

Richmond Planning Commission

Public Session for Town Plan Update

February 15, 2012

Approved Minutes

Members Present: Gary Bressor (Chair), Lou Borie (Vice-Chair), Mark Fausel, Dan Renaud, Christy Witters

Members Absent: Joe McHugh, One vacancy

Others Present: Cathleen Gent (Town Planner/Staff to the DRB); Sharon Murray (consultant with Front Porch Community Planning & Design); Aron Meinhardt, taping for MMCTV Comcast 15; *see attached list*

7:05 PM Call to order by the Chair.

Introductions

Bressor welcomed the group and briefly discussed the status of the town plan, related to both the existing town plan which is scheduled for re-adoption in early March and the updated town plan which will have some significant changes. The updated town plan will hopefully be ready for public comment by mid summer.

Gent reviewed the benefits of having a town plan in terms of bylaw amendments, Act 250 proceedings, and Public Service Board considerations for electric grid and natural gas transmission lines. She added that a town plan must be re-adopted every five years and gave some details regarding the current status of the town plan re-adoption.

Natural Resources

Gent reviewed the Inventory and Trends section of the current (2007) Richmond Town Plan, which includes: drainage basins; surface waters; floodplains; riparian areas; wetlands and vernal pools; groundwater; soils; steep slopes and regional features (such as hills and ridgelines); wildlife habitat; flora, fauna, and natural communities; natural areas; farms and forest land; sand and gravel deposits; scenic views; and air quality.

Resource Studies

Murray discussed the natural resource-based resource studies that have been release since the 2007 Town Plan. She noted there were 17 project studies and reports to date including the following: three river corridor studies for the Winooski River tributaries and the Huntington River; one water quality monitory report; three environmental hazards publications including flood, fluvial hazard maps and a mitigation plan; four reports related to infrastructure including two for stormwater and two for bicycle/pedestrian and streetscapes; one invasive plant management plan; one wildlife habitat report related to large forested blocks and connections; four policy repots regarding the management of Richmond's conservation fund, economic development and other topics.

Questions for Participants

Murray led the discussion portion of the public session. The group began with a discussion of what new or additional natural resource conditions or issues should be referenced in the updated plan. The group also discussed policies and objectives and implementation strategies that should be integrated into the updated town plan.

Murray also briefly reviewed the top natural resources priorities that were discussed by participants in the Planning Commission's 2009 town-wide and neighborhood sessions held as part of the zoning bylaws changes. The top issues from participants included: prominent ridgelines; large forest blocks; wildlife habitats, followed by protecting agriculture soils.

Town Plan Process and Content

- There is outdated information in the Richmond Town Plan, which should be updated
- Review the Conservation Fund Program management report– for ideas for sustaining the program
- Town Plan Objectives and Implementation Steps
 - The groups and committees and individuals charged with implementing those items need more direction and on-going assessment
 - Prioritize implementation steps so as to give direction for taking next steps

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2 *General Natural Resources*
3 - Consider two approaches to protecting natural resources
4 - Regulations
5 - Conservation – encourage voluntary protection with private land owners
6
7 *Scenic Resources and Ridgelines*
8 - Need inventory for scenic resources
9 - Ridgelines – view corridors. Bob Low and others did a viewshed analysis in 2006, a copy of which
10 Gent has.
11
12 *Data and Regulatory Requirements*
13 - Regulatory proceedings – Richmond needs data to strengthen the regulatory requirements
14 - The data and science goes beyond Richmond boundaries – for a variety of natural resources topics
15
16 *Climate Change*
17 - Climate change studies should be added to the town plan
18 - The current town plan does not mention climate change. That may be an omission, since
19 climate change discussion is driving energy policy and planning for natural resources at the
20 state level.
21 - There are private data sets on climate change: climate data on Wes White Hill Road since the
22 1970s; annual bird count on Gillett Pond
23 - Look at the new growing range maps for gardens
24
25 *Floodplains & Fluvial Erosion Hazards*
26 - The new plan should refer to the new DFIRMs
27 - The town efforts to potentially challenge the new DFIRMs may not make sense, particularly
28 considering that Tropical Storm Irene was less than a 100-year storm
29 - Fluvial Erosion – add information to define exactly how this differs from inundation flooding
30
31 *Severe Weather*
32 - Analyze the incidence of severe weather events
33 - Need state/local data
34 - Need to define a severe weather event
35 - Update the culvert standards in light of the severity of storms
36
37 *Streams*
38 - Address the quality of small streams
39
40 *Agricultural Soils*
41 - Public Service Board will consider agricultural lands
42 - Discuss prime agricultural land versus land used for farming in town plan
43 - Add policy for limiting forest fragmentation
44 - Provide a local current use tax break for farms and forestry operations
45
46 *Sand and Gravel/Earth Resources*
47 - Hydrofracking – Explore policies for not allowing the practice until there are scientific answers
48 - Question of whether there are a lot of shale deposits in Richmond
49 - Sand and gravel – should there be a town source for sand and gravel – to protect access to sand and
50 gravel for municipal uses
51
52 *Wildlife Habitat*
53 - Wildlife habitat studies - talk with experts about known areas
54 - Do inventory of wildlife habitats, including a bird count
55 - Prepare specific standards for legal proceedings
56 - Prepare a map with sightings from residents (less analytical but valuable)
57 - Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) has released a fragmentation study which provides some
58 information useful to the town plan update
59 - More information is needed regarding wildlife corridors

- 1
- 2 *Invasive Species*
- 3 - support remediation efforts
- 4 - provide outreach to owners
- 5 - look at changing the road mowing policies – so as not to spread invasive plants

6
7 No prioritization of the ideas was done.

8
9 **Wrap-Up and Adjournment**

10 Gent led a brief wrap up and invited the public to the next two public sessions regarding the town plan
11 update, which will be held on March 21 (energy policy) and April 18 (tools to encourage local
12 agriculture).

13
14 The public session ended at 8:57 PM.

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17 Respectfully submitted by Cathleen Gent, Town Planner/Staff to the DRB

