

APPROVED MINUTES
MAIDSTONE PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Thursday, December 6, 2023, 7:00 pm
Held by Zoom Video Conference

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

Other members of Town Government present (via Zoom): Administrative Assistant to the Selectboard, Zoning Board, and Planning Commission Mary von Alt

Also present (via Zoom): Burt and Carol Kline, Jesse Noone of Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA), John Kascenska of the Vermont Community Development Review Board within the Agency of Commerce and Community Development

At 7:01 pm, the meeting was called to order by Chris von Alt, Chairman.

APPROVE MINUTES:

Bob made a motion to approve the minutes for the October 19, 2023 meeting; Bruce seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Jesse Noone, who had asked to be placed on the Agenda to discuss Maidstone's needs and potential projects that would fit with the Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP), had not yet joined the meeting, so Chris moved on to the update on the Municipal Planning Grant.

UPDATE ON PROGRESS WITH THE FY24 MUNICIPAL PLANNING GRANT:

Chris phoned the Grant contacts at the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, because we have not heard any information about Maidstone's grant application, and had expected that decisions about grant applications would be made in November. He was informed that the applications have not yet been reviewed; the Agency expects that applications will be reviewed and grant awards will be made in December.

The Commission decided to move onto discussion of the Town Survey results thus far, until Jesse arrives. Chris reported that 116 responses had been received; over 400 surveys had been mailed out by the Town Clerk to all property owners, voters, and residents. Of the responses, 43% were from full-time residents. The Survey does not distinguish between voters and non-voters. Chris asked if there should be any weighting of responses, based on whether the respondent is a voter or not. Bob said that you can infer from full-time residency that the respondent is a voter. The issue of whether people said they were part-time residents or owned property, but did not reside here was briefly discussed. People may have interpreted that differently, so some people who live at the lake for the summer may have chosen the owned property option rather than the part-time resident.

At this point, Jesse Noone joined the meeting, so the Commission moved on to discuss his topic,

Outreach by NVDA to discuss MAIDSTONE'S NEEDS AND POTENTIAL PROJECTS THAT WOULD FIT WITH THE MUNICIPAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (MTAP):

Jesse said that he is learning more about MTAP, which has had multiple iterations of rollouts to try to get funding to rural towns. Its premise is to connect projects that towns have for which they have not been able to find contractors to implement. Specific projects include housing, wastewater or water facilities, community recovery projects that do not include the July floods, and climate resilience. "Or if there isn't anything under that scope, then let's talk about what the biggest needs for the Town are and maybe we can massage something, because they [the State] are opening up; they are realizing that the rollout of this program isn't quite meeting the needs of rural communities." He continued, "That's the first step - to see if there are qualifying projects for the Town that they can pursue."

Bob said that MTAP was trying to get rural towns assistance in reaching out for grant monies that were available, but Maidstone did not have projects in the categories listed by the State. He then brought up the topic of National Grid's Twin States Clean Energy Link proposal for which NVDA recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with National Grid. Bob described all of the information he has

gathered about the Twin States project and discussed his concerns. Jesse was not familiar with the project, but said he would contact Allie Webster of NVDA for further information. In response to concern about the impact on stream banks of the Twin States proposed work on Route 102, Jesse suggested that is an area that fits with MTAP's climate resilience project category. Furthermore, he said he had spoken with Katie Buckley of VLCT who is partnering with rolling out MTAP; she is interested in a pilot project creating a new multi-municipal position as a Town Administrator for Walden and several other communities. He said that the towns along Route 102 also have a unifying need and might want to form a coalition. Mary told him that Maidstone is already working on that; the Town Clerk, Bob, and she will be drafting a letter to send to the Selectboards of the other towns to see if they are interested in meeting together at a public hybrid meeting to discuss the Twin States Energy proposal. She asked if Jesse were saying that MTAP might help with that. Jesse responded that it would not help with the meeting, but perhaps could help with developing a joint position/job that would address such situations. Chris said that the Towns value their independence, but might be interested in working together, giving them more clout.

Returning to MTAP, Jesse asked what Maidstone's greatest needs are at this time. Bob pointed out that MTAP is supposed to help small, rural towns with identifying needs and finding grants that would address those needs; with limited time and no knowledge of what grant opportunities exist, it is difficult to identify qualifying needs. NVDA as the Regional Planning Commission is tasked with connecting towns, projects, possible grants, and contractors, said Jesse. Maidstone is now pre-approved for municipal technical assistance, but what that actually means needs to be clarified by the State and communicated to NVDA. As an example of what NVDA might do to help a town in this area, Jesse referred to a Groton community recovery project for which he will create a Statement of Work for the Regional Planning Commission, find a contractor to do the job and how much it would cost, and report back to the Town. Mary asked if MTAP might help with not only stream banks impacted by the Twin States proposal, but also with weatherization of residences and septic system issues that the Survey indicates are concerns. Jesse will look into the possibilities for such projects.

Bob introduced the next item on the Agenda, **Discuss next steps in the Town Plan revision, including survey results received thus far:**

A discussion ensued including but not limited to the following:

- Overall objective now is to go through the results and identify priority issues, based on feedback; schedule the first public hybrid informational meeting;
- Bob and Bruce referred to Question #7, "What should Maidstone be in the future with regard to size of residential community and amount of business and industry?" Four options were given; the majority of the responses to the question in 2006 and in 2023 being "a SMALL residential community with LIMITED business and industry", nearly the same percentage in the 2006 and 2023 surveys.
- Year round residency at the lake is increasing; Jesse said to address the impact of this on waste discharge, on the road, and on the forest in the plan;
- Agriculture:
 - The majority support agricultural growth, protection, and prioritization;
 - The big dairy farms no longer exist;
 - USDA has an organic dairy marketing assistance program - something to research;
 - Most of the farmland is along Route 102, now zoned as Rural 1, with conditional uses including gas stations, etc.; update the conditional uses to reflect the desires of the survey respondents;
 - How best to support and protect agriculture;
- High percentage of respondents against commercial and industrial development;
 - Difference between small businesses and commercial development; definition of small, clean development;
- Zoning as an empowerment tool deployed to protect the Town as survey respondents indicate, including protecting forest land and wildlife habitat, both supported by a high percentage of respondents; stipulating what the Town wants and doesn't want; that is the intent - implementing the protection that survey respondents want, rather than reducing landowner rights;
- 74% of respondents are concerned about failed septic systems; that is a potential project for MTAP;

- Interpreting what the survey results mean, how the results can be included in the Town Plan, and linking survey data to specific actions such as updating conditional uses and to the importance of zoning and of having a strong, competent Zoning Administrator.

John Kascenska suggested that we look at the Agency of Commerce and Community Development's website, as the Agency has a multitude of programs, some of which may be utilized by the Town. He is happy to attend future meetings and be of help if needed.

After discussion, it was concluded that the next steps are to summarize the survey results, prioritize the top concerns, and schedule a first public hybrid informational meeting at which the Planning Commission will present the results and core issues, identify questions that perhaps were not clear, and then open the floor for discussion with attendees. The Commission will meet via Zoom on January 10th (**later changed to Tuesday, January 9th**) to prepare for the public informational meeting that will be held on Wednesday, January 17th, in person at Town Hall and via Zoom.

The Commission decided to end the 2023 Maidstone Town Survey on Friday, December 22, 2023. The Town Clerk will be asked to send out two more email blasts, reminding people about the Survey and informing them of the end date.

ADJOURN:

The business of the meeting having been concluded, Bob made a motion to adjourn; Bruce seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 9:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary von Alt