

Richmond Planning Commission

Public Session for Town Plan Update

March 21, 2012

Approved Minutes

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

Members Absent: Mark Fausel, One vacancy

Others Present: Cathleen Gent (Town Planner/Staff to the DRB); Sharon Murray (consultant with Front Porch Community Planning & Design); Nick Irwin-Testa, taping for MMCTV Comcast 15; Chris Granda; George Wuerthner; *See attached list*

7:04 PM Call to order by the Chair.

Introductions

Bressor welcomed the group and briefly discussed the purpose of the meeting, namely to gather public input for the energy policy section of the town plan.

Town Plans, Bylaws, and the Public Service Board approval process

Consultant Sharon Murray reviewed the document, "Energy Planning Information Sheet" and described the energy considerations for the municipal plan, noting that the current Richmond Town Plan has an energy policy section that will be updated and expanded. She noted that the town plan forms the basis for local bylaws. Act 250 projects must conform to the town plan and meet energy standards. The Public Service Board looks at the land conservation measures within the town plan and whether a project will unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due considerations given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions and recommendations of the municipal legislative body. In addition, any PSB project is reviewed to ensure that there is not a scenic impact of a clear, written community standard. Murray highlighted the fact that it's important to review and add standards to the Richmond Town Plan for Act 250 and Public Service Board projects.

Energy Policy – Review current plan topics, objectives, and implementation

Gent said that, since the last public session in February, the Selectboard has re-adopted the 2007 Town Plan as the 2012 Town Plan, which will remain in effect until such time that the Planning Commission completes the town plan update (currently underway).

Gent reviewed Section 10, Energy Policy, in the current town plan, beginning with a discussion of the energy policy components of energy sources, energy conservation & energy efficiency, land use planning, renewable energy resources, and transportation. She then reviewed the current objectives and implementation strategies in terms of activities which have been undertaken since the town plan was last updated in 2007 including the following: integrating the Residential Building Energy Standards and the Commercial Building Energy Standards into the new draft zoning and subdivision bylaws; promoting development patterns which concentrate growth in existing areas through the new draft zoning and subdivision bylaws; adding a Richmond village park and ride facility into the 5-year Chittenden County park and ride plan; developing streetscape plans for East Main Street, Jericho Road, and Bridge Street, which have been approved by the Selectboard (much of the work for Jericho Road has been completed); completing energy audits for all municipal buildings; receiving an Energy Efficiency Block Grant for energy improvements at the water treatment facility, most of which have been completed; developing a plan for Town Center improvements; adding new insulation to the Town Center attic.

Gent acknowledged that the town has not yet developed a policy related to net-metered renewable energy projects and noted that the topic will be part of tonight's discussion.

Maps & Resource Studies

Next, Murray and the group discussed two maps that were prepared for tonight's meeting by Pam Brangan from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission. The first map showed prime agricultural soils and agricultural soils of statewide significance along with existing solar, wind, biomass, solar photo-voltaic, thermal, and potential renewable resource locations, based on the Renewable Energy Atlas. The second maps showed wind energy potential sites (residential, small commercial, and large commercial), also based on the Renewable Energy Atlas.

1 Murray and the group then reviewed the “Energy Information” sheet, which highlighted information
2 which has been released since the 2007 Town Plan. She first reviewed the home heating fuel data
3 showing the types of fuel used in Richmond homes, based on the US Census. She then discussed the
4 electricity consumption patterns and household savings between commercial/industrial and residential
5 units between 2004 and 2009. Murray briefly reviewed the renewable energy capacity for existing and
6 potential installations. General discussion followed.
7

8 **Questions for Participants**

9 A variety of comments were offered, including the following:

10 *Questions #5/6 - Are there certain areas in Richmond where specific types of renewable energy*
11 *resources should be located or avoided? For what types of resources?*

12 - The best way to address this topic is to conserve energy to a greater extent (i.e., to improve buildings,
13 windows, etc.)

14 - Geo-thermal exchanges are a great alternative.

15 - Energy efficiency – reduce the electric load for cooling and heating.

16 - The Town Plan must address this topic.

17 - A legal issue which is emerging in parts of the country where photo-voltaic and solar installations have
18 a longer track record relates to the blocking of sunlight, as through trees and structures. A policy can be
19 established in the town plan

20 - Placing installations within boundary setbacks can also be an issue in terms of adjoining property
21 owners, which the town plan and land use bylaws can address.

22 - There are emergency response issues with respect to the placement of solar panels on the roofs of
23 principal structures.

24 - Some states are placing solar panels along highway rights-of-way to provide electricity for car
25 charging stations, rest areas, lighting, and other purposes. The town plan could include a policy for such
26 placements.

27 - Other parts of the country use lighting fixtures which operate on mini solar panels. This might be
28 something the town should consider installing.

29 - Energy efficiency should be our first order of business – consider raising the bar for efficiency
30 thresholds for construction.

