

Town of Barre Planning Commission February 15, 2023

The Town of Barre Planning Commission held a meeting on Wednesday, February 15, 2023 beginning at 7:00 p.m. in the Municipal Building at 149 Websterville Road, Websterville, VT.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

In person: Cedric Sanborn, Terry Reil, Byron Atwood, Mike Gilbar, George Clain and Craig Chase

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

In person: Cindy Spaulding

OTHERS PRESENT

In person: Chris Violette, Jack Mitchell (Selectboard), Jim Fecteau, Chris Neddo, Mark Reaves, Anne Cummings (State Senate), Gina Galfetti and Topper McFaun (State representatives)

Remote: Paul White (Selectboard), Jacob Hemmerick (Commerce & Community Development), and Anne Watson (State Senate)

A. CALL TO ORDER – 7:00 P.M.

Mr. Sanborn called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

B. CHANGES TO THE PUBLISHED AGENDA?

There were no changes to the agenda.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1) January 18, 2023

On motion by Mr. Gilbar seconded by Mr. Reil, the Planning Commission approved the minutes of January 18, 2023 as written. Vote 4-0-2 (Chase and Clain abstained).

D. NON-AGENDA ITEMS (PUBLIC COMMENT) - NONE

E. NEW BUSINESS

F. OLD BUSINESS

1) Receive guests: Ann Cummings and Anne Watson (Washington County Senators) to discuss Bill H.68 legislation that significantly alters enabling zoning laws which will limit municipalities existing authority to regulate (via zoning) residential uses.

Mr. Sanborn welcomed Senators Cummings and Watson for coming to the Planning Commission meeting to hear concerns about H.68 as it was introduced:

- Limits authority that requires more than one parking space per dwelling unit;
- Eliminates using “character of the area” as written for conditional use review;

- Eliminates control over where duplexes can go;
- Prohibits restrictions of allowing less than five dwellings per acre*
- Increases limits on heights of multi-family dwellings or mixed development*
- Limits restrictions where emergency shelters can go.

Members of the Planning Commission expressed their concerns to Senators Cummings and Watson that the proposed bill reduces planning and zoning control on the local level for planning Commissions, Development Review Boards and Zoning Administrators. The proposed bill is a broad-brush approach to address housing that is being taken without addressing potential long-term implications that the mandates might have. The Planning Commission members requested that the proposed amendments provide guidance and not be issued as mandates. Members of the Planning Commission, Development Review Board and Selectboard know the town and its vision.

Mr. Chase provided an example of various permits and procedures needed to build a single-family or duplex home, including road frontage, sewer, power, communication, stormwater, etc. The costs total over \$40,000 before building the structure.

Mr. Atwood commented that there were houses vacant now due to landlords not wanting to rent only to see their properties destroyed by the tenants and incurring the expense of eviction. There needs to be a balance instead of focusing on subsidies for homeless or low-income individuals/families.

Mr. Gilbar commented that ACT 250 was the problem, not local zoning ordinances. Our legislators should be focusing on bringing better paying jobs into the state to provide incomes that will better support the housing needs of those that now can't afford it. He also mentioned that Act 250's administrative procedures are cumbersome.

Mr. Clain asked how will the electric grid be built out to sustain the additional energy needs with electric heat pumps, EV (electric vehicles), etc. It is not able to accommodate the demand currently.

Mr. Reil asked to consider the forgotten individuals who work and are not subsidized for housing or other services, because their income is just above the income threshold.

Mr. Mitchell stated that H.68 is a one-size fits all solution. He and the Selectboard support the Planning Commissions concerns.

Mr. Fecteau indicated that Act 250 development or developments with stormwater permits require a larger build out it which is very expensive as there would be a need to build a larger storm water infrastructure.

Mr. Violette commented under the new stormwater three-acre rule—pre-dated stormwater permits are not grandfathered and are now an additional expense to the municipality. Designing stormwater infrastructure for older developments are a cost of up to \$800,000. The cost to build the infrastructure could be in the excess of billions of dollars.

Senator Cummings stated she would take all that was mentioned at the meeting back to the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs. Senator Watson will take the ACT250 and Stormwater concerns back to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

The Planning Commission will submit something in writing as testimony to the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs outlining its concerns with H.68.

G. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE AND BILL REVIEW - Tabled to March meeting.

- 1) Review H.68 – A bill proposes to alter zoning bylaws
 - VLCT’s Response to H.68
- 2) Review H.74 – A bill proposes to change State’s greenhouse gas reduction requirements to goals and repeal the Vermont Climate Council.
- 3) Review H.95 - A bill that proposes to amend the Municipal Energy Resilience Grant Program.
- 4) Review H.96 - A bill proposes to establish Clean Heat Standards to reduce Vermont’s greenhouse gas emissions.

H. OLD BUSINESS

- 1) Continue discussion about the possible formation of an Energy Committee – Tabled to March meeting.
- 2) Continue discussion about whether to pursue village center designation – Tabled to March meeting.

I. FOLLOW-UP

- 1) Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission report – Tabled to March meeting.

J. ROUND TABLE

- 1) VLCT’s weekly legislative update – Tabled to March meeting.

K. ADJOURN

*On motion by Mr. Atwood, seconded by Mr. Gilbar, the Planning Commission adjourned at 9:00 p.m.
Vote 6-0-0.*

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Spaulding, Clerk

Cedric Sanborn, Chair

Mike Gilbar

George Clain

Byron Atwood

Chris Violette

Craig Chase

Terry Reil