



Town of Whitingham
WHITINGHAM PLANNING COMMISSION
Tuesday, May 9, 2023, 7:00 p.m.

These Minutes will be accepted into the public record (with any corrections noted) at a future meeting of the Whitingham Planning Commission.

Attending

PC

Brad Lackey (Chair)
Keith Thompson
Peter Barus (Clerk)
Joe Saladino

ZA

Gig Zboray

Public

Matt Bachler (WRC)

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

The Commission welcomed Mr. Saladino as a new member.

Additions or Changes to Agenda

Annual reorganization needed before adjournment.

Windham Regional Commission Municipal Consultation

Mr. Bachler explained a recommendation that the Commission host at least two consultations per year with WRC; that WRC is one of eleven regional commissions in Vermont to operate at a level between local and state government in the absence of county administrations; that the Windham region is comprised of 27 towns; and listed different functions supporting towns working on regional issues; as a Senior Planner with 1.5 years in municipal planning, zoning, grant applications, town plans, regional plan updates, and transportation.

The consultation followed the provided agenda, as follows.

Local Planning Needs

Plan recommendations from the last review

~ Whitingham Town Plan expires in 2026; recommendation for planning for 18-24 months prior to next update;

~ Assistance is available for Municipal Planning Grants applications and Project Management (as with John Bennett previously); applications should be submitted by fall a year in advance (by fall 2024 for funding in 2025); just under two years remain for current update work;

~ Last update included no significant state level changes to transportation, land use, housing;

~ Forest Blocks and Habitat should go in the plan (under Natural Resources); the plan already covers this in different terminology that should be updated to show data the state developed on Connectors/Blocks (WRC has language template);

There was discussion of Forest Blocks, Habitat Connectors; that the plan already does a good job of identifying connectors; some requirements in zoning bylaws; that there was no need to create a Forest Block Zoning District; a significant area covered by blocks and connectors;

Review of any new required elements

(included at the back of the agenda provided)

Review recommendations from WRC's review of town plan and any other recommendations from staff

~ childcare/educational section;

~ stronger implementation section with timelines;

In discussion, Mr. Bachler suggested it was a good idea to set goals and recommendations; that "the WRC role is to check in with towns on implementation of plans; but not scoring; help with implementation where we can."

~ flood plain updated;

It was noted that the Town Plan had been updated in 2019 and 2021.

~ How well is the plan working?

There was discussion, that the commission concentrate on zoning, updating bylaws, as primary role, then other responsibilities.

~ Training needs of the municipality

There was discussion, of land use basic training as helpful for new commission members; flood map issues, grants-in-aid ditching requirements.

~ Are there topics about which you would like more information and training?

Grant writing training was discussed; it was noted that a WRC bylaw change allows inter-municipal agreements, and a possibility of WRC staff or hiring assistance.

~ What format works best for your community? Virtual or in-person? (N/A)

Plan Implementation

There was discussion.

~ Local permitting (note this is a discussion only, the WRC will not be evaluating bylaws).

~ Are the bylaws up to date? Do they implement the plan?

~ Are there specific issues regarding the local permitting process that need attention?

~ Review the merits of a DRB system

(N/A. Discussed, not considered necessary for the town.)

~ Non-regulatory

~ Discuss the municipality's priorities related to the plan.

Implementation priorities were discussed, sidewalks in bad shape, belong to Jacksonville Electric Company, technically a separate municipality; not a member of WRC; received ARPA funds; the Commission discussed the feasibility of finding funds to improve the sidewalks; a FEMA buyout of property on Rt 112, as to whether it could become a park, or parking lot; Mr. Bachler offered to follow up about potential funds, and also with Margo Ghia regarding flood hazards farther downriver.

Municipal Energy Resilience Project (MERP);

How can WRC help?

- ~ Overview of WRC programs and projects and local priorities
- ~ Overview of WRC programs and projects that may be of assistance.
- ~ Where has the WRC been the most valuable?

It was noted that John Bennett had been greatly appreciated for his work with Whitingham, and his presence in general.

- ~ WRC Board Representation
- ~ Review whether town has any WRC Commission vacancies.

None noted (one more anticipated).

- ~ Do you hear enough from us? What would you suggest to improve our communications and assistance?

It was suggested that emails be provided with more context; there was discussion of state materials management plans and requirements for towns; a solid waste implementation plan, requiring annual in-person meetings and trainings; a question arose about training at the school on recycling; there was discussion of annual calls or visits with local businesses, considered an ineffective approach; unfunded mandates.

Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)

No visitors

Review and approve prior meeting Minutes

Mr. Barus moved to approve the minutes for November 9, 2022. Second by Mr. Thompson. All in favor.

Other business

Annual Reorganization

Mr. Lackey was nominated by Mr. Barus as Chair. Mr. Lackey accepted nomination. All in favor.

Mr. Lackey nominated Mr. Barus as clerk. Mr. Barus accepted nomination. All in favor.

Adjourn

Mr. Thompson moved to adjourn. Second by Mr. Lackey. All in favor.

The meeting was Adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Peter Barus, Clerk, May 15, 2023