

Shaftsbury Planning Commission Meeting

Tuesday, May 11, 2021

The meeting **came to order** at 6:01 p.m. Present were commissioners Chris Williams (chair), Mike Foley, Martha Cornwell, and Naomi Miller; zoning administrator Shelly Stiles; and from BCRC Jim Sullivan and Cat Bryar.

Mr. Williams asked Mr. Sullivan what could a small town Planning Commission do to have the most effect. Mr. Sullivan recounted a story of a meeting of the PC held downstairs at Cole Hall in 1990 when then Governor Madeline Kunin appeared, on tour to promote a smart growth act. Even then, the PC was discussing wastewater for the Village. In Jim's opinion, it still remains the most important issue for the village and the Town; **a vibrant, Village Center to which growth is directed remains the best protection for rural areas in the town and the best source of economic health in the community at large.**

Now, he said, is the best time in his planning career to pursue that possibility, as Covid funds for towns and states are available that could contribute \$2 million or more to a new system for Shaftsbury, \$1 million from the federal government and \$1 million or more in matching funds from Vermont.

He said "you might not see immediate returns, but if don't invest, you won't see any returns."

Other ways to reduce impacts in rural areas include ag land preservation and improved public transportation, but most important is a strong, growth-centered Village Center – which requires wastewater treatment.

Ms. Bryar reported that BCRC will have an intern this summer who will be able to do a "noncompliance analysis" of South Shaftsbury, essentially a study to ascertain which of the town's regulations are incompatible with dense, mixed use Village lots. Mr. Sullivan said the analysis could help make clear just what we want a wastewater treatment system for.

Mr. Foley asked if other towns are doing things in this regard that Shaftsbury might do too. And is in-migration really a likely possibility? Mr. Sullivan said 2020 home sales were way up compared to previous years. He noted a housing rally after 9/11, which in Bennington County mostly benefited the Northshire. (Burr and Burton enrollment went way up.) He noted a recent article on the attractiveness of northern New England to climate refugees. He said climate change is almost an inevitability. If we don't do something, Shaftsbury could easily become a postcard for rural sprawl.

Ms. Bryar noted that addressing wastewater needs in the Village would also permit the town to develop housing affordable for a wider variety of persons, including the work force we depend on for teachers, public servants, police officers, and so on.

Mr. Sullivan said some northern Vermont towns have successfully pursued wastewater systems. Cost has been an obstacle, but is less so now thanks to Covid relief funding.

Mr. Williams thought it is too early to talk about a population increase. The economy hasn't been good for a long time. Let's wait, he said, to see what the new normal brings.

Mr. Sullivan said, indeed, the number of people in the workforce in the region has declined since 1990. But there are jobs here, and a great quality of life here. To do: give people a reason to come here. Mr. Williams noted that the new middle school was built in part for just that reason.

Mr. Foley summarized some of the argument the PC could make to the Select Board. Take the long view. If you don't invest, you will get no returns. Sprawl is more likely if the Village Center is moribund. More people could drive down taxes.

Mr. Williams wondered if broadband wasn't a greater priority as it serves more people and is seen as essential by young people. Mr. Sullivan said he thought other sources of money would be directed to the broadband challenge.

Mr. Sullivan noted that VLTC will be offering trainings on the Covid relief funding for municipalities.

Mr. Foley moved to approve the April 27 **minutes**. Ms. Cornwell seconded the motion, which passed 4-0-0.

Ms. Miller described a potential **helipad** site on Glastenbury Road. Ms. Miller moved to send to public hearing an addition to the zoning bylaw, to wit: "Private helipads and aircraft landing strips are prohibited in all areas of Shaftsbury." Ms. Cornwell seconded the motion, which passed 4-0-0.

In other **loose ends**,

- a) The grandfathering provision has been approved by the PC and will be bundled with other items for a public hearing.
- b) Mr. Foley wanted limits on a zoning administrator's authority to issue a permit amendment. Ms. Stiles will ask her ZA colleagues around the state for ideas.
- c) The DRB's proposed BLA language will be sent to town counsel for review, then added to the hearing schedule.
- d) The kennel bylaw will be added to the hearing schedule.

In other business, **Ms. Cornwell will report** at the next meeting on the Stone Environmental study on wastewater and on her conversation with Art Whitman. She hopes to come up with a presentation for the Select Board on "why wastewater treatment now." It was suggested that BCRC's presentation on wastewater systems could be shown to the public. Wolcott's efforts are profiled in that presentation.

It was agreed the PC will look at **revising the subdivision regulations**. Perhaps a municipal planning grant could be secured to hire BCRC to help.

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Notes by Stiles.