

WEST WINDSOR PLANNING COMMISSION

Draft Minutes
January 6, 2010

Present: Barbara Truex, Mark Isenberg, Joe D'Anna, Martha Harrison, David Jaacks, Cathy Boedtker, Ted Emerson

1. Call to Order – Vice Chair Barbara Truex called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.
2. Changes or Additions – None
3. Review Energy Committee's draft of Energy chapter of Town Plan – Barbara commented that the format of the draft is a little different from the format of the other chapters of the Town Plan so the Planning Commission (PC) will probably reformat it. Barbara suggested some rewording of the introduction. Cathy said the Energy Committee used a cut and paste approach so most of the language for the Energy chapter came from other town plans. There was discussion about conflicts that could arise by promoting alternative energy structures while discouraging development that has an adverse impact on aesthetic values and scenic views. David gave the example of a 200' tall wind turbine that would reduce fossil fuel consumption but could also upset neighboring property owners. David said Mt. Ascutney is one of three sites in Southern Vermont that have significant wind power potential so, at some point, people should discuss how they feel about the possibility of wind turbines on the mountain and how they feel about other emerging technologies that may have an aesthetic impact. Barbara said aesthetics have been a big part of town plan discussions so far. Ted said we're not just talking about conserving energy; there may be locations in town where it would be appropriate to generate alternative energy. Cathy said she thinks there should be some overlap in the issues covered in each chapter. Barbara agreed that there is some overlap and that's fine. Martha said she thinks there's an important connection between land use and energy; she has already had an inquiry about local regulations with regard to wind turbines. Martha said there are other ways, in addition to regulations, that a town can promote energy conservation and development. Cathy said the introduction is just a brief overview of the chapter. Mark said promoting "settlement patterns that minimize vehicular transportation requirements" is incongruous with the nature of the town and the landscape. Barbara said the PC has talked about having people build closer to existing roads. Mark said someone with sloping property might want to build at the top where there is a view. David noted that there is a lack of affordable housing in town and the cost of construction would be less if the house is closer to the road. David said the town could promote the fact that it would cost less and save energy to build closer to the road without necessarily enacting legislation that would require people to do so. Barbara noted that there has been concern about the possible future development of the Bascom property. Ted said if a house is built 500' from the road, more energy is used in constructing and maintaining the house and the driveway. Mark said it makes sense in an urban setting to promote public transportation and that sort of thing, but in a rural setting, we all depend on cars and he's not concerned about whether someone's driveway is 20' or 100'. David said he's not in favor of mandating how people live their lives but the town can promote the idea that "less is better." Mark pointed out that people build large houses that consume a lot of energy and are not in keeping with their real needs. Martha said the PC has discussed the idea of limiting house size. There was further discussion about what is meant by

“minimizing vehicular transportation” before the PC decided to eliminate that sentence and focus on encouraging land use that conserves energy. Joe said the statement, “Vermont is not heavily dependent upon non-renewable carbon based fuel for electricity but is for heating and transportation,” is confusing and awkward. Ted offered clarification. All agreed that it is important to include basic information on energy usage for public education purposes. Martha asked if nuclear energy is considered “renewable” or “not renewable.” Ted said nuclear energy is in its own separate category. David said if you calculate the sourcing and transportation of the material and the transportation of the waste, then you have a much different carbon footprint. Ted noted that no one knows what the future cost of long-term nuclear waste storage will be. There was discussion about the advantages of local energy sources. Cathy said Thetford’s town plan gives more specific information about the advantages to the local economy. After discussing whether West Windsor’s economy would benefit in the same way as Thetford’s, the PC agreed to include a statement similar. The PC agreed to remove a short paragraph about Vermont reducing its use of fossil fuels. There was further discussion about wind turbines on Mt. Ascutney and municipally-owned alternative energy systems. Cathy pointed out that the top of Mt. Ascutney is not owned by West Windsor so it would be a long process. Ted noted that Norwich is putting up a PV array, which will reduce the energy that the town is currently buying. Ted said the town-owned Cross woodlot is on the western slope of Ascutney and may have the potential to produce wind power. David said the ability to connect a wind site to the grid is critical so the Chuchill Road substation makes Ascutney more viable than some other potential sites. David said Plymouth has tremendous wind potential but the distance to the grid is too great so the cost of putting the power lines in offsets the benefits. The PC talked about the “purpose” paragraph. Martha said with regards to Act 250 and JAM Golf, the town’s position on alternative energy structures, relative to their aesthetic impact, should be clearly reflected in the town plan. There was discussion about converting the Goals and Policies proposed by the Energy Committee to “Policies” and “Recommendations for Action” to be consistent with the rest of the Town Plan. Mark said the Town Plan should note that an Energy Committee was created in 2009 and the Committee’s input is reflected in the Energy chapter. The PC decided to streamline the recommendations for presentation in the town plan. David said the Energy Committee met with the Selectboard and asked them to put an article in the warning for Town Meeting exempting renewable energy systems from property taxes, so that recommendation may need to be removed or revised before the town plan is adopted later in the year. Cathy asked the PC to send the Energy Committee the revised version. Barbara suggested having an addendum referencing organizations and websites where people can get more energy information. Martha suggested having a hand-out available at the Town Hall. Ted said the EC wants to have watt meters available for people to borrow so they can see how much energy their appliances are using, and they also want to hold weatherization workshops. Martha said Town Meeting would be a good place to distribute information. Martha suggested having the Energy Committee’s educational videos available at the General Store rather than the library since the library isn’t open very much.

4. Prepare for Land Use Forum – Martha said she has not heard anything from the Regional Planning Commission but she will contact Tom Kennedy. Mark suggested getting input on the questions for the flyer from Tom and the speaker. The PC briefly skimmed the Land Use chapter. Mark suggested eliminating the concept of ridgeline protection. Mark

asked if West Windsor has any headwaters. Martha said apparently there are headwaters in the Mile Long Field area. Barbara said she thinks she has headwaters on her property also. Barbara asked everyone to look over the Land Use chapter from the 2005 Town Plan and suggest questions for the flyer. Barbara suggested including a question on ridgeline protection. The PC agreed to review a revised version of the energy chapter at their next meeting, along with the Transportation chapter.

5. Minutes: December 16, 2009 – The PC agreed to defer consideration of the minutes until their next meeting.
6. Other Business – Joe asked what the PC’s function is after the Town Plan is adopted. Martha said Hal would like to work on a capital budget. Barbara said it may also be necessary to revise the zoning regulations.
7. Adjourn – **Mark Isenberg made a motion to adjourn at 8:15 PM. Joe seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison