

WILLIAMSTOWN PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MEETING HELD ON: January 8, 2025
Minutes - - (DRAFT COPY)

PRESENT: Rich Turner, CH, Jasmin Couillard, Susan Lyons, David Traczyk, Horace Duke, Rama Schneider
Guest: Daniel Couillard

The Meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. at the Town Office.

Rich T. Is there a Motion to approve or add to the Agenda? None noted.

Rama S. Move to accept the Minutes from Nov. 13, 2024 as written, 2nd by Horace D. All approved.

New Business:

Rich T. Started the discussion on the Regional Priority Projects. Central Vt. Economic Development corp. received a full list of 22 applicants. The regional list is led by the Greenway College project, an initiative to launch a new engineering college. (Refer to the link to these projects that in the email that was sent to the members.) The CVEDC list ranks the region's top ten priority projects as determined by a joint committee of members from both CVEDC and CVRPD.

Rama S. Looking at the list - - it seems that most of them look to be compressed to bigger areas. Is that a reflection of the applications submitted or is that some sort of deliberate choice?

Rich T. It's from the applications themselves. They have applications from more rural communities, but it just depends on how they score. Looking at how they score on the regional areas.

Rama S. Is there any intent in the process to keep these in the larger cities.

Rich T. Yes. There have been some good discussions on the criteria. (Discussion followed.) Spoke next on the Land Use Reform Training - - Niki Sabado and Will Pitkin did the presentation. (There is a video available to watch and that information was included in the e-mail sent to you on Jan. 6th.) They spoke about the Home Act 47 – looking at residences, also Act 181 which refers to the Act 250 revisions and also Act 121 which is the Flood Safety Act. More discussion on Long Term Act 250 Exemptions – the different tiers. Williamstown wouldn't qualify for that because we have No Zoning. The above video has a lot of good information.

A special meeting on Dec. 30, 2024 was called by the CVRPC Board of Commissioners. It had to do with the Washington Town Plan – it was being brought up for approval – but there was some concern regarding some items and details not meeting all the criteria. Niki Sabado did meet with the town and the decision was that they did meet all the criteria, however, different areas needed to be improved on. Mapping was one area that needed to be vastly improved upon. An interim approval was given and time extended.

Dave T. Were “they” being really picky about things?

Rich T. Yes, and it's because of the new requirements. There is a Municipal Plan Committee that goes through things. It's a 3-step process. They approve the Plan, then approve the process of the planning and then a final resolution of the Town Plan.

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Rich T. I'd like to get into the Municipal Planning Grants for the Town Plan. There was an e-mail that I received from "Eli" Toohey regarding Grants that are available ranging from \$15,000 to \$30,000. I told them that we would be doing a new plan, not an update, with more robust material. I also told them that we would be interested in going through the Grant process.

Rama S. So, this is separate because we have listed an \$8,500 matching grant? That's what is in the budget right now, right?

Rich T. No – that's for next year's Budget. We currently show \$8,000. The \$8,500 was looking at sidewalk stuff plus if we needed any more for a town match. But the applications are open Jan. 27, 2025 and there is a webinar on Jan. 28th that I am registered for. The e-mail has a link to the Municipal Planning Grant. CVRPC will help us with this application process.

Rama S. The Selectboard has to ask for the Grant correct?

Rich T. Yes – so once we get everything lined up, we can run it up through the Selectboard to get approval to move forward with the Grant. The state has something new called the "GEARS", which is the Grant Electronic Application & Reporting System. This is the first year that the Municipal Planning Grant program will be using GEARS. The Webinar on Jan. 28th will be going over this process. I think that we would have a much better opportunity here if we go after one of these grants for the Town Plan and a better end product.

Susan L. Do you have a date set when they can come and talk to us about this?

Rich T. Not yet. Still under discussion. Maybe try and get on the docket for the next SB meeting.

Old/New Business/Comments:

Susan L. I shared some e-mails that have come in. Passed them around. I also received the Town Plans from Brookfield, Washington and Chelsea. I only made one copy so folks can stop in and look at them at the office.

Rama S. Are they up on the RPC website? If so I can look at them there.
I just have a comment on (going back to) the Large Language Models - - they have progressed so far and so fast. There are a bunch of different products out there that I have looked at. If you have a Google account – one thing to play around with is "Notebook LM". You can take a bunch of pdf's and upload them and it brings those in and with a free account you can bring in like up to 50 and you can sit there and have an honest conversation – you are talking to a computer, right – but it helps to bring together materials and do comparisons and stuff. I can do that with the Williamstown material and double-check facts. These Large Language models have a very practical use and could be very helpful. I have the programs and would be glad to do this with the planning material.

Susan L. Sounds good, we should keep this in mind going forward.

Rich T. Passed around an article on the Watershed situation. Will send out some info on this. Some discussion followed.

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Rich T. Thank you Rama. Anything else? Nothing - -

Jasmin C. I will make the Motion to adjourn – 2nd Rich T.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:10 P.M.

Next Meeting: Feb.12, 2025
