

Town of Richmond
Rapid Fire Planning Night
Topics: Transparent and Inclusive Decision Making
Special Joint Meeting of the Planning Commission and the Town Plan Steering Committee
March 2, 2016
5:30 – 8pm

Present: 19 total

Planning Commission: Brain Tellstone, Joy Reap, Sean Foley, Bruce LaBounty, Marc Hughes

Steering Committee: Heidi L. Bormann, Chris Granda, Kristin Novotny, Alison Anand

Public: Terry Light, Martha Nye

Staff: Clare Rock

Clare Rock, Town Planner, welcomed people and provided an overview of the planning process, project timeline and the expectation of re-writing the zoning following adoption of the new town plan. Rock added email invites were sent to all members of the municipal board and committees in addition to the other ways we advertised the meetings and we'd hoped to have them attend this evening.

Topic Presentation on Transparent and Inclusive Decision Making by Clare Rock, Town Planner.

Summary of Key Observations:

Richmond's Vision is to ensure transparent and inclusive decision-making, with a representative and open government, civil discourse, and an active and informed community.

Rock provided an overview of the Municipal Boards and Committees:

Selectboard – Legislative Body. Members elected. In general they appoint (and removes) board members, adopts town plan and bylaws, hires staff, proposes town budgets, and approves town attorney expenses

Planning Commission – Legislative function, policy making. Members appointed by Selectboard and report to the Selectboard. Generally charged with preparing and amending the municipal plan and bylaws, identifying future needs of the town, conducting surveys, other studies (and capital budget)

Development Review Board – Quasi Judicial function. Members appointed by Selectboard. They are charged with development Review... reviews sites plans, conditional uses, subdivisions, variances and appeals of zoning administrator's decisions.

The following are considered Advisory Committees who provide to counsel the legislative body, in this case all report to the select board.

Conservation Commission – Advisory. Members appointed by Selectboard and report to the Selectboard. Generally charged with development of planning tools for local natural resources and working of proposals to utilize the conservation reserve fund. § 4505. Powers and duties of conservation commissions

Recreation Committee – Advisory. Members appointed by Selectboard and report to the Selectboard. Generally charged with developing and managing recreation programs and enhance the use of Volunteers Green and Browns Court. This group may not have met regularly in recent past.

Richmond Trails Committee – Members appointed by Selectboard and report to the Selectboard. Generally charged with development and managing the trail and path network in Richmond, including making connections to neighborhoods.

Economic Development Committee – Advisory. Members appointed by Selectboard. Charged with assisting the Selectboard in enhancing the business climate in Richmond.

Other boards include:

Water and Sewer Commissioners – Appointed by the select board (composition of Selectboard and outside people) oversees the operation of the municipal water and sewer plant and its associated systems. Includes purchasing land and easements, constructing, maintaining, operating and repairing the systems plus settings rates and charges.

Cemetery Commission – Elected positions. Tasked with the care and management of the towns cemeteries.

Parade and Fireworks Committee – appointed yearly. Tasked with planning the annual 4th of July festivities.

At time to time the town may create Ad hoc committees which are charged with a specific project currently include the Town Plan Steering Committee and Public Safety Building Committee.

The Open meeting law governs the conduct of meetings by public bodies in Vermont. A meetings is “a gathering of a quorum of the members of a public body for the purpose of discussing the business of the public body or for the purpose of taking action.” The Open Meeting Law requires: Public announcement of meetings; Preparation and posting of agendas; Conducting the business of the municipality in open meetings (unless specifically exempted) Resolutions, rules, appointments, or formal actions that are not taken or made at an open meeting are not considered binding, except actions to secure real estate options; Allowing for public comment at meetings (subject to reasonable rules); Taking minutes at meetings, making those minutes available 5 days after the meeting, and posting on a website, if there is one.

The Select board, Planning Commission, and DRB are staffed by town employees and they work to ensure those meetings are held to the requirements of the public meeting law. Other non-staffed committees may have difficulty meeting the requirements due to volunteer capacity.

Other Town Officers which are related by topic to the other boards and to town plan related items (among others) include: CCRPC & TAC Representatives, Emergency Management Coordinator, Energy Coordinator, Fire Warden, Health Officer, Tree Warden. They all report to the select board.

