

NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes
Regional Approval of Newport Town and Brownington Town Plans
Monday, August 24, 2015 4:30 PM
Emory Hebard State Office Building, Newport, Vermont

From Town Plan Review Committee: Sten Lium, Concord; Jeanne Desrochers, Coventry; Paul Brouha, Sutton

NVDA Staff: Irene Nagle

Representing Newport Town: Paul Duquette, Planning Commission; Ernest Choquette, Planning Commission; Doug McKenny, Planning Commission

Representing Brownington: Kate Johnson, Planning Commission

Prior to the opening of the hearing, the committee voted to have Jeanne Desrochers act as Chair. The hearing opened at 4:45 p.m.

Irene Nagle explained the purpose of regional approval of local plans as per 24 V.S.A. §4350. She mentioned that both Plans contained all the required elements and were consistent with the State planning goals.

First was the review of the Brownington Town Plan.

Kate Johnson explained the purpose of the Brownington Plan update, noting that the Plan had expired. Some of the original issues at the outset of the Town Plan had been resolved during the course of the work on the Plan, such as the new town Garage. The main goals of planning in Town is to retain the Town's important historic and agricultural resources. It is what the Town wants to be known for. Kate noted that the Plan has not yet been adopted – the Selectboard hearing is scheduled for September 9. She does not expect there will be more than minor technical revisions to the document.

Members of the NVDA review committee noted that the maps were well done and were a good addition to the plan. The presentation of information on agricultural resources in graphic form was useful. In general, the Plan made good use of data, and put it into useful context. Also, there was a clear presentation of goals and objectives at the beginning of the document. It was noted that the survey was well-done. Kate noted that although there was a relatively low response rate as compared to the town's population, since Town Meeting usually draws no more than about 150 people, the 50 responses received was actually considered a good return.

Jeanne noted that it would be useful to know how well the day camp is attended, and this information would be interesting to track over the years. It was also noted that the section discussing adjacent areas and how development in the region might affect Brownington was useful. The benefits of village center designation was discussed. The area of re-designation is the historic area of Brownington, the Old Stone House Museum at the core.

Kate noted that the next task for the Town was to address flood hazard regulations.

Jeanne made a motion to recommend the Brownington Town Plan for Regional Approval of the full NVDA Board. Motion was second by Paul and all vote in favor, motion passed.

Next was the review of the Newport Town Plan.

Paul Duquette from the Newport Town Planning Commission spoke about the process. He said that Vermont Fish and Wildlife contributed useful information about the important habitat in the southern

part of Town. He said that there was not currently community support for the creation of additional zoning districts, although this is mentioned in the Plan. The village center designation program was discussed, and it was noted that the Town was not interested in pursuing this. Newport Planning Commission members discussed the fact that the Vermont Land Trust owns land around the existing village area, hindering expansion of development around the village. Irene Nagle noted that the state village center designation program is not intended to promote expansion but is intended to support revitalization of village centers by providing incentives for rehabilitation of commercial properties. Newport Planning Commission members observed that most of the income-producing residential properties in the village area have already been rehabilitated. Planning Commission members noted that the trend has been for consolidation of smaller dairy farms into larger farms. Paul indicated that there was not much interest in farming the land that is conserved. Ernest said that most new residential development is on larger lots in a rural setting, and there is little interest in building houses on small lots in the Village. There was discussion about why this may be the case, since this has been observed throughout the region.

In regards to the future of agriculture in Newport, NVDA committee members noted that agriculture is evolving – pointed to the example of organic farms and other crops. The growth of blueberry farms in NJ was noted by Sten as an example of changes in farming. Ernest also noted that years ago corn was not grown in northern Vermont, and now short season varieties are prolific.

Jeanne asked about the public water system in Newport Center, and it was noted that there are water source issues that need to be addressed by the Selectboard. NVDA committee members noted that it would be helpful to present statistical data on Newport in context of surrounding communities and region. Sten inquired about flooding history in Town. Newport Planning Commission members noted that most flooding is on Route 105 near Troy. No flooding in village.

Jeanne Desrochers made a motion to recommend the Newport Town Plan for regional approval, which was seconded by Paul Brouha. All voted in favor and the motion was passed.

A motion to adjourn the hearing was passed and the hearing was adjourned at about 5:40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Irene Nagle