

BARRE TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

The Town of Barre Planning Commission held their regular meeting and a public hearing on **Wednesday, October 19, 2016** beginning at 7:00 p.m. at the **Municipal Building**, Lower Websterville.

Members Present:

Cedric Sanborn Charlie Thygesen Sr. John Hameline George Clain
Debra Pierce Chris Violette Claire Duke

Members Absent:

Others Present:

Regan Howard Verne Paquet Elaine Wang
Kathy Paquet Tom White

1) **CHANGES TO THE AGENDA**

None

2) **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

On a motion by Clain, seconded by Hameline, the commission unanimously voted to approve the **August 17, 2016** meeting minutes.

On a motion by Hameline, second by Pierce, the commission unanimously voted to approve the **September 14, 2016** meeting minutes.

3) **WARNED PUBLIC HEARINGS**

On a motion by Duke, seconded by Clain, the commission voted unanimously to open the public hearing regarding amendments to the Town Plan, chapter 3 (transportation) chapter 5 (preservation), and chapter 8 (energy).

Chairperson Sanborn invited the public to provide input with regard to the proposed amendments to the Town Plan.

Regan Howard representing the Paquets on Morrison Road spoke first. Ms. Howard's points were as follows:

- Concerned that their previous statements are falling on deaf ears.
- That they are mostly concerned with preserving their farm.
- That because of an aging workforce (family member getting older) they need to look at other options to keep the farm going.
- They feel that the proposed amendments are taking away from potential development that would help them keep the farm.
- That the Town is viewing their farm as "our" asset but in reality it is their asset

with regard to the balance sheet.

- Disappointed that the new proposals do not lessen previous Town Plan amendments restricting solar development on prime ag land.
- Solar development is not permanent and after 30 years or so can be turned back into farming unlike other potential developments.
- Notes that now the proposed amendments include a new section on scenic vista and that their farm falls into that vista which again is of “scenic” importance to the Town but has importance to them on their balance sheet.
- That the farm has been taxed on fair market value for over 100 years and its future development potential but every time the Town Plan is rewritten there are more constraints on their abilities preserve the land.
- The Paquets and the Town are on the same page with regard to wanting to preserve the land, but how can the Town help them do that.
- That the Public Service Board will defer to the Town Plan during section 248 hearings.

Sanborn noted that the intent of the proposed amendments is not to ban solar development but in the big picture we are trying to get to a point where the Town has more say in the siting of solar development.

Sanborn also noted that the Planning Commission wishes that the Public Service Board would listen to them more and that it is not at all certain that they will give our plan consideration as written.

Ms. Howard mentioned a potential moratorium to allow Town’s to get their Town Plan in order to prevent more development on prime ag land. Sanborn noted that there isn’t a moratorium but there will be some incentives to develop areas that aren’t prime ag and/or land that is less desirable.

Violette stated that he wanted to make sure that the Paquets know that what they have said in the past has not fallen on deaf ears because the Planning Commission has heard what they’ve said and in fact at almost every meeting, the Paquet name and property has come up with regard to how this restricts the land.

Violette explained that the problem the Planning Commission and the Town is faced with is how do you control or protect a proliferation of solar development. There really isn’t an in-between, it’s almost restrict all (or at least on the prime areas) or nothing. His concern and he thinks that of the Planning Commission is that Barre Town appears to be prime for significant solar development because of our south facing open land and the proximity to three-phase power. So with little control over the siting of solar, how do we know we won’t end up supporting a disproportionate share of the areas solar development? The concern comes down to with the current regulations that you can’t really find a happy medium to accommodate in some areas while not in others.

Duke asked Ms. Howard what she would like to see in the plan. Ms. Howard said something that allows some ability to use the land in a way that will allow alternate revenue for them.

Vern Paquet offered the following points:

- He is just asking for the Town via the Town Plan not to shut the door on them.
- He thinks that solar has a place on farms.
- Thinks that we have to continue to look for alternative energy sources because of climate change and that the current relatively cheap energy won't stay cheap for long.
- Also thinks it's a good investment to allow this technology into Town with jobs and other beneficial factors.
- Solar panels don't cause pollution like other forms of development can cause including farming.
- Sometimes you have to sacrifice the view if it's beneficial. He used Booth Brothers and Bond Auto as examples as to how the Paquet's are affected but yet he see them creating jobs and needed commodities which is good for everybody.

