

Town Plan Review Committee Hearing
Regional Approval of Walden Town Plan

Monday, May 12, 2025, 5:00 pm

Walden Town Library

Representing NVDA: Liam Abbate, Cathlin Lord, Mike Metcalf, Paul Brouha, Justin Barton-Caplin

Representing Walden: Sarah Augeri, Zarina Castro, Susanna Jones

Introduction of local representatives and discussion of the planning process:

Before the opening of the hearing, Liam explains the benefits of a regional approval and what is required to be considered. In the review, the regional approval committee will recommend approval of the plan by the full board of NVDA if it finds that it: 1) is consistent with the goals established in 24 VSA section 4302; 2) is compatible with its regional plan; 3) is compatible with approved plans of other municipalities in the region; and 4) contains all the elements included in subdivisions 24 VSA 4382. Mike nominated and the committee voted for Tin to be the chair of the approval hearing. Tin opens the hearing at 5:28 and asks everyone to do introductions.

Questions and comments for the Walden Planning Commission:

Tin asks the planning commission what prompted the town to do update the plan. Zarina explained that this is Walden's first town plan to be adopted (there was an attempt in about 2001). The town was previously opposed to a town plan, as they were under the impression that completing one would lead to zoning. Once they understood that they can have a plan without zoning, they decided to proceed. The town plan was partially written to address large issues in town including the want for internet, not wanting cell towers, and developing a town center for people coming together. Zarina also brought up the road washouts Walden experienced during flooding and the town learned that doing things like having a town plan can help them obtain grants and funding.

Tin then asked, what the town hopes to achieve through the town plan. Zarina then reiterated access to grants and funding for roads. She also explained that the planning commission wants to learn where interests are in moving forward with major goals or how people can come together to work on goals. These include communication through town and supporting the public school.

The planning commission wants to know where the interest is, who will be involved, and what method to use to move towards achieving the town's goals.

Tin then follows up with asking how NVDA can help the community in the future. Zarina mentioned how valuable Jesse's help was. She also noted how having someone that has worked with other towns is helpful with things they do not even know about yet. The planning commission would love the continued support of NVDA.

Paul asked about the town not being on board with many state initiatives or Home Act. He posed the question -Does development within neighboring towns threaten Walden? Zarina explained that there are no jobs or services in town, and no public transit. It would be difficult for someone who does not have a lot to move to Walden. She doesn't think there is a concern with more dwellings and thinks the increase is from people with second homes moving here during the pandemic. Paul mentioned many people being willing to make long commutes, as is common in the Northeast Kingdom. This sort of thing can get out of control without zoning. Liam then mentioned how zoning can actually help preserve land.

Tin acknowledged that the town did well to give a strong sense of what the community wants and how they feel. This will be a good guide moving forward in dealing with wants, needs, and tensions within the town.

Mike mentioned that it may be useful to look at other town plans that do not have zoning to see how they deal with development issues.

Paul talked about the town's communication plan and the need for the planning commission and select board to work together and communicate regularly. Zarina mentioned that the selectboard was invested in the town plan through edits, attendance at meetings, and voting. They are also to work together moving forward. The town clerk was also a major support in developing the plan.

Paul brought up that guidance for Act 250 is not included. The town needs to develop guidelines in the future. Section 248 also needs specific guidance or else it will be ignored. This will help address wants around communication and energy infrastructure. Those present then discussed how it can be difficult to include all these specifications in the first plan. Susanna mentioned that they are forming committees to tackle these topics.

Tin then suggested the town look into VT Alert for the municipality to help meet their goals of a communication plan.

Questions and Comments from Walden Planning Commission:

Susanna thanked Paul for pointing out Act 250 and Section 248 needs. Paul also applauded the language in the housing section.

Tin entertained a motion to recommend approval to the full NVDA board. Mike seconds. Approved.

This hearing adjourned at 6:12 pm

Respectfully submitted by Cathlin Lord