31 - For net metered projects, there should be greater rights for neighboring property owners – there are
32 holes in the Public Service Board process

33 - More people should be notified than just abutters – the town should do a general notice for any
34 net metered project (town-wide)

35 - Need to add checks and balances to the PSB system for both all parties

36 - Also need relationship with neighboring towns in circumstances where net metered projects
37 are proposed since they might affect Richmond negatively even if the neighboring town is not
38 effected (example of Lowell and neighboring communities, where Lowell will benefit from tax
39 revenues while surrounding communities do not benefit and have to live with the visual and
40 environmental impacts of the wind turbines)

41 - In California, it's not one versus the other in that there are renewable energy installations in the same
42 fields where crops are grown

43 - Electric vehicle charging will become a much more prevalent practice within the next 15 years. That
44 will be revenue producer, but net metering considerations will also need to be addressed.

45 - Community benefits of net metered projects will lead to support

46 - Solar projects should not have restrictions added via the town plan

47 - The solar installations can be removed easily from prime agricultural soils should priorities
48 change

49 - Wind – impacts wildlife habitat

50 - Biomass – would move slowly to allow such facilities

51 - There should be no restrictions for renewable energy installations beyond any zoning or other
52 requirements in place for residential and non-residential structures.

53 - Act 250 requires a mitigation plan for disturbances to prime agricultural soils/ the PSB process does
54 not require any agricultural soils mitigation

55 - Ideas for efficiency-related bonuses or standards vis-à-vis local regulations:

56 - Allow for expedited review for energy efficient projects

57 - Consider a fee-bate system approach (might have to be done via a building code system, not
58 zoning) – possibly penalize newly constructed or existing energy inefficient structures, with the
59 goal of having a revenue-neutral system.

- 1 - Require energy audits at the time of a property sale
- 2 - Could vote to lower taxes for large renewable energy resources
- 3 - Increase lot coverage allowances
- 4 - Encourage solar hot water
- 5 - Site plan – must provide for renewables (current)
- 6 - New subdivisions – must be net-metered compatible
- 7 - Clustered development/village development
- 8 - An important part of the energy policy

9
10 *Other Energy Policy Considerations for the Town Plan*

- 11 - If we were to focus on water heating, solar hot water – we could save 60% associated with water
- 12 heating. Various statewide programs were discussed.
- 13 - Need the town plan to address the marketing for moving to solar hot water, for instance, to make it
- 14 easier for people to access the programs.
- 15 - Note about the electricity consumption pattern data discussed earlier – the Chittenden County
- 16 numbers include Burlington and South Burlington, which have quite a bit more multi-family housing.
- 17 - The 7,700 savings in kilowatt hours a year is similar to the statewide average, although the US
- 18 average is more like 10,000 (because more air conditioning is used in other parts of the country)
- 19 - Sun Common is a new company which is focused on making residential photo voltaic
- 20 installations.
- 21 - There are incentives through Efficiency Vermont for making energy improvements or building more
- 22 efficiently.
- 23 - Weatherization funding can assist lower-income households also.
- 24 - We should focus on climate change within the town plan, as was discussed in the natural resources
- 25 public session.
- 26 - Energy Policy Implementation #1 to encourage the use of energy efficiency techniques for new
- 27 residential construction by having the zoning administrator provide available information on energy
- 28 efficiency from the state – This should be implemented as a public education tool and regulatory
- 29 requirements should be considered. For instance, buildings should be required to be south-facing for
- 30 photo-voltaic solar.
- 31 - Point out that one commercial wind turbine can create enough power for 3,000 homes
- 32 - The town should figure out current energy consumption
- 33 - Richmond should be a leader on energy policy
- 34 - Begin with energy efficiency in town facilities
- 35 - Bury power lines in the village
- 36 - Add solar panels to streetlights

37
38 *Transportation*

- 39 - Should expand the park and ride facility (Gent noted that VTrans is bringing a plan to the DRB)
- 40 - Add bicycle trails along roads and make them safe
- 41 - Add a trail along Route 2 – along Governor Chittenden Road to Catamount Ski Area
- 42 - Add a bus route from Williston village through Richmond village to Waterbury village
- 43 - CCTA strategic plan includes a link through villages, more buses for the routes, and light rail
- 44 - We should encourage transportation options that involve walking, and not rely solely on park and ride
- 45 facilities
- 46 - Explore getting a local commuter train through Richmond (rural scale)
- 47 - Consider having system of free bicycles with stands (like system in Montreal and many other cities)
- 48 - Consider a “no idling” ordinance
- 49 - Transmission line– could add solar installations within the rights-of-way or on the tower
- 50 - Transmission projects – Canada is shipping power south – there will likely be shared corridors

51
52 **Wrap-Up and Adjournment**

53 Gent briefly discussed the general process/schedule for revising the town plan and encouraged the
54 public to attend the April 18th town plan public session (tools to encourage local agriculture).

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56 The public session ended at 8:50 PM.

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

