

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING OCTOBER 20, 2017

Present: Regular members David Colbert, Stephen Saccardi, Anna Timell, alternate members Benjamin Gray, and LUA/ZEO and Commission clerk Karen Griswold Nelson.

Absent: Peter Kalmes, James LaPorta and Ginny Potter

1) Welcome and Introductions.

Chairman David Colbert opened the meeting at 7PM, welcomed the members of the public and introduced Commission members in attendance.

Mr. Colbert gave an overview of the evening's purpose as relating to a Plan of Conservation and Development (Town Plan). A summation of his comments below:

A Town Plan intends to document the present conditions of a Town and help guide the Town move towards a future of its choice. If major regulatory changes are called for, its best if that call is supported in a Town Plan. This is because a Town Plan is the closest we can come to a document expressing the collective will of the Cornwall citizenry.

The creation of a Town Plan is the primary time residents can become involved and help shape our regulatory environment. The 2010 Town Plan had about 60 specific recommendations, spread over 4 major groupings. Over the last 8 years, we addressed a great many of these. Actions stemming from these recommendations include model regulations protecting the Housatonic River, regulations that make it easier to create accessory apartments, and numerous smaller initiatives. This is documented in the Implementation List seen printed out and on the website. It also encouraged the creation of new groups such as the Conservation and Economic Commissions, both of which are likely to provide major input into the new Town Plan.

After this Forum, the real work begins. By the end of this year, P&Z will officially appoint 5 subcommittees: Natural Resources, Community Resources, Economic Development, Housing, and Young Families. They will each be chaired by a member of P&Z and have several committed community volunteers. The subgroups will aim to represent a diverse range of perspectives on their topic. If anyone here is interested in serving, please contact us. We will also solicit volunteers with an announcement in the November Chronicle.

These groups will study and make recommendations for their respective areas. Surveys will occur regarding these recommendations. We'll aim to hold regular informational sessions during which progress towards the Town Plan Update will be shared and public input sought. This process should be concluded by 2020, but individual sections may be put to Public Hearing sooner than that.

It's a cliché to say a Town's greatest asset is its community. In Cornwall that is true. Witness all the groups we already have, groups already working hard to steer Cornwall towards a better future. We also have a committed Planning and Zoning Commission, strong regional planning resources and a supportive Town Government all helping us towards that goal.

Mr. Ridgway gave an opening statement, noting that the year round population has significantly declined in the last 5 years and is projected to decline further in the next 20 years. Impacts are already being seen at the school enrollment and average age of volunteers in organizations - declining enrollment of the school, increased age of the volunteers. This does not have to happen if the town takes quick action to encourage more housing and businesses in town. The time to act is now.

2) Break out into issue areas (random) followed by a second break out in groups by choice.

The following opinions, suggestions and questions were expressed during both groups sections as summarized by facilitators listed.

HOUSING - P&Z facilitator: Jill Cutler.

- Focus on septic system in West Cornwall, and septic capabilities generally in Cornwall
- Smaller lot size
- Make the maximum size of accessory apartments larger
- Examine short term rentals—pros and cons
- Make more apartments
- Raise money for a mortgage fund for young families. Also a fund for septic systems, and for composting toilets and solar installations.
- Allow developers to build multi-unit dwellings (not just town or non-profits)
- Regulations to facilitate house sharing
- Revisit Incentive Housing Zone, possibly in connection with W. Cornwall septic
- Allow for the construction of mixed-use buildings (“entrepreneurial live-work buildings,” according to Janet Sanders)
- Facilitate bringing high-speed internet through Northwest Connect
- Make inventory of all housing
- Mapping
- Create a register of people who would rent their “vacant” house
- Rent-to-own agreements—how to encourage?
- Bequeathing homes to young families through a gift program (with tax benefits)
- Tax incentives for selling homes at reasonable prices

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/JOBS - P&Z facilitator: Anna Timell

Opinions (with some caveats) Expressed by Both Groups:

- We do need economic development but we have to take care to invite only those businesses “we want, need or can sustain”.
- We need to make our zoning regulations more flexible but also “respect the privacy and livability of our neighborhoods”.
- We need high-speed internet and better cell phone service
- Economic development is inextricably linked with more reasonably priced housing and attraction of a younger workforce.

Other Ideas:

- Promote tourism. Consider forming a Tourism Board.

