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Sutton Planning Commission

Jan. 26, 2015

Sutton Town Offices

In attendance: Sutton Planning Commission (Paul Brouha, Hank Parker, Byron Savoy, Joe Witt (by phone), Mark Barrett, Brandon Mazur), NVDA planners Alison Low & Frank Maloney.

Paul opened the meeting at 7:10 by reading the proposed agenda. No additions or deletions were suggested.

Alison Low then began a “dress rehearsal” presentation of a proposed zoning overview in Sutton titled “Balancing the Pretty and the Practical” for final review. Topics included the possibility of denser residential development in the Village District, identifying an Industrial District (along Route 5 part of which has three phase electrical power, and the railway while avoiding sensitive wetlands), and identifying working lands. At this point Hank questioned if “outdoor recreation” might be included as a “resource-based” consideration in addition to forestry and farming. Hank noted since the Northeast Kingdom is an outdoor recreation hub a business involved with or manufacturing outdoor recreational gear would be applicable.

The topic of maintaining Sutton’s working lands was introduced by noting that the 10-acre minimum lot size “threatens to fragment Sutton’s natural resources and working lands” and the presentation showed how clustering smaller lots is more efficient at preserving viable working lands and open space. Hank raised a question he can imagine being asked during a focus group: are there any data that show comparative prices of a 10 acre “spaghetti lot” (an example of inefficient linear development) versus a 2 acre clustered lot? Byron raised the issue that a purchaser desiring to own a mid-sized parcel might not be able to do so. Including the expensive development requirements, they would be either forced into a smaller lot or simply unable to afford a larger lot. A counter to that argument was that the cost of the development requirements would be spread among all the clustered lots and that, under the proposal, a landowner would not be precluded from subdividing a larger parcel. The presentation noted in its conclusion – and the Planning Commission agreed—that the presentation describes a proposal in its conceptual stages and nothing is set in stone. It was generally agreed upon by all present that the presentation must not sound like an already-decided upon set of criteria since the public would react negatively. It was again generally agreed that the presentation should both begin and end with the note that it is a work under development. It was also recommended the presentation might begin with an overview of the changes and development issues in Sutton and the Northeast Kingdom as a way of demonstrating the need for and the validity and prudence of the proposal.

Paul handed out excerpted notes from Burke's focus group process as an example we might learn from. After consideration the Planning Commission decided on the following focus groups: 1. large landowners/farmers/loggers, 2. Board of Civil Authority/old timers/retirees, 3. business people, 4. commuters/young families with children. People would be welcomed at meetings regardless of which focus group they fit. Paul asked Mark (and Karla!) to lead the first focus group of "large landowners" and asked what might entice people to attend. Coffee/cookies/sweet desserts were suggested. Monday or Tuesday evenings seemed to be the best nights. The meetings will be warned in the paper, publicly posted, and noticed on the Town of Sutton website and Front Porch Forum. In addition, prospective attendees will be invited to attend by telephone call. The meetings should be scheduled within a two month period. The multi-purpose room at the school was agreed upon as the best venue.

The meeting then moved to Hank and considering the draft Zoning and Subdivision Application Forms. He noted he had met with and gained support from Zoning Administrator Ron Trembley. The three different documents under consideration were the Zoning Permit Application, Zoning Subdivision Permit Application, and a packet of supporting information. The content of each having already been discussed, the issue under consideration was the size of the type/formatting. Paul entertained a motion to approve these forms, which Joe seconded. Voting was unanimously in favor of adoption.

Paul then asked if the Planning Commission would like to purchase Karla a gift certificate in recognition of her service. All agreed it would be an appropriate gesture and Paul is to purchase it.

New business included Joe's proposal to have one of his VTC classes produce a drawing and proposed renovation budget for the Grange Hall. Joe noted that since the Town was notified that the current Town Hall is not ADA compliant and the cost of retrofitting it is prohibitive, considering the Grange Hall as a possible new Town Hall might open up many grant opportunities. Hank noted that Misty Sinsigalli, Community Programs Specialist in Rural Development at the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture expressed interest in visiting the Grange Hall. Hank agreed to see if she might be able to visit the week of February 12th when Joe has winter break.

Brandon then read the draft November 18th meeting minutes of the Planning Commission. No changes or deletions were requested. The Minutes were accepted as written.

Paul entertained a motion to adjourn which was seconded and carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:51 pm.

These minutes prepared by Brandon Mazur (secretary).