

**NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes
Regional Approval of Irasburg, Greensboro, and Sutton
Thursday, June 20, 2019 at 6:00 P.M.
NVDA Conference Room, St. Johnsbury**

From Town Plan Review Committee: Jeanne Desrochers, Coventry; Paul Brouha, Sutton (abstaining from Sutton Review); Amanda Carlson, Coventry; Justin Barton-Caplin, Barton (abstaining from Irasburg and Greensboro reviews)

NVDA Staff: Alison Low

Representing Irasburg: Judith Jackson and Michael Sanville, Irasburg Planning Commission; Dave Lahar and Mark Collette, Irasburg Selectboard

Representing Greensboro: Dan Predpall, Greensboro Planning Commission (participated by phone because of flooding on Route 15)

Representing Sutton: Paul Brouha, Sutton Planning Commission

Prior to the opening of the hearing, the committee voted to have Jeanne Desrochers act as Chair. It was noted that both Irasburg and Greensboro would be holding hearings the same evening for public comments on their energy plans.

The regional approval hearing opened at 6:00 p.m.

Alison explained the purpose of the hearing, which was critical to the confirmation process [outlined in statute](#). The staff reviews had found all three plans to be compliant with statute, but in order to keep the hearing process from feeling like a regulatory process, the NVDA board prefers a more collaborative discussion with each community in order to discuss planning priorities and ways NVDA may be able to assist in the future.

Irasburg's plan was first for consideration. The Irasburg delegation explained that Irasburg's plan is a first-ever plan, although there was an unsuccessful attempt to adopt a plan many years ago. While the prospect of siting utility scale wind (on Kidder Hill) was the original motivating factor back in 2015, the planning process took on a life of its own. Opposition to utility scale wind was very strong: The Town held a referendum on the proposed development, and the town voted 274-9 against it. At that time, the voters approved a mandate for the planning commission to develop a town plan that protected the town from utility scale wind development.

Having a say in the Section 248 process is important to Irasburg, but so is the long-term view. The plan cites concerns regarding all forms of large-scale development, as well as preserving the traditional development patterns and historic assets of the community. They intend to pursue Village Center designation from the State of Vermont as soon as possible.

The town planning process included a community survey (165 respondents, representing about 20%), which identified types of preferred future development, as well as desires to preserve the aesthetics of the community, address lack of IT infrastructure, and build a sense of community.

Having an inclusive planning process was absolutely essential. Planning is often viewed as a gateway drug to zoning, and the planning commission had to ensure citizens that they did not have an agenda to adopt zoning. The planning commission shared their grass-roots communications strategy for reaching out to as many interests as possible in the process. There were about 90 publicly warned meetings from start to finish. The end result is that no single interest or agenda controlled the plan.

The Town's greatest asset is its ability to collaborate and cooperate. "We can influence the way we treat each other." The community points to the "[University of Irasburg](#)" as an example of the town's ability to bring people together in a positive way.

Questions from committee: Were there any issues that emerged that are not addressed in the plan?

Answer: Education is addressed in the plan, but late in the process. The town has a school population of 130, and residents have made it clear that they do not want to merge. The town has joined a lawsuit against Act 46. Another development is the asphalt plant. The town did not have an adopted plan or specifications for a visual impact assessment when the Act 250 application was made.

Question: Regarding the statement on page 12 that forests sequester about 2.6 metric tons per acre per year. Answer: Jared Nunnery (county forester) actually feels it's more like 1 metric ton per acre per year. With about one-third of the town covered by forest, it's close to being a carbon sink, and the region as a whole is a carbon sink.

Question: How to implement the Visual Impact Assessment? Answer: The Federal Highway Administration was very helpful, and they would hope to enlist their support should the need arise. https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx

Question: Who is responsible for implementing the plan? (It was noted that responsible parties are not identified, which is a deliberate choice by the Town.) Answer: The selectboard and planning commission have been taking the initiative.

Typo page 20: "advanced wood hear", should be "advanced wood heat". Type page 38 – and extra bullet. (Clarification from staff: It's okay to correct typos without amending the town plan.)

At this point, Paul Brouha made a motion to recommend approval of the Irasburg Plan from the full board of NVDA. Amanda Carlson seconded the motion. The motion passed, with all voting in favor.