- Use the public spaces we already have to promote economic development. For example, use West Cornwall library space as a communal space for start-ups to share office equipment and Wi-Fi.
- Create fund to provide fiscal incentives for new businesses.
- Make Cornwall attractive and available as a wedding destination.
- Finish the trail between West Cornwall and Cornwall Bridge. Use tax incentives or purchased right-of-ways to overcome property owner reluctance.
- Finish the septic system project.
- Purchase the Cornwall Bridge triangle/green to make it available for businesses.
- Consider promoting Cornwall as a destination for motorcyclists (in general, this did not seem like a popular idea).
- Consider a summer recreation program at Mohawk. This was not a consensus opinion, concern was expressed about garbage, speeding motorists and theft.
- Bar/restaurant for people to gather after work.
- Consider turning Cornwall into a NORC, i.e. “naturally occurring retirement community”, with a focus on creating town services and attracting businesses that provide services to seniors.
- Change zoning to allow for more commercially owned space. People who want to have a business here can’t find the right property.
- The next Town Plan of C&D should present all ideas concerning economic development in a prioritized manner.

NATURAL RESOURCES - P&Z facilitator: David Colbert:

- We need to use preserved land for recreation.
- We need to plan for climate change.
- We need a regional approach to protecting the Housatonic watershed.
- Is there a conflict between exploiting our agricultural resources and preserving natural resources?
- Studies show there is economic value in land preservation. We need to find those studies.
- We need to quantify what \$ the natural environment contributes.
- Weekenders and tourists are drawn to Cornwall due to its preserved environment.
- We need to identify land to preserve *and* land for development.
- We need a campaign for sustainable actions.
- We need a map showing areas deemed especially worthy of protection based on quantifiable guidelines.

There were also some comments for other subcommittees:

Housing:

- -Town should work with Housing Corporation to increase the parcel program.
- -We need more cluster housing.

Economic Development:

- We need to focus more on business to lower taxes.
- Cornwall doesn’t have enough available commercial property.
- We need to deregulate to increase economic opportunity.
- We need to balance conservation and development.
- We need better marketing of Cornwall’s assets.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES - P&Z facilitator: Stephen Saccardi

- Start getting young people involved in volunteering at the school age level
- Make volunteering easier & without a tremendous amount of commitment
- Create central gathering place (community center)
- Identify resources that citizens need & can offer (an exchange of some sort)
- Foster a spirit of volunteering
- Create shared work space for office work
- Announcements of community events before public meetings
- Bartering or currency for Cornwall residents (coyote coins)

ATTRACTING YOUNG FAMILIES AND ADULTS - P&Z facilitator: Ben Gray Jr. -

Noting a recurring topic of communication and the need for an improving outreach methods, the following summarizes the talking points, dividing them into six categories based on discussion theme; Communication; Housing; Technology; Recreation; Services; Economic Development.

Communication

- Generational disconnect, how to reach young people? How can we find them?
- Encourage retaining/attracting all people, but develop different strategies based on life stages?
- Young person wondered, based on their experiences since moving to town, does the town really want to attract youth? How can we fix this underlying sentiment?
- “Welcome Wagon” visiting newcomers, making sure people are welcomed and wanted here?
- Things like the Cornwall Community Network (E-mail chain) can help with outreach and is great for answering questions from prospective newcomers.
- Advertising campaign to attract young persons in local communities, Torrington, Hartford, Waterbury? The quality of life here is a great asset, commuting an hour from here is feasible.
- Survey young folks who have moved away to see what they didn’t find here and what they are looking for elsewhere?

Housing

- Lack of housing, advocating a need for apartment complexes and cluster housing.
- Discussion about land conservation versus development.

Technology

- Cell reception is a problem, also, how about fiber optics?
- Cornwall website could be revamped and made interactive.

Recreation

- Terrain park at Mohawk? Can they expand services at other times?
- Maybe a Town Cafe space, bring your own liquor? Coffee house with music?
- Advertising and improving our outdoor recreation resources?
- No place for 4 wheeling, skidooing, etc.

Services

- Rural transport for youth, maybe utilizing the N.W. Hill transport/Geer? Scheduling and communication to make it useable. Train, biking, ride-sharing?
- Library open when kids are not in school and also open later - 9pm - or even certain services all night?
- More diverse range of recreation actives (for all ages, not just young and old), seems like it is mostly sports?
- The pre-K education in town is good.
- Start apprenticeship programs at HVRHS with local tradespeople.
- EMS volunteers get supported housing or maybe Fire Department buys house that it can rent at reduced rates?
- Getting a youth EMS outreach program going again?
- Business in other locations in town?
- Attracting a private school for jobs?
- Music Festival or Bridge Dance?

3) Return and report back to full groups.

Facilitators summarized the input of their respective groups, with written comments to be summarized in the minutes.

4) Closing and adjourn.

Chairman David Colbert thanked the audience for their participation and closed the meeting at 9PM.

Compiled and prepared by Commission secretary Karen Griswold Nelson.

Original notes from facilitators on file in the Land Use Office