

Shaftsbury Planning Commission telemeeting

July 14, 2020

The digital meeting held via the GoToMeeting platform came to order at 6:14 p.m. Present were commissioners Chris Williams (chair), Mike Cichanowski, and Mike Foley; citizen David Rosner; and zoning administrator Shelly Stiles.

Mr. Foley moved to approve the June 23 minutes. Mr. Cichanowski seconded the motion, which passed 3-0-0.

Roadside Commercial rezoning: Mr. Williams said that in his opinion the discussion has become less a planning exercise and more a negotiation with the select board. Ms. Stiles described selectman Whitman's most recent request: to rezone commercial the west side of Route 7A from West Mountain Road to Birch Hill Road, and the east side from the Knafel farm property to Old Depot Road. Mr. Foley wondered if the commission should invite BCRC planner to a select board meeting to describe the state's requirements regarding sprawl and village centers. Mr. Cichanowski said he would prefer RC zoning on both sides of 7A from West Mountain Rd. to Birch Hill and Old Depot Roads, as that would address the lack of commercial opportunity available to lower income Vermonters. He would also withdraw the recommendation to rezone as RC the strip between the village and the Bennington line. Mr. Foley said he was concerned that the discussion of this possible major decision is not being followed by residents, as internet access is so limited in town. He said the plight of rural areas is not limited to Vermont but is common around the nation. He said the commission must balance the need for commercial activity with the expectations of those who purchased land in a rural zone – that it would remain rural. Mr. Williams noted that more RC zoning won't necessarily mean more jobs. And would the voters even approve it? Mr. Williams appreciated Mr. Cichanowski's suggestion that leaving the south end of town rural would demarcate the boundary of the town; it would not simply be "more Bennington." Ms. Stiles suggested the citizens could be polled via an online survey. Mr. Rosner said he thought many citizens, like he, would have many questions about the ramifications of such changes. Their input should be sought. Mr. Williams noted the hearing process would allow ample opportunity for examination and discussion of the proposal. Mr. Cichanowski moved to rezone to RC both sides of Route 7 from West Mountain Road to Birch Hill and Old Depot Roads, and that the earlier proposal to rezone the south end of town be withdrawn. The motion failed 1-2-0. Mr. Williams will take this information to the select board chair in hopes of getting greater clarity on what it is the board actually wants. Mr. Rosner reiterated how important it is to promote transparency and to seek wide input from residents. It was agreed the proposal will generate much controversy. Mr. Cichanowski and Mr. Foley offered contrasting opinions on the value of a tourist-based economy.

Kennel bylaw: to date the commission has discussed allowing kennels in commercial zones and in rural zones on lots of greater than ten acres, both as conditional uses. Mr. Williams asked at what number of animals does a sitting service become a commercial one rather than an informal means of picking up a little income and helping a neighbor. Mr. Foley said Fran Zando seems to have enclosures for six animals. Mr. Cichanowski suggested calling around to get rates from different companies, to learn how many animals are required for success. It was agreed that the use should be a conditional one. Mr. Williams expressed discomfort with the two-tier approach. Mr. Foley suggested leaving it up to the DRB: if you have the necessary acreage and can meet the setbacks, the DRB can impose additional restrictions regarding the number of animals and so on. Mr. Williams will attempt to craft draft language embodying this concept.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Notes by ZA Stiles.