

Town of Lyndon
Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 25, 2024

In attendance—

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Ken Mason, John Peters, Holly Taylor (Zoom), Curtis Carpenter (Zoom)

OFFICIALS: Tracy Bodeo (Planning Director)

PUBLIC: Jacob Hemmerick, presenter from Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development, DHCD (Zoom), Annie McLean, NVDA (Zoom)

PRESS: Paul Hayes (Zoom)

Meeting begins: Chair, Holly Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Agenda Changes: There were no changes to the agenda, but it was noted that Jacob Hemmerick would be the only presenter from DHCD.

Approval of the minutes from the September 11, 2024, meeting: Holly Taylor asked about the minutes from the September 11th meeting. Curtis Carpenter made a motion to approve. Holly Taylor seconded the motion. Approved, 4-0.

Comments from public on non-agenda items: None

Current business—

- John Peters asked a question about the technology being used in the new biomass plant that is supposed to go into the Industrial plant. What kind of generation process is being used to generate electricity? Is it an internal combustion engine? Tracy shared that there would be an informational meeting at VTSU on October 2nd at 5:30 pm, lead by Evan Dell'Olio, owner of Synergy Bioproducts (Vermont Renewable Gas, LLC and Professor Hao Chen, of UVM. Hopefully we can get some questions answered.
- Tracy introduced Jacob Hemmerick of the VT DHCD. Jake introduced himself. He is a community planning and policy manager with the State. ACCD has several departments, and one of the divisions within the DHCD is the division of planning and community development. They work with municipalities to build downtowns and villages. Jacob shared his screen and presented material on the Village Center designation and the Neighborhood Development Area designation (an add-on designation). He walked through the Village Center program benefits and requirements. He went through the differences in the programs and provided links to each of the programs and how they compare. One major benefit of the Village Center designation is the technical support and funding source information that is provided once designated. Another benefit is the access to downtown and historic building tax credits that can help restore buildings, jump start businesses, add jobs, and add housing units, raising the grand list value. Projects must be in the Village center. There are new flood mitigation credits as well. There is a great

opportunity to create partnerships between municipalities and businesses or non-profits. Projects are eligible for federal and state tax credit.

- Annie McLean commented that NVDA will help people fill out applications for projects in this program and shared how several businesses within Lyndon have already taken advantage of this program in past years, although not as many recently. They will work closely with Caitlin Corkins, the tax credits and grants coordinator for the ACCD in the State of Vermont.
- Jacob then discussed talked about the Neighborhood Development Area designation and its benefits. We have an option of adding this onto our Village Center designation. It is used to support homes people can afford, infill development, with traditional neighborhood design etc. Program built around walkability. Provides tax, regulatory and funding incentives to accomplish those goals. Get also access priorities to certain grants and funds. The state looks favorably on projects that occur in these areas (~1/4 mile out and around the village center.). There are also some Act 250 exemptions within these areas, reduced permit fees, mitigation fee reductions, land gains tax exemptions, etc. Other benefits may be available next year. There are many specific requirements for applying for this add-on designation that the town must meet and must provide specific zoning maps for the area and other documentation. More requirements, details and checklists were discussed. Lyndon might be a difficult place to build more within the 1/4 mile area, but still could work for some projects and might be worth considering.
- There were questions about this (Village Center w/Neighborhood add-on) versus Downtown designation. Jacob pulled up some information showing how the benefits and requirements can be compared, and also talked about deadlines for applications for current and new, changing designations. Curtis made a comment about how the Village Center designation is smaller than the actual size of the previous Lyndonville village. Annie stated that Lyndon's Village Center is the largest in the state and can't be expanded, but Lyndon could instead look to applying for the larger Downtown designation.
- Holly Taylor asked if there were any disadvantages to the Neighborhood Designation. Jacob said that there are certain regulatory requirements that certain towns do not want to change to meet. Annie asked again to compare the benefits of Neighborhood Area designation versus just Village Center designation. There are a few, but not any more benefits to the Neighborhood designation compared to the Downtown designation. Some neighborhood benefits from past years did not apply this year, but may come back next year, depending on the state budget. But the lack of interest in building in Lyndon could be a problem, and Curtis made a comment that one reason for this is because it costs more to build a house than you can sell it for. Jacob said that some towns might instead have to change the current uses of buildings that are already in place.
- A discussion was started on whether this is a possibility of making this work, or if it is possible to make building projects work. The Planning Commission needs to go through all the information, learn more, and decide if either additional designation (Downtown designation or the Neighborhood add-on) is worth pursuing. We need to learn more about what the Downtown Designation would require and if this is possible for the town. A question was asked about boundaries, and Annie stated that this is a State program that just allows for "designation" not having anything to do with actual town or village or center boundaries.
- Curtis stated that it would be more likely that we would go to a downtown designation due to not really being able to build anywhere in the Neighborhood designated area, and asked what we would have to go through to get the Downtown designation. Jacob stated that one big cost requirement would be to have a dedicated board/staff member to be willing to do programming, merchant support, downtown revitalization, form-based regulation, and more selectboard and funding commitment. Jacob made a separate comment that if there is a Neighborhood designation, this could pique the interest in building in the area. Annie stated that getting the Downtown designation is a big hurdle, but there may be people who have an interest in doing this, and it could be a big help in promoting the community. We can get in touch with Gary

Holloway, who heads the Downtown designation at the DHCD, if we would like to discuss this designation further. So, there is a lot more to consider.

- A copy of the presentation will be sent to the Planning Commission so it can be reviewed and thought about before making any decisions.

New business was then discussed—

- Since there were two PC members not at tonight's meeting, Holly suggested that the Planning Commission read through the PC-specific action steps from the Town Plan over the next few weeks before the next meeting, so that we can start discussing them at the start of the next meeting. The PC agreed that this should be done.

Adjourn: Holly asked if anyone would like to make a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion to adjourn was made by Ken Mason at 7:11 pm. Seconded by Jon Peters. All approved, 4-0.

DRAFT