

APPROVED MINUTES
MAIDSTONE PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Wednesday, June 21, 2023, 7:00pm
Held by Zoom Video Conference

Members present (via Zoom): Bruce Barker, Bob Champagne-Willis, Chris von Alt

Ex-Officio Member present (via Zoom): Selectboard Chair Scott Lovell

Other members of Town Government present (via Zoom): Town Clerk Amy Pear; Zoning Administrator Mike Otis; Administrative Assistant to the Zoning Board, Planning Commission, and Selectboard Mary von Alt

Also present: Jim Bennett; Ed Tully

At 7:00 pm, the meeting was called to order by Chris von Alt, Chairman.

APPROVE MINUTES:

Bob made a motion to accept the minutes as presented for the 4/19/2023 Planning Commission Meeting; Bruce seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

RULES OF PARTICIPATION:

Bob and Bruce had no comments after reviewing the Rules of Participation that were emailed to the Planning Commission, the Selectboard, and all who had requested notification of Town meetings. Chris explained that all discussions between or among the Planning Commission (PC) members can only occur during meetings held in public, in accordance with Vermont's Open Meeting Law. The meetings therefore must focus on the work the Planning Commission is charged with accomplishing, i.e., updating the Town Plan and amending as necessary the Town Zoning Bylaws to ensure that they accurately reflect and serve to implement the Town Plan. As Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) verified, meetings are in public, but not of the public. The PC is therefore asking people to be respectful of the time in a meeting. A period of time for public comment and questions is scheduled towards the end of the meeting. Bob pointed out that the Planning Commission welcomes questions, but may not always have answers, as much of the PC's business involves legal matters; the PC will not answer questions about legal matters at this meeting, but will consult with the proper authorities and address them at the next meeting.

DISCUSS AND DECIDE UPON PROCESS AND METHODS FOR UPDATING THE TOWN PLAN:

Bob has scoured the Town Vault with the Town Clerk and found copies of the pre-Town Plan from 1973 as well as Town Plans from 1993, 2007, and 2016. The Town is currently operating under the 2016 Plan, which expires on February 1, 2024. The new Town Plan must be in place before any amendments are proposed to the Zoning Bylaws, as the Bylaws are intended to reflect and implement the Town Plan.

Bob has found the survey that was sent out in 2006 in preparation for the 2007 Town Plan. A survey, although one was not conducted in 2016, is one method of community outreach to solicit public input. At the end of the process, when the PC has created a proposed new Town Plan, there is a State-mandated 60 day period for public comment before the Plan is turned over to the Selectboard for their approval process. Bob has spoken with Alison Low, the person at the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) who deals with Town Plans; NVDA is Maidstone's regional planning commission for all zoning matters. Alison says it is optimistic to think we can have a Town Plan in place by that 2/1/2024 expiration date, given the lengthy approval process, including warned public hearings, required by Vermont law.

Recent legislation has changed the language regarding the twelve (12) elements that must be included in all Town Plans, Bob reported. Formerly, Town Plans "could" be consistent with state-wide planning goals; now the law states that Town Plans "shall" be consistent with state-wide planning goals. Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions, including NVDA, are in the process of working through what this means for Town Plans.

Bob went over the elements that the State says must be addressed in a Town Plan, the twelfth of which concerns the Town's flood resilience plan. Although this presented a hold-up in the past, flood resilience was put into the 2016 Town Plan. The Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) that is currently being worked on may provide some help in this area. The US Flood Maps are being updated. Another consideration is the fact that the Town does not participate in the National Flood Insurance Plan. *(For the list of elements, please see the Addendum below.)*

