

NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes
Regional Approval of Canaan Town Plan
Wednesday, March 22, 2017 at 5:00 P.M.
Canaan Town Office, 318 Christian Hill, Canaan, VT

From Town Plan Review Committee: Sten Lium, Concord; Jeanne Desrochers, Coventry; Mike Metcalf, Greensboro.

NVDA Staff: Irene Nagle

Representing Canaan Town: Morgan Wade and Odette Crawford, Canaan Planning Commission

Prior to the opening of the hearing, the committee voted to have Jeanne Desrochers act as Chair. The hearing opened at 5:15 p.m.

Irene explained the purpose of regional approval of local plans as per 24 V.S.A. §4350. She mentioned that Alison Low provided the staff review and found that all the required elements were present and that the Canaan Town Plan was consistent with the State planning goals. She noted that the review included suggestions for future updates of the Plan.

Jeanne asked the Canaan Planning Commissioners to describe the plan update process. Morgan indicated that a major update of the plan was undertaken, including a re-organization of the entire document. The flood resilience section was new, and major additions were made to the sections on energy, housing and economic development. The desire to apply for Village Center designation was noted in the economic development section.

Irene noted that at the time that the Canaan Planning Commission was working on the energy section, the final standards for certified energy plans had not yet been released. She explained that a certified energy plan would confer “substantial deference” to the local plan by the Public Service Board when reviewing projects for a Certificate of Public Good. Without this added certification, the PSB is only obliged to give the local plan “due consideration.” The Planning Commission could choose to update the energy plan in the future to the standards of a “certified” energy plan, now that the standards have been finalized.

Odette noted that access to broadband was still a significant issue in Town. She also noted that the Planning Commission distributed a brief survey at the 2016 Town Meeting to get residents’ input on renewable energy projects. It was noted that the Fire Department was concerned with solar panels on roofs due to roof venting issues in firefighting. Morgan noted that the Town is not opposed to development of renewable energy projects, especially if it helps the local economy.

The Town Plan Review Committee members discussed the information in the housing section, noting the high vacancy rate and the decrease in seasonal units. Odette noted that the loss in seasonal units was due partially to property owners making a seasonal residence a year-round home.

The effects of the 2008 financial crisis and the closing of a section of Ethan Allen was also discussed. The impact of the closing of the Balsams resort in 2011 on employment was also discussed. Odette noted that some of the Ethan Allen employees that had transferred to Orleans facility have recently transferred back to replace employees that have retired.

The Town Plan Committee members asked about the number of employees at the Border Patrol Station and at the ports of entry, and the effect on the economy. Odette noted that there weren't as many employees at the Border Patrol Station as was initially expected. The federal government paid to have water and sewer brought to the Border Patrol Station, but do not pay taxes.

Jeanne asked about the proposed new water treatment facility in Canaan, noting that her Town had water quality issues. She also noted that the Town had significant accomplishments in infrastructure improvements, as well as an addition of Town Forest land. Odette and Morgan discussed the process of obtaining the Town Forest and the work of the committee to raise money to replace lost property tax revenue. The use of the land for community events and for educational projects by the Canaan school students was also discussed.

The Town Plan Review Committee noted that the plan was well organized and easy to read, and the table at the end was useful. However, it was also noted that a reference to the Tactical Basin Plan on page 54 of the Town Plan was unclear, and this was noted by the Planning Commission for future updates.

The public hearing was closed at approximately 6:00 P.M. Mike Metcalf made a motion to recommend approval of the Canaan Town Plan to the full NVDA board. Sten Lium seconded, all voted in favor and the motion was passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Irene Nagle