Kathy Paquet offered the following points:

- Echoed what the previous speakers mentioned.
- She also noted that there is a big push for what is referred to as the farm to plate movement and that they are working on that as well.
- That their (Paquet) priority is to keep the land open, keep it producing and keep it local.

Tom White (Selectboard Chair but not representing the Selectboard) noted that what the Town has seen is that developers come in and just can do what they want and we have no control over these outside entities. He also noted how it's frustrating when you can't put more solar development in locations where it may make sense because there is already a solar development such as the former Pike land.

Ms. Howard noted that they feel some of the same things White just mentioned because they also don't have say in how their land is developed and don't want the door closed because they happen to have ag land or green space.

Pierce thanked the audience for coming and providing input. This is not the Planning Commission's plan; it's the "Town's" plan. She also noted that the PC is listening to them.

On a motion by Duke, seconded by Hamline, the commission unanimously voted to close the public hearing.

4) **TOWN PLAN AMENDMENT(S):**

Discuss proposed Town Plan amendments and whether to make any subsequent changes

Sanborn pointed out to the board that the commission has the most recent amendments and asked whether after hearing public comment are there any changes they'd like to make?

Duked noted that Millstone Hill should be better identified in the preservation section as to where

exactly it is located.

Clain pointed out that in the transportation section, starting at line 31 regarding the Ancient Road Committee, that the plan should be updated to reflect that the committee has done its work and is no longer in existence. However, he also noted he didn't want to do anything that may delay moving the current amendments forward.

Violette noted that these amendments where not intended to correct the document at this point in time but rather amended as noted. Making any substantial changes after the public hearing would delay the amendments moving forward at this time.

Pierce stated that she is just bothered by what the Paquets are saying in the context that she understands their concern and hopes that a better idea will come up by the next rewrite. Violette agreed and is bothered that we are pinned down right now and maybe things will change over the next few years and allow more leeway.

Discuss whether to vote to send the proposed Town Plan amendments to the Selectboard.

Clain asked if each section could be passed on to the Selectboard individually or if it had to be done together. Violette didn't think that can be done because the Plan is being reviewed as a whole.

On a motion by Clain, seconded by Duke, the Commission voted unanimously to pass the proposed Town Plan amendments, chapter 3 (transportation), chapter 5 (preservation), chapter 8 (energy) with the minor revisions made tonight to the Selectboard.

5) **FOLLOW UP:**

Review the Public Service Departments draft Regional and Municipal Energy Planning Standards

Sanborn generally reviewed the standards telling the commission that he saw very little that has to do with energy siting and that his take on it is what they are really asking for is the Town to write a comprehensive energy plan and put it into our Town Plan. Sanborn doesn't really think that the standards or trying to amend our Town Plan to conform really helps get a seat at the table.

Violette agrees with Sanborn. Act 174 was passed appearing to give Town's the ability to move towards getting more say in renewable siting, in reality Violette thinks it's so complicated it will be hard for Towns to comply. Violette further stated that it's not really the Public Service Departments standards that are the problem, its Act 174. The PSD is only doing what Act 174 required them to do.

Discuss joint letter comment letter to be sent to the Public Service Department regarding the Energy Planning Standards.

Sanborn provided a history of why this letter is before the commission and he is asking for them to agree to send this to the Public Service Department. He noted that a couple of Planning Commissions drafted it and the Selectboard approved it last night. The comments are due tomorrow the 20th.

On a motion my Clain, seconded by Duke, the Commission voted unanimously to authorize the chair to sign the joint letter and send it to the Public Service Department.

- 6) **OTHER:**
- 7) **CORRESPONDENCE:**
- 8) **ADJOURN:**

On a motion by Duke, seconded by Pierce, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting of October 19, 2016 at 8:24pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christopher Violette

Cedric Sanborn, Chair

John Hameline

Charlie Thygesen Sr.

George Clain

Chris Violette

Claire Duke

Debra Pierce