

**Brandon Planning Commission Special Meeting - Draft
February 6, 2023**

Board Members Present: Jack Schneider, Cecil Reniche-Smith, Bill Mills

Others Present: Jeff Biasuzzi

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 6:06PM by Cecil Reniche-Smith - Chair.

2. Agenda Approval

A motion was made by Jack Schneider to approve the agenda. **The motion passed unanimously.**

3. Approve Meeting Minutes – January 9, 2023

A motion was made by Bill Mills to approve the minutes of the January 9, 2023 Planning Commission meeting. **The motion passed unanimously.**

4. Zoning Administrator Report

Jeff Biasuzzi reported receiving several applications and noted he has been busier than normal. The DRB has also had items to act on. Permits are mostly for residential. The DRB had hearings on an 18-hole miniature golf course and the Brandon Library. Dave Atherton, Town Manager, has resigned and will be greatly missed. The car wash should be opening next month. Cecil Reniche-Smith asked about the Don Scarborough applications. Mr. Biasuzzi stated the way the decision was written was confusing and problematic. This item has been cleared and Mr. Scarborough has reapplied for an improved permit for a garage that is smaller and is having a survey completed. It is hoped once the DRB meets, the new survey will provide the information on what the boundaries are.

A motion was made by Bill Mills to accept the Zoning Administrator's report. **The motion passed unanimously.**

5. Energy Committee (BEC) Report

Jack Schneider stated the BEC just met and had updates from the 4 working groups. The Conservation Group will do its 3rd button up event on February 25th for landlords. For the renters' events, there were 6 in attendance at the last one and 50 at the first one. The next event will focus on what landlords can do to improve their properties that will include information on heat pumps and heat pump water heaters. The renters' events were about weatherization. Jeff Biasuzzi suggested the BEC develop a one-page document about the event he could provide people he is in contact with. The Generation Group will be researching town-owned properties. Currently the Town gets half its energy from Green Lantern but there may be an opportunity to build a town-owned solar project. One Select Board member has indicated the new town garage is not a high priority but the previous town manager had asked the BEC to look into energy efficient options for the garage. It was noted that the town landfill is not a good location for the solar as there is no 3-phase power. The Transportation Group had written a grant that purchased e-bikes to be loaned out through the Brandon library and there is discussion of starting a weekly bike-ride program. The Education Group is trying to improve the level of knowledge around town in how to save energy and provide information on the programs available. They are talking about having a booth after the parade in July in Central Park.

A motion was made by Bill Mills to accept the BEC report. **The motion passed unanimously.**

6. Review of Town Plan Action Items for Update: Commissioner Feedback/Wishlist

Cecil Reniche-Smith stated at the last meeting all members were asked to review the Town Plan and determine what action items have been completed and provide suggestions for new ones. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated quite a bit involves

updating statistical information that is in the new census numbers and advised that someone at RRPC is doing this work for the Town. She stated the median age is now 49e of the reasons is that housing is expensive for young families and is one of the items the grant will be used to focus on. One big action item will be accessibility to affordable housing. In terms of the introduction and preparation, it was noted there was a lot of input from community members and a suggestion was made to reach out to some of the same people like Kevin Thornton, Robert Black and the Recreation Director. These sections could be parsed out and provided to the people associated with the sections. The future land use section would be the section the Planning Commission needs to update. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted there are some action items that are being worked on; ex. walkability. Additional information could be obtained from Kevin Thornton for the history section to include Thomas Davenport. In the section on public facilities and services, it was suggested to include the statement of diversity and inclusion that has been adopted by the Select Board. Data on the water system can be obtained from the Water District. Ms. Reniche-Smith advised Ed Bove of the RRPC has indicated the grant received cannot be used for updating the Town Plan but there might be snippets from the BLUO that can be added to the Town Plan. There may be other grants available for this effort. Mr. Biasuzzi noted what is being recommended for town plans is something that is concise, photo loaded, less statistics and more meat of the matter. They have a template at the RRPC and the towns of Wallingford and Hubbardton have done their town plans over to make them easier to read and are designed to sell people on the towns. Jack Schneider suggested talking to Devon Neary at the RRPC about whether there are funds available to assist with the Town Plan update. Mr. Schneider asked if there is a schedule for completing the sections and Ms. Reniche-Smith advised the updates on the sections would need to be received by November. Mr. Biasuzzi noted the Planning Commission will be required to hold two hearings and the Select Board at least one. Ms. Reniche-Smith suggested meetings with groups like the Downtown Brandon Alliance should be done initially.

Cecil Reniche-Smith stated there needs to be better signage for town parking. Suggestions for additional parking include the property on Mill Lane, the area behind Hannafords, noting however that this land is private. It was noted that parking is a problem and would be an action item for the Town Plan. Another action item discussed was walkability and it was noted there are funds in the town budget for Union Street and there has been discussion about Pearl Street also. Seminary Street has no curbs and a safer sidewalk would be better there. Jack Schneider stated a priority for Greenways is the sidewalk from the school to the senior center and there was a discussion of extending the sidewalk. It was noted the Town Plan should say to improve walkability by constructing or improving sidewalks in areas that are needed to try to get people to walk rather than drive, but not outline specific areas. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted that bike paths are another issue, but there are limitations on what can be done. Ms. Reniche-Smith suggested the main changes to the Plan could be done to include an update on the actions items. It was suggested an information booth could be in central park during the July parade to obtain input early in going through the future land use goals. It was noted that Ed Bove had indicated the current Town Plan has all the updated State regulations. Mr. Schneider stated with walking and bike trails, permission is required to cross private lands. Mr. Biasuzzi noted the big problem with recreational trails on private property is that property owners change and the easements are at the whim of the property owners.

Ms. Reniche-Smith stated the new action items would be: 1) investigating new parking strategies, either pocket parking or finding land the Town could purchase or lease for a parking structure; 2) walkability – sidewalks, nature trail improvements and creating more green spaces like a Neshobe River park in Town; 3) revising the BLUO for affordable housing -whether it is building or looking at the existing housing stock that is underused. There could be larger homes that could be separate residential units that can't currently be done due to the amount of land required. Mr. Biasuzzi suggested eliminating the 1-acre Act 250 cooperation that is currently in the BLUO. He noted what the legislature wants to do is have Act 250 stay out of communities with designated downtowns but Act 250 is pushing back. Act 250 had wanted to take jurisdiction over cell towers, silva culture and