The survey questions must address the elements, ascertaining where our Town is at this point in time and where the Town wants to go. The 2006 survey questions are helpful, but need to be updated, as things have definitely changed in Maidstone since then. Bob pointed out some of the changes: a decrease in agricultural activities; adopting the lake roads as town roads; an increase in population, with more residents now at the Lake than previously; fewer school age children and more older residents. A brief discussion ensued about the change in the amount of agriculture, with Ed Tully participating, voicing his support for continuing to include consideration of agriculture in the Town Plan, with which the Planning Commission agreed. Bob pointed out that one of the required elements is preserving what we can, which directly applies to agriculture. Ed also voiced his concern that affordable housing be addressed, which Bob said is one of the elements that must be considered in the formation of a Town Plan. Bob said that logging was another aspect that must be included in the Plan; Chris said the preservation of natural areas is another. Chris stressed the importance of including flood resilience, as it is required to ensure that the maximum amount of assistance is available to Townspeople in the event of a flood-related disaster. Bob reiterated the role that the LHMP plays in that. Bruce spoke about the importance of examining and analyzing the old and current Town Plans for adherence to the twelve elements, and determining what we need to do to thoroughly cover each required element.

After discussion, it was decided that each PC member would take four elements and craft survey questions to address these elements. Bob will take the first four, Bruce will take the next four, and Chris will take the last four. They will each prepare proposed survey questions and bring them to the next meeting. On June 13, 2023, Bob emailed the PC, attaching the State Municipal Planning Manual that includes the list of elements.

Bob will share the demographic information he has gathered and will send the link to the website on which demographic information for Maidstone is available. *(Note: according to that website, Maidstone has 106 households.)* Bob will assemble the responses proposing survey questions. Mary will create a document comparing the components of the historical and current Town Plans. These will then be discussed at the next meeting in July.

Ed asked if the PC should not meet at Town Hall, which he feels would encourage more participation in formulating the Town Plan. Bob said that public meetings will be held at Town Hall after being properly warned, during that 60 day period that is specifically held to elicit public input. Chris said that currently these are working meetings, open to the public, that are preparing for that 60 day period of public input. The PC has not heard anything concerning a request to hold meetings at Town Hall, prior to this comment by Ed. Travel to and from Town Hall requires more time on the part of all attendees. The Zoom meetings are open to the public. Ed asked if Chris thought 60 days was enough time; Chris said that is the minimum time required by law; if necessary, the process may take longer. Ed asked if the Town Plan should be included with the survey; Bob said the the Town Plan is on the website and hard copies are available at Town Hall, so people can read it.

DISCUSS CAMPING TRAILER USE AT THE LAKE AND POSSIBLE ACTION NEEDED (REQUEST FROM ZA):

Zoning Administrator Mike Otis has heard from various people that someone is considering renting out three trailers near the boat launch. He will look into this, but suggested that the current 25 foot setback from the lake that is required for camping trailers in the Bylaws should perhaps be reconsidered.

DISCUSS LEGAL RESPONSES FROM VLCT TO QUESTIONS ASKED BY PLANNING COMMISSION:

Bruce presented questions asked of the VLCT legal team with responses, interpretation, and analysis. These will inform both the analysis of amendments needed for the Bylaws and the consideration of zoning permit applications. *(For the Questions and Responses document, please see the Addendum below.)*

ESTABLISH DATE FOR NEXT MEETING:

After discussion, it was decided to hold the next meeting on Thursday, July 20th, 2023, at 7:00pm. Each member will create questions to include in a survey, addressing their four Town Plan elements, including consideration of Town demographics. If possible, these questions will be given to Bob in advance, who will create a document incorporating all of the proposed questions, which he will then share with the other PC members. If done in advance, this will give everyone the opportunity to consider the questions before the meeting. The hope is that it will be possible to create a survey soon. If possible, the survey will be discussed at the Maidstone Lake Association meeting/picnic in order to elicit more input. Bruce said a raffle was used in conjunction with the last survey. Mary said creating some interest in the survey is important - at the MLA picnic, by doing a raffle, by publicizing how impressed NVDA was with Maidstone's LHMP survey response.

ADJOURN:

Bob made a motion to adjourn; Bruce seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:53pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary von Alt