

TOWN OF SWANTON
DRAFT MINUTES
SPECIAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Swanton Town Office Building
1 Academy Street, Swanton, VT 05488

Wednesday, December 2, 2015 @ 7:00 p.m.

Present:

Jim Hubbard, Ed Daniel, Andy Larocque, Yaasha Wheeler, David Jescavage, Darlene Marrier.

Also present:

Penny Dubie, Christine Lang, Pat Messier, Marianna Gamache.

Mr. Hubbard opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

1. Agenda Review

No changes.

2. Interview Planning Commission Candidate

Mrs. Sarah Luneau was not present yet, so the Planning Commission moved to the next item.

3. Discuss Renewable (Green) Energy amendments to Town Plan and Zoning By-laws

Mr. Hubbard stated that the Planning Commission was not looking to adopt anything tonight, but just to overview some new information collected by Mr. Jescavage.

Mr. Jescavage said that the packet included most of the information sent in by people regarding wind energy, including the Town of Freedom Wind Ordinance, the Newark Town Plan, Large Wind Projects in Vermont, Electricity Demand, Hubbardton Plan, Solar & Wind Power, Wind Questions and Answers, and Wind Issues.

Mr. Jescavage recommended working both on the Town Plan and the Zoning Bylaws, and recommended putting a section in regulating wind turbines. The legislation existed now regarding solar farms, allowing communities to regulate them, but there was no such

legislation on wind energy. Representatives Marianna Gamache and Brian Savage were planning to introduce legislation regulating wind farms.

Mr. Hubbard recalled the issues that arose in the use of cell towers, which had since been discovered to have aviation issues, and he felt that “these things take time. We don’t want to have to change [the plans] day after day, and that’s what will happen if we rush this.” That said, the community had voiced its opinion on the Swanton Wind project, and the Planning Commission wanted to give that due consideration. Tonight would not be the night of making any real changes, but just perusing the information available to see how the issue may be best addressed.

Mr. Daniel said he would like a presenter before the Planning Commission to define various wind turbine projects. He was personally opposed to commercial wind projects, but he was curious about personal residential use. He was concerned with the blade span, the setbacks for safety, and other matters. He wanted an expert to educate the Planning Commission on both wind energy and solar fields. He did not want neighbors blocking each other’s sunshine with solar panels, and he wished for more information on screening available and space required. After an expert had visited, Mr. Daniel wished to go over the NPRC overlay maps regarding renewable energy siting again.

Mr. Hubbard summarized that Swanton had made a statement that renewable energy was not needed, since there was sufficient energy available, yet Swanton should not be belligerent and should fairly consider incoming projects and their potential. He suggested reviewing Mr. Jescavage’s packet of information and, at the January meeting, the Planning Commission would begin locating potential renewable energy sites, and setting the sizes and setbacks. “We have to be careful not to totally make it impossible [to have a renewable energy project].” He mentioned that a huge percentage of the farm on which two of the turbines would have been located was in land trust. If such sites could not be located on land in land trust, where should they go?

Mr. Larocque agreed that “we should take our time and do it right.”

Mr. Jescavage said that New Hampshire emphasized individual residential projects, instead of commercial projects, which, in Vermont, were incentivized. Mr. Hubbard stated that “we don’t want to throw renewable energy out the door. There’s a place for it and it can be very beneficial.”

Mr. Jescavage suggested that the board should consider that the zoning bylaws restrict the lot coverage, and noted that solar panels might require an exemption of some kind, so that developers could take advantage of putting in panels. Mr. Hubbard agreed that that was a valid matter. “If we could address the size and locations of these, we can work out the smaller details later.” He suggested coming up with simple language to put in the plan regarding renewable energy, with considerations for location and setbacks.

Mrs. Darlene Marrier noted that she had had a lot of dealings with the company Solar City, and asked if the Planning Commission wanted to see hear from them. Mrs. Marianna Gamache felt that whoever came in should be an independent party, not associated with a company.

