leave the language vague; Mr. Newton was in favor of broader language. “Promote the utilization of existing community facilities” should replace “enhance.”

2. *Ensure that there are sufficient recreational facilities for all ages.*
3. *Encourage private enterprises to enhance public access to lakeshore and other recreational amenities in the Town.*
4. *Improve public access to Lake Champlain and Missisquoi River, including at the Depot Museum and Marble Mill Park.*

Mr. Newton noted that these two locations had been identified by a Swanton task force.

5. *Install public restrooms downtown.*

*C. To provide for quality educational facilities that meets the needs of current and future residents.*

1. *Coordinate new partnerships with various groups and organizations including, but not limited to: Friends of the Library, Swanton Historical Society, the Chamber of Commerce, Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, and the Abenaki Self Help Association to provide community activities and educational opportunities for young and old.*



Mr. Newton would add Swanton Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Paxman suggested adding Swanton Recreation to this item.

2. Maintain and expand cooperation and coordination between the Swanton School District and the community.
3. *Encourage local educational institutions to broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities for all age groups to the greatest extent possible.*

Mr. Daniel suggested that perhaps the church may be another place where people go to seek for help, and the church could know what other programs were available out there. The Planning Commission discussed whether to add the need for a homeless shelter.

- D. *Ensure regulation of land development in Swanton does not negatively impact the availability of safe and affordable child care.*

Mr. Jescavage suggested posing encouragement of child care in positive terms. Mr. Newton suggested: "Ensure regulations in Swanton promote the availability of safe and affordable child care." Since this echoed the objective, this may end up being a goal with no objectives.

1. *Ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child chair providers, and child care work force development of the greatest extend possible.*

Mr. Newton noted that there had been a slight decrease in the capacity of licensed child care facilities since the last Town plan revision. The Planning Commission discussed ways to determine how that was impacted by the number of children in Swanton; how do you factor in single moms, grandparents, unlicensed facilities? Also, the facilities may not be serving just Swanton children.

- E. *To identify and address the public health needs of all community residents.*
  1. *Support the gathering of data and information about substance abuse and substance abuse treatment in the community.*
  2. *Support efforts to create and expand access to substance abuse treatment in Swanton.*

Mr. Newton asked: Would this be a place to discuss a homeless shelter? Mr. Hubbard suggested perhaps a shelter or substance abuse recovery facility could go in near the new health center. Mr. Newton suggested: "Investigate the needs of/explore ways to aid the homeless and lower-income households in our

community.” Mr. Hubbard highlighted the needs of those who hardly ever leave the community and live on very little income. Mr. Kilburn felt that the new health center would address some of those issues. Mr. Newton suggested language along the lines of “ensuring better community with local non-profits about spreading the word of community health resources and public support.”

## **Energy**

- A. *Make more efficient use of energy from all sources, encourage the availability of a diversity of energy types, and reduce reliance on energy from nonrenewable energy sources.*

Mr. Hubbard asked how to balance having community input on renewable energy siting with the possibilities brought by an entrepreneur of renewable energy resources. Mr. Newton stated that the implementation document called for identification of potential renewable energy sites. Mr. Hubbard explained the current desire of Swanton Electric to have no competition from other energy sources. Mr. Newton posed a hypothetical situation in which a solar-powered property could hook onto the grid and net-meter with Swanton Electric.

Mr. Hubbard suggested sitting back and letting the Public Service Board regulate the issue, and see where the renewable energy debate went in a few years. Mr. Newton said that, if Swanton wanted to do anything about siting of renewable energy, now was the time. The Planning Commission discussed the various types of renewable energy, the energy needs of Swanton, and potential situations. Mr. Newton encouraged the Commission to consider: Do you want language in your plan? Do you want a timeline for answering that question? Do you want to indicate certain desirable locations? Do you want to have no information? He reminded the board that vague language will not be useful at the Public Service Board level. He asked them to consider what they preferred.

The Planning Commission discussed the siting of radio towers, as it had affected Swanton in the past. Mr. Newton suggested discussing this deeper at the next meeting, and he would send the updated text of Chapter 2/4 in the mail by next Thursday.

1. *Promote energy efficiency in homes, business and municipal buildings.*
2. *Expand the energy chapter within this Plan for use in assessing current and future energy needs.*
3. *Promote the development of renewable energy resources in the community.*
4. *Encourage clustered development of renewable energy resources in the community.*

5. *Support efforts of Efficiency Vermont and the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) to increase awareness about energy conservation and weatherization programs.*

Mr. Daniel asked if there would be a way to make bio-mass quality wood available to lower-income people. Mr. Newton noted that Swanton does have the potential to do some level of “bio-mass,” since the eastern side is very wooded.

### **3. Any Other Necessary Business**

The Planning Commission scheduled the next meetings as following:

- June 9<sup>th</sup>
- June 23<sup>rd</sup>
- June 30<sup>th</sup>
- July 8<sup>th</sup>

The two JLB hearings would be scheduled for September 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. It would have to be after September 12<sup>th</sup> and before September 30<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Newton explained the schedule of the process, and recommended notifying the JLB well ahead of time. Mr. Kilburn asked where, in the local plan, there would be an affirming statement allowing for Swanton to have a Conservation Commission and a Certified Local Government.

Mr. Daniel made a motion, seconded by Mr. Larocque, to approve the minutes of April 29, 2015 as presented. Motion carried.

The Planning Commission discussed the availability of municipal water and sewer from St. Albans and how that affected Swanton.

Mr. Hubbard made a motion, seconded by Mr. Larocque, to adjourn the meeting at 9:24 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Yaasha Wheeler, Planning Commission Secretary

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Jim Hubbard

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Ed Daniel

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Andy Larocque