

WEST WINDSOR PLANNING COMMISSION

Draft Minutes

September 10, 2014

Present: Barbara Truex, Elvin Kaplan, Mark Isenberg, Glenn Seward, Martha Harrison

1. Call to Order - Planning Commission Chair Barbara Truex called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM.
2. Changes or Additions – None
3. Public Comment – None
4. Update on Resort Property Acquisition – Selectboard Chair Glenn Seward said the Selectboard is working with the current resort property owner to secure the trail system by acquiring the mountain property with assistance from the Trust for Public Land (TPL). Glenn said the owner is planning to retain Mile Long Field and the property to the west for development. Glenn shared the property owner's conceptual development plan with the Planning Commission (PC), which includes approximately 20 house lots. Glenn said the Selectboard's primary concerns about the development have to do with the trail system. Glenn said the owner is comfortable with the town retaining easements to some of the trails in the MLF area and, if the town acquires the land around the base lodge, that land would be suitable for beginner trails as well. Glenn said the town is also considering acquiring the water system, the base lodge, Hotel Road, and the remaining chairlift with no cash outlay. Glenn said this proposal will essentially "clean up the mess" at the resort. Glenn said before the Selectboard can proceed, they need authorization from the voters, which is why they have warned a special town meeting for October 14th. Glenn said the current zoning regulations do not allow development in Mile Long Field. Glenn added that the town had an opportunity to buy Mile Long Field a few years ago and turned it down, which suggests that perhaps some development should be entertained. Glenn said a Master Plan would have to be developed and there would have to be subdivision and Act 250 permits. Glenn said the property owner has offered to meet with the PC to work through any issues. Glenn said he is going to talk with the Property Owners Association this afternoon to see if they'd be interested in forming a small non-profit co-op ski area centered around the remaining lift. The PC reviewed the concept plan showing the proposed lots and the trails that would remain in the MLF area. Barbara asked if the proposed house lots would hook up to the existing sewer system. Glenn said the property owner is looking at the cost-benefit of providing sewer service. Glenn said the property owner's preference would be to sell Mile Long Field as one piece. Barbara said if a subdivision is done properly it will help increase the tax base. Glenn described the portion of the property that would be owned by the town. Barbara asked if the town can carve out any lots for development. Glenn said the property that the town acquires will have development restrictions on it and will, essentially, be an extension of the town forest. Glenn said the Town Treasurer has estimated that the town will only lose about \$18,000 per year in tax revenue if the acquisition goes through. Glenn said, alternatively, if the 20 houses proposed for the Mile Long Field area are actually built and are valued at an average of \$750,000 each, that would add \$15 million of property to the tax base. Elvin asked how much the property acquisition will cost. Glenn said \$615,000. Elvin asked how much more it would cost to acquire Mile Long Field. Glenn said acquiring Mile Long Field is not an option at this point. Glenn said the owner was not happy with the appraisal and TPL cannot pay more than the appraised value so the owner took Mile Long Field off the table. Elvin said the water table in the area is too shallow for development. Glenn said we won't know what can or cannot happen there until the owner goes through the permit process. Elvin said the Town Plan would have to be changed to allow this type of development. Glenn said the Planning Commission (PC) is going to have to wrestle with all this. There was discussion about the applicability of the town's current zoning regulations. Mark noted the 2008 stipulation agreement between the town and Snowdance, which resulted in the town accepting the resort's master plan and the resort accepting the town's zoning restrictions. Martha said the zoning regulations require development to be in accordance with an approved master plan and, right now, there is no master

plan, so that would be the first step. Mark said any increase in the tax base from development would be down the road. Mark asked about the costs associated with deferred maintenance on the road, water system, chairlift, and lodge. Glenn said the water system users would be responsible for the costs associated with the water system and they are okay with that; they have been lobbying for the town to take over the system for some time. Glenn said the water system is essentially sound although there is deferred maintenance and it needs a spare pump. Improvements can be financed with low-interest loans from the state, which would be repaid by the users. Regarding the base lodge, Glenn said it could be given a face lift inexpensively using correctional facility labor. Glenn said those costs would not be covered by tax payers; the Selectboard's goal is to acquire this property with little or no cost to taxpayers. Glenn said the base lodge could be used as a trail head or office space or it could be rented out for events or sold. Glenn said other cell carriers could rent space for cell towers on the roof. Barbara asked about the Cunningham building. Glenn said that's not part of the deal anymore. Mark asked if a fee system could be established for the trail system. Glenn said yes; Kingdom Trails has worked that out. Mark asked if the Land Trust will allow the town to charge a fee. Glenn said yes as long as it's not a commercial operation. Mark asked about the \$50,000 contribution from the town. Glenn said that would come from the Conservation Fund, Town Forest Fund, surplus funds, and donations. Glenn said there will be some acquisition costs, including legal work and survey work, and TPL has to be reimbursed for their expenses, but those costs can be covered with surplus funds with no effect on the tax rate. Mark said people see property coming off the tax rolls and he thinks they would like to see some means for adding to it, to reduce their obligations. Glenn said if the taxpayers are willing, the town could entertain some development in the area. Glenn said there is also standing timber in the ski area and the town forest, so the town could establish a sustainable harvesting program. Mark said he'd like to see something overt about opening up some property for responsible development. Glenn agreed. Glenn said we have a lot of work ahead of us but the end result could be really good. Alternatively, Glenn said, if we do nothing, we know what the result is going to be. Glenn said the former sewage treatment area at the entrance to the resort is being considered by MFW for smaller lots and lower priced housing. Barbara was concerned about mitigating the increase in demand for municipal services that could come with additional housing development. Barbara suggested senior housing or a retirement community for the resort entrance area. Barbara said the rate of increase in the state tax rate is unsustainable and is threatening to drive people out of state. Glenn said he is also concerned about lifestyle – having things to do in West Windsor and having new businesses. Barbara agreed that she wants a vibrant community and asked if the various homeowner associations at the resort think that the town's plans could help revitalize the housing market. Glenn said he will know more after he talks with the various association representatives this afternoon. Glenn said he thinks it would be helpful for the PC to meet with Dan. Barbara asked if MFW is still thinking about wind turbines. Glenn said the town would own that land but, regarding renewable energy, the town could look for grant funding to put solar panels on the roof of the base lodge, consider a geothermal heat pump, or get a pellet boiler to showcase the product of the town's newest business entity. The PC tentatively scheduled a meeting for September 17th at 11:00 AM, subject to Dan's availability. Elvin asked about the purpose of the meeting. Barbara said she thinks the purpose would be to get a sense of Dan's development plans so the PC can determine whether or not they can accommodate them. Glenn said he thinks Dan would like to get a sense of where the PC stands and whether there's a means to work through this. Mark asked about the timeline. Glenn said it could take two years for TPL to secure grant funding to acquire the property.

5. Adjourn – **Elvin moved to adjourn at 11:20 AM. Mark seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison