



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Special Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board April 21st, 2025 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

Select Board: Steve Isham, Frank Empsall, Brendan Hughes, Tracy Zschau

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak, Matthew Walsh

Public: Jim Brown (via zoom),

Public Hearing- Town Plan:

- Greg expressed concerns about the Town Plan, stating that it seems to be written from a distance and lacked specificity. He mentioned that he felt the proposed plan was too broad and generic, failing to provide a clear focus on the Town's current and future priorities. He expressed that the plan doesn't seem much different from the 2017 Town Plan and lacked a narrow focus on important things.
- Jim Brown explained that the proposed town plan, is based on the 2017 plan, however it has been reviewed and reamended. Removing items that have been completed and adding some smaller projects. He explained that the proposed Town Plan isn't oiler plate and that many people participated in the revisit of the plan, including the Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, Zoning Administrator and Planning Commission. The Planning Commission conducted extensive research and gathered input from various stakeholders, including community members, the superintendent of schools, headmasters and the head of Catamount Arts. He agreed that the plan is generic but that it does contain some good specifics.
- Steve Isham mentioned that the Energy Committee rewrote the Energy Enhancement piece.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager explained that the Town Plan provides a guiding document for work done in the Town Manager's Office. He explained that there is 2 types of projects, short-term 3-5 years and long-term 10-15 years. By reviewing and reamending the current 2017 Town Plan allows the Town to move forward with current projects and see them until the end instead of changes courses mid project. He mentioned that the plan is to revisit and reamend the plan and revisit it in 12-18 months for a more in-depth update.
- Matt Walsh, Zoning Administrator mentioned that it was his understanding that the 2017 Town Plan took over a year and half to write. He explained that with the short deadline and the recommendations from NVDA the Town opted to review and reamend the current Town Plan with the plan of revisiting it in the next 12-18 months. Allowing the Planning Commission to have more time to create a more robust Town Plan and conduct revisions, particularly in response to legislative changes.
- Tracy clarified that the Town Plan has to follow some State framework. Matt confirmed that the Town Plan needs to align with the regional and state plans and comprehensive economic development strategy.

- Joe explained that the Town Plan is very dry and generic making it easy to navigate and use when applying for grants for the Town.
- Jim Brown explained that the Planning Commission followed a booklet on how to develop a Town Plan and that surveys were conducted and that gathered information obtained in a recognizable and authoritative way. There is a certain form that needs to be followed and the Plan needs to comply with NVDA's requirements.
- Brendan provided clarification regarding NVDA's involvement in the Town Plan and Regional Plan.
- Greg asked if the Town consulted with NVDA to write the Town Plan because he does not believe anyone in Barnet actually wrote their Town Plan. He explained that the Town Plan gives only a general picture without the plan to get there. Matt clarified that NVDA did consult with the Town with regards to the Town Plan.
- Greg expressed concerns about the lack of specific plans in the Town Plan, particularly regarding walkability. He cited the Town's challenging walkability and the need for incremental change. Brendan explained that it takes 5-10 years to see incrementation change for big ticket items. Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that when he started 10 years ago there was no funds for sidewalks, since then \$200,000 is set aside into reserves for work on sidewalks. He explained currently the Eastern Ave sidewalk is being reviewed. The problem is that sidewalks are not cheap and \$200,000 doesn't go far. However there is day to day incremental change happening. Brendan acknowledged Chad's points and highlighted the Town's progress in increasing the reserve budget and leveraging state funds for downtown transportation.
- Greg expressed concern that more community members are not here to hear what the Town is saying and that it is a 2-way street. He explained that the reason he was present was to represent the voice of a person who is not on the inside. Steve Isham agreed that it is concerning and that the Select Board is here to hear what the public has to say and to serve them.
- Steve Isham asked Greg if he believes the Select Board should approve or not approve the Town Plan as presented and why. He explained that hearing from community members helps the Select Board make their decision. Greg urged the Select Board not to approve the Town Plan at this time without more input and analysis.
- Greg expressed concern with the warning of the Public Hearing. Steve Isham confirmed that the meeting was warned as required.
- Greg inquired about the proposed Town Plan and its relation to Act 181 vs Act. 250. Joe explained that currently the state is soliciting feedback from Towns now and depending it could change the requirements for Towns. Matt explained that they are proposing different tiers but the Town will learn more following a meeting in May. Given the information learned from Act 181 the Town Plan will be reevaluated with those details when the Planning Commission takes a deeper look.
- Greg inquired about the specific issue with agriculture changes in the bylaws. Steve Isham explained that the Bylaw Modernization has not been approved yet so it is not currently in place. He explained that the Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator are working on getting an agriculture definition from the State. Greg mentioned that he also reached out to the state and has not heard back from them. Steve explained that the Bylaw Modernization continues to be worked on by the Planning Commission. Matt explained that the Planning Commission still has to hold its Public Hearing for the Bylaws before it is presented to the Select Board. He highlighted that the Town Plan is different from the Bylaw Modernization and they just happen to be occurring at the same time. The bylaw modernization is to update the bylaws to be compliant with State Statute. He included that the Town Plan doesn't specifically talk about agriculture that is the bylaws that provides those zoning restrictions.
- Greg also mentioned that when he spoke with community members most of them were surprised by the agricultural change within the different zones. He expressed concerns about public

participation and the potential impact of zoning changes on property values and neighborhood relations. He mentioned that he believes the zoning changes should be included in the proposed Town Plan.

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank that there is a need for an executive session to discuss a contractual matter where pre-disclosure could place the Town at substantial risk. All in favor.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to enter executive session and invite the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager. All in favor.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to exit executive session. All in favor.
- The Chair had nothing to report.

On a motion by Frank and second by Brendan the board adjourned by unanimous decision.

April 21st Select Board Meeting Video:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/j6MarHBXQfcJVBWolmFc_Rdv8EdQ02g2lN34k_m0rQl5P-s8yepFkttms_tvXPL_e0SpBgVIit2ulD1e

Passcode: Z2@SJ2!K