Mr. Hubbard felt that there was enough information to take the first few steps, and was leery of bringing in professionals because opposing sides would need to be fairly represented.

Mrs. Marianna Gamache said that the governor was not backing away from the renewable energy projects. She stated that the grid was completely full, so even if the project went through, there was no utility company willing to contract with Swanton Wind. In order for the project to go forward in terms of supplying energy would require expanding the grid, which defeated part of the purpose of doing renewable energy in the first place, and she did not feel that any administration would be willing to sign up for that, since it was very expensive.

Mrs. Dubie agreed with Mr. Daniel that the layered NRPC maps would be useful, and added that all the residents of the Swanton Wind project area had requested Mr. Newton to create a layer that showed the concentration of homes in any area in Swanton.

Mr. Hubbard said that he would like to meet with Taylor Newton again, to bring the Planning Commission up to speed on the maps and the current projects and to inform Mr. Newton on Swanton's needs. He noted that the Planning Commission had not received the planning grant it requested. Mrs. Luneau suggested that, once the maps for homes were generated, it would show few suitable places anywhere in Vermont for renewable energy siting. Mrs. Lang suggested that, in the case of a project being sited near homes, the people of the affected area should agree to the project.

Mrs. Pat Messier suggested that if farm land was taken for renewable energy projects, that should be questioned again. Mr. Daniel replied, "If a farmer wants to sell that land, he's got that right." Mr. Hubbard noted that Swanton was the number one town in the state, per capita, of conserved agricultural land. There had already been two farmers in 2015 who applied to put their land in land trust. He felt that Swanton had done well at preserving agricultural land. Mrs. Messier said that it was taking away from the scenic character of the whole state when commercial projects came in. Mr. Hubbard agreed that without the farms, open space, skiers and snowmobilers, there was no tourism, which was one of the state's biggest income.

The Planning Commission set Tuesday, January 12, 2016, at 6:30 p.m. as the next Planning Commission.

Interview Planning Commission Candidate

Mrs. Sarah Luneau came forward. Mr. Hubbard noted that she had grown up in the Community and asked: What do you see in the town that could be improved? What interests or thoughts do you have?

Mrs. Luneau replied that she had few pet peeves, but felt it was important to have oversight, and a town plan and bylaws that were not haphazard. What she saw of the renewable energy projects was that developers were in a hurry to take advantage of the incentives and tax credits, rather than fully considering the long-term effects of the project to the area. Appropriate bylaws and plans protected the community.

Mr. Hubbard said the big questions were, "What are the projects in our town? What hasn't been addressed yet?" Mrs. Luneau agreed that monitoring was important. The Planning Commission and Mrs. Luneau discussed the balance of being flexible with the needs of Swanton while enforcing the bylaws. Mrs. Luneau noted some of the changes she had observed in the Town over the decades, and added that she had some background in aesthetics planning. "I've always been interested in community and planning."

Mr. Daniel clarified the difference between the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board. He suggested that Mrs. Marrier was an excellent resource, and that any zoning questions from citizens should be directed to her.

Mr. Hubbard added that the boards hoped to work together more closely, so that everyone was on the same page. Mrs. Marrier had started an "idea file" to keep track of the things that could be discussed. Mr. Hubbard suggested having a double meeting with the Development Review Board in January or February.

Mr. Daniel made a motion, seconded by Mr. Larocque, to recommend Mrs. Sarah Luneau to the Selectboard as the new Planning Commission member.

4. Review the Minutes

Mr. Daniel made a motion, seconded by Mr. Larocque, to approve the minutes of the Special Planning Commission meeting of September 22, 2015. Motion carried.

5. Any Other Necessary Business

None.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Hubbard made a motion, seconded by Mr. Daniel, to adjourn at 8:20 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Yaasha Wheeler
Planning Commission Secretary

Jim Hubbard

Ed Daniel

Ross Lavoie