*****At 6:50, the committee voted to suspend the hearing regional approval and open the hearing for Substantial Deference for the Irasburg Town Plan. (The substantial deference hearing for Irasburg and Greensboro was warned separately, but the hearings were held on the same night.)

*****6:57, the committee voted to reopen and continue the hearing for regional approval.

Next on the agenda was the Greensboro Plan. Dan Predpall represented the Greensboro planning process. (He participated by speaker phone because he was stranded by heavy flooding on Route 15.)

The plan is entirely new. Previously plans were reiterations of preceding plans, and it was time for a change. The only remaining portion from previous plans was the discussion about population. Otherwise, it was written entirely from scratch. Also, action items were added to policies.

Question regarding page 90: How does the plan identify responsible parties or timelines? Answer: The items that are in italics indicate which actions come first. There was a desire to keep the implementation plan simple and manageable. “You can only get people to do things if they are interested in doing it.”

Question page #4: When are you going to develop a junk ordinance? How will you attack that? Answer: We’ve already done that. <https://www.greensborovt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/OUTDOOR-STORAGE-OF-JUNK-ORDINANCE.pdf>

It was noted that wastewater capacity around the lake was a significant issue that would cost millions of dollars to address. Dan Predpall said that most of the contamination coming into the lake is from farm runoff, and they are working with ANR to address this.

Correction noted: NEK Airport is in Coventry, not Newport.

Question: Are ATVs on town roads an issue? Answer: We rarely see them except when they are in use on farms.

Comments on business climate, noting their high level of employment activity is enviable. There are about 300 workers in town, but about 95% live elsewhere. Affordable housing is a major challenge and a priority. The Town just received a \$6,000 grant to do a housing study. Also noted was the addition of the SPARK innovator, which is located in the basement of the UCC church. It has 3D printers, plotters, fast broadband. Businesses in area pay a monthly fee to use it.

Question: What help do you need from NVDA? Answer: Help with zoning.

Amanda Carlson made a motion to recommend approval of the Greensboro Plan from the full board of NVDA. Paul seconded the motion. The motion passed, with all voting in favor.

*****At 7:15, the committee voted to suspend the hearing regional approval and re-open the hearing for Substantial Deference, this time for the Greensboro Town Plan.

*****7:22, the committee voted to reopen and continue the hearing for regional approval. When the hearing re-opened, Paul Brouha abstained from the review because he was representing the Sutton Town Plan, which was now being considered for regional approval. Justin Barton-Caplin, who had abstained on the other two reviews, took his place on the regional approval committee.

Paul Brouha spoke about the town plan and its adoption process. The previous town plan had expired, so the plan was updated to reflect accomplishments from the previous plan (e.g. the town adopted new zoning and joined the National Flood Insurance Program, and the Sutton school board became part of the Kingdom East School district). There were a few changes to keep pace with statute, such as priority habitat blocks. There will be a more extensive town plan update once the community survey is complete (which should be by the end of the year). Additionally, the next plan update will meet the requirements of Act 174 in anticipation of receiving Substantial Deference in

section 248 proceedings. One improvement to this plan is clearer implementation sections, with each chapter accompanied by discrete actions and responsible parties.

Comments and questions: Really enjoyed the history section.

It was noted that the population is actually up over 1,000, which is closer to the historic peak population levels. Still, the town has a very low population density, about 24 persons per square mile, and it has extensive forest cover.

It was noted that the water system has only about 28 users – wanted to know if it was metered. The town recently spent about \$500,000 addressing nitrates, which probably came from farm runoff.

Question about the build-out analysis referenced in the plan. Paul Brouha explained that NVDA used a GIS system (Community Viz) to identify where new residential development was likely to occur, working from the historic growth levels would stay the same. Typo noted: It's "build-out", not "build-our".

Question about the status of the King George School. Answer: It's been up for sale for 12 years now, and it's falling into disrepair. The owner still pays taxes on it.

Comment: It would be nice to see all of the implementation actions organized into one table, sorted by timeframe.

Justin Barton-Caplin made a motion to recommend approval of the Sutton plan from the full board of NVDA. Amanda Carlson seconded the motion. The motion passed, with all voting in favor.

The committee moved to adjourn at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Low