

NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes
Regional Approval of the Groton Plan
Wednesday, August 15, 2017 6:00 PM
at the Groton Town Offices, 1476 Scott Highway, Groton, VT

From Town Plan Review Committee: Mike Metcalf, Greensboro; Paul Brouha, Sutton; Kenn Stransky, Norton; Justin Barton-Caplin, Barton.

NVDA Staff: Alison Low

Representing Groton: Mary Berlejung, Debra Jurist, Peter Lyon*, Carrie Peters

*Also on NVDA Board

Prior to the opening of the hearing, the committee voted to have Mike Metcalf act as Chair. The hearing opened at 6:15 p.m.

Alison Low explained the purpose of the hearing

The review process commenced by asking about the nature of the Groton plan update – was it a substantive rewrite of the 2009 plan? Carrie Peters (who serves on the Planning Commission) said that it was not, except that two elements – flood resilience and economic development – had to be added. The motivation for updating the plan was the fact that the existing plan had expired, leaving the town ineligible for certain benefits. Otherwise, there were no major changes. Input was received through a town-wide community survey, that was distributed at town meeting day. A URL to the survey was mailed to every name on the grand list.

Discussion entailed some of the issues and challenges in town:

- Bylaws – these were last revised in 2012, although it was noted that another review of the bylaw was imminent.
- Septic capacity in the village core – while there is no plan for establishing a large central offsite system, it was noted that some people would like it, given the existing limitations in the village. Cost of implementation is an obvious problem, as is mitigating potential for flood related damage to such a system.
- ANR’s Long-Range Management Plan for State-held lands in Groton – it was noted that this plan, which was adopted in 2008 recommends another series of public meetings in 10 years. Getting the town’s public input to ANR was seen as very important, and it was recommended that the town start trying to have the dialog soon.
- Current Use – discussion on Current Use, especially reference to the study that identified the cost impacts of the program, could be very helpful for other towns with lands enrolled in the Current Use Program, because its helps to dispel the notion that the program negatively impacts the tax base.
- Clarification regarding Shorelands – the town’s zoning has a shoreland district, and this district intersects with lands subject the Vermont Shoreland Protection regulations, which

took effect in 2014. There are still aspects of land use the Town can regulate, such as the types of uses that can be established there, and the density of development.

- Salvage yards – also known as junkyards, household debris, etc., are an ongoing problem in Groton and in the NEK in general. What is particularly challenging is that the accumulation of household debris is usually part of a bigger issue, such as hoarding. The Groton Plan proposes tackling this on a social level, by having a community greenup event, in addition to ordinances. Debra Jurist noted that the Town has taken creative approaches in the past, such as painting a junk vehicle, which is now public art.
- Cross Vermont Trail – part owned by state, part owned by Town, this is definitely seen as a potential recreational draw. There isn't a great deal of parking available to access the trail. Currently, people cross the street by the church to access the trail.
- Village Center Designation – obtaining it was noted to be the next strategy and could help further business development and expansion in town. It was noted that the former Brown's Market Bistro was the site of new business, which will prepare takeout meals aggregated from local food producers. A soft opening was scheduled for 9/23, but it was also hoped the business would be open in time for the Fall Foliage Festival, a signature Groton event. Debra also mentioned the road rally coming this fall, September 23rd, which is something like a scavenger hunt where participants look for sites with historical or geographical interest based on maps and a series of clues.

Strengths noted:

- The organization of goals and strategies, supported by policy statements, give a clear direction of what should happen and when.
- Flood resilience strategies – the proposal to waive setback requirements to locate structures in less hazard spots seemed to be a practical solution that could be done in other towns.

Commendations: Peter Lyon thanked Alison for her work with the Groton PC. Both highly commended the Groton Planning Commission, all of whom were new to planning when they started work on the plan. They were quick learners, and their enthusiasm and expertise resulted in a successful plan update. Members are Carrie Peters, Kelly Emerson, Julie Oliver, Rane Curtis, and Nancy Vaughan

Paul made a motion to recommend full board approval of the Groton. Kenn seconded the motion. The motion passed, with all voting in favor. Mike made a motion to close the hearing. The hearing adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Low