

**NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes**  
**Regional Approval of Concord Town Plan**  
**Tuesday, September 19 at 6:00 P.M.**  
**Concord Municipal Building, 385 Main Street, Concord**

From Town Plan Review Committee: Justin Barton-Caplin, Barton; Paul Brouha, Sutton (via Zoom); Gina Vigneault, Norton (via Zoom)

NVDA Staff: Alison Low, Jesse Noone

Representing Concord: Cynthia Stuart, Concord resident and consultant who also worked on the plan; Bill Humphrey, Selectboard; Jessi Hudson, Planning & Zoning Board (PZB); Steven Bean, PZB; James Gochie, PZB; Dale Urie, PZB; Danielle Cote-Sukkaew, PZB alternate

Prior to the opening of the hearing, the Town Plan Review Committee opted to have Justin Barton-Caplin act as chair. Alison Low explained the purpose of the hearing, which was to receive public comment on a request to regionally approve the local plan as per 24 V.S.A. §4350. She mentioned that she had already completed the staff review and found that all the required elements were present and that the Concord Town Plan was consistent with the State planning goals. She also noted that the review committee would receive comment and pose questions in this public hearing (required by statute) and make a recommendation whether to request approval of the Concord Plan from the full board of NVDA, which was set to meet Thursday evening, September 21<sup>st</sup>.

The hearing was called to order at 6:11. The first question to the Concord planning commission and town representatives was the nature of the plan amendment: Was this a minor or major update? It was a major update. It was explained that the Town opted to scrap the existing plan and adopt a more streamlined plan approach that was based on the Hubbardton Town Plan – a small town that was awarded “Town Plan of the Year” by the Vermont Planners Association in 2017. It was more concise (shorter than its predecessor), more accessible, and engaging.

The new Concord Plan has new areas of focus, and its implementation plan – which takes broader goals into assigned tasks to responsible entities – is more reflective of the community input process and ultimately more realistic in terms of what the Town can achieve. Concord’s Community Visit by the Vermont Council on Rural Development (Let’s Grow Concord) also helped to energize the planning process. ARPA was also a catalyst, and ideas for spending ARPA funds sparked a conversation around planning initiatives. Concord representatives cited a big advantage to working with Cynthia on this plan, because she lives in the town and understands it.

The committee commended the Town for a “well written plan” and saw its implementation plan as a “good road map.” A couple of questions from the committee:

Concord’s population is declining, yet its housing stock increased by more than 6% over the previous decade. How do these seemingly conflicting trends go together? NVDA reps responded by saying that it is a common scenario in our communities, especially ones with seasonal populations. Not all housing units are year-round. Moreover, household size is probably decreasing, due to an aging demographic, leading to a need for a more diverse offering of housing units.

Another question: what is being done to weatherize existing housing stock? The Town representatives responded that they had applied for a MERP grant (the \$4,000 outreach) and are meeting with regional partners to do outreach and education (such as HEAT Squad and Efficiency Vermont).

Another question: Was there any discussion to open a rail trail from St. J to NH? The Concord delegation responded that this initiative was controversial with some lake residents.

Final question: What is next for Concord? Cynthia noted that the Town is applying to expand its Village Center Designation (regional approval and confirmation was needed for this!) The expansion would encompass the site of the former Barney's store, which has now been closed for three years. Reopening the store is a major initiative for the Town and the Plan. Dale Urie also mentioned that the Town was considering a grant to amend or "modernize" its zoning bylaws.

Paul Brouha made a motion to recommend approval of the Concord Plan from the full board of NVDA. Gina seconded the motion. The motion carried, with all voting in favor.

The review committee commended the Town of Concord for their work. The hearing closed at 6:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Low