

APPROVED MINUTES
MAIDSTONE PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Sunday, January 7, 2024, 2:00 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): Town Clerk Amy Pear; Lister, Auditor, and Health Officer Sandra Gray; Administrative Assistant to the Planning Commission Mary von Alt

Also present (via Zoom): Jesse Noone of Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA)

At 2:01 pm, the meeting was called to order by Chris von Alt, Chairman.

APPROVE MINUTES:

Bob made a motion to approve the minutes for the December 6, 2023 meeting; Bruce seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

UPDATE ON THE FY24 MUNICIPAL PLANNING GRANT:

The Town has been awarded the full amount requested in the Municipal Planning Grant application. Chris emailed a copy of the submitted application to the Commission earlier today, including the budget. A Planning Commission Report is on the agenda for the Selectboard meeting scheduled for tomorrow, Monday, January 8, 2024; an update about approval of the Municipal Planning Grant application will be given, including the acceptance process that the Municipal Approving Officer, Scott Lovell, must follow to accept the grant.

PREPARE FOR THE PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING ON JANUARY 17, 2024:

Chris shared a draft PowerPoint presentation that he has created for the meeting on January 17. The Commission discussed and suggested modifications to the presentation, including the following:

- Move the slide entitled “The Plan” to the beginning of the presentation, after the opening slide;
- On the slide entitled “Some Background Concerning the Survey Questions”, change the last bulleted paragraph to read:
 - “A Town Plan approved by NVDA provides access to State grant funding, is a component of eligibility for the Town to receive the maximum State assistance in a flood disaster; and is a component of eligibility for residents to purchase flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program, which is less expensive than privately purchased flood insurance. A current, adopted, and approved Town Plan also enables the Town to modify its Bylaws.”
- Some of the charts from the Survey do not include the full wording of the questions. Use a text box with the complete wording from the Survey in place of the abbreviated wording on the charts;
- For the “Maidstone’s Zoning Districts Overview” slide, Amy and Bob will provide updated data for the number of parcels per district, the number of voters per district, and the taxable values per district; the fact that the number of parcels includes non-taxable parcels owned by the Town, State, or other entities should be noted;
- Add a note to the “Zoning Districts Overview” slide stating that the “Taxable Values Millions of Dollars” chart reflects April 1, 2023 Grand List valuations. Bob stressed that this valuation information is expected to increase significantly in the April 1, 2024 Grand List;
- Include the sources of any quotes or data, so that viewers can look up the information for themselves;
- There is much acreage in the Forest District, but not many parcels;
- End the presentation with the “Questions with Strong Agreement” slide; have other slides showing other charts available if people are interested in seeing them, OR, have the Survey Response page online available for viewing;
- Change the presentation of information on the “Questions with Strong Agreement” slide to a bulleted, summarized list; Chris said he could link each abbreviated question summary to the chart to be accessed in response to requests from the public.

Other items of discussion included:

- What the correct term is for this work on the Town Plan; after discussion, the Commission decided on the terms “updating and re-adopting” the Town Plan;
- What is involved in approval of the Town Plan by NVDA; this includes review for compliance with State statutes and formal approval by the NVDA Board; Jesse said he would find out the specific wording that should be used in describing NVDA’s role;
- The fact that the Town Plan has no regulatory effect; it acts as a guide to future actions by the Town, as well as providing reference to data researched and collected;
- Jesse said the response by the community indicates what the priority actions should be; he also pointed out that it is unique and something to take note of that a sizable part of the Maidstone community owns property in Maidstone, but does not live here full-time;
- Bob pointed out the importance of the lack of strong consensus on concerns other than failed septic systems;
- The response regarding upcoming need for Elder Care indicates a high level of concern about this anticipated need;
- The picture of agriculture in Maidstone has changed, with no active dairy farms left. Ed Tully’s remark at an earlier meeting that the Town should continue to consider agriculture was referenced as part of a brief discussion about the kind of and location of agriculture changing, and the need to expand our view of agriculture to include smaller operations. Jesse says that statistics show that the acreage of farms has gone down, but actual farming operations have increased in the State. Farming for personal consumption or for local farmers’ markets should be looked into, as part of digging deeper into the agricultural activity in Maidstone;
- The challenge faced because some people want the Town to remain small, do not want any industry or commercial growth, but are against any more regulations. Potential subdivisions of land no longer being farmed was mentioned. Non-regulatory ways of managing subdivisions are limited.

Bob pointed out that the one strong survey response that should be recognized and addressed now due to its budgetary impact, is the strong support for increasing the Town’s support for the Aquatic Nuisance Prevention Program at the Lake. Chris said he will introduce that during his update at the Selectboard meeting on January 8, 2024.

Jesse suggested that at the beginning of the meeting, it should be announced that there will be a time for public discussion after the presentation. One person will be monitoring the Chat on Zoom, in which people participating via Zoom will be able to write their questions. Those questions will be gathered and presented during the Public Discussion. People attending in person will be able to ask questions at that time as well.

After discussion of the Survey and the upcoming meeting on January 17th had concluded, Jesse asked what role the Planning Commission needs him to fulfill, what is expected of him, and what he should be prepared to do in this Town Plan update/re-adopt process. The members of the Commission replied that Jesse’s aid with resources is very helpful as is the perspective he brings from NVDA and from his experience working with other towns. The Commission should drive the development of the Plan, with Jesse’s help in guiding and informing the process, helping with the outline, organization, and format of the Plan, and sharing NVDA’s plan resources. Jesse said he would send the Brownington plan, the outline he has been working on, and some of the American Survey data to which he has access until the end of this month.

SET DATE FOR NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting was not scheduled at this time, by group consensus.

ADJOURN:

Bob made a motion to adjourn; Bruce seconded. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 4:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary von Alt