There may be opportunities for collaboration between the boards and between the above referenced officers to work more closely with related boards on similar topics and projects.

Tonight's topic also includes how these boards function together and also how the public is engaged with this boards and commissions.

Discussion followed with participants and touched on the following topics:

Last year's changes to the Gateway Districts zoning regulations could have been more inclusive, the Select board could have had more open discussions on the last minute changes to the district regulations and also worked more collaboratively with the Planning commission when considering those changes.

It would be good if board minutes included the rational/decision making process which leads to final decisions, like in a court proceedings.

Additional discussion on the open meeting law and use of email.

Discussion on Executive Session and the statutory reasons why the select board may enter into Executive Session and the transparency of decision making. Discussion also about DRB proceeding and the use of Deliberative Session. The DRB is held to slightly more rigorous standards for meeting procedure due to their quasi judicial status, there meeting notices have more requirements and their ability to have deliberative session in private (vs in public) for decisions.

Observation that all boards and officers all report to the select board and the need for more cross collaboration.

The group was charged with reviewing the list of topic goals (aka "what achieving our mission means" from topic posters) and each group then brainstormed action items for each goal and posted (with sticky notes) on the topic posters.

The group then prioritized the ideas by organizing the action items on the Impact/Feasibility Chart. Below is a listing of the action items followed by how they fell on the Impact/Feasibility Chart.

Impact/Feasibility Key:

HI/HF = High Impact / High Feasibility

HI/LF = High Impact / Low Feasibility

HF /LI = High Feasibility / Low Impact

LF/LI = Low Feasibility / Low Impact

- Encouraging civil discourse and understanding (Blue)
 - Setting or explaining rules of civility before meetings **HI/HF**
 - “I can see your point but...” better ways of debating, trainings **HI/HF**
 - Internship program, high school or middle school **MIDDLE**
- Building a culture of thoughtful and balanced planning and decision-making (Purple)
 - Change structure of all boards reporting to selectboard, instead make a hierarchy of interrelated boards **HI/HF**
 - Recruit seniors **HI/HF**
 - Vetting of potential selectboard candidates **HI/LF**
- Building active online and offline communication forums and channels (Yellow)
 - Ensure all meetings are posted on Front Porch Forum **HI/HF**
 - Ensure all boards meet the open meeting law **HI/HF**
 - Recruit selectboard member from senior population **HI/HF**
 - Seek seniors/Grange members to help with meeting minutes / open meeting law **HI/HF**
 - Improve cross board coordination, such as quarterly meetings of board chairs **HI/HF**
- Ensuring that local government is accessible and representative (Teal)
 - Increase the use of technology for board participation (skype of absent members) podcasts of meetings **HI/HF**
 - More active recruitment for board members **HI/HF**
 - Boards set up tables at town meeting day and July 4 to share work **HI/HF**
 - Boards host a Friday Night Food Affair **HI/HF**
- Strengthening trust and communication between government and the public (Orange)
 - All board should post agenda and meeting minutes (open meeting law) **HI/HF**
 - If a board receives a letter from a citizen the letter should be read aloud at the meeting **HI/HF**
 - Morals and Ethic for all boards (Code of Ethics) **HI/HF**
 - Less executive session, if needed the reason for entering them should be explained **HI/HF & HI/LF**
- Increasing civic participation in government, community meetings and organizations (Neon Green)
 - Celebrate the work of the boards and commissions **HI/HF**
- Boards set up tables at town meeting day and July 4 to share work **HI/HF**

- Formal recruitment process and vetting for select board candidates **HI/HF & HI/LF**
- School (high school and college) internship program to have youth/young adults help with the work of the boards **HI/HF & HI/LF**
- Recruit youth representation on boards and give them a title “student ambassador” **HI/HF & HI/LF**
- Recreation Director to help staff some of the boards **HI/LF**
- Compensate select board members **HI/LF**

Other comments included: Trustees (what towns have them and what do they do?)

Clare Rock thanked everyone for coming and reminded people to be on the lookout for an upcoming mapping workshop which will use information from each planning night and map out a future land use map. The Planning Commission and Steering Committee shall return to their regular scheduled meetings on March 18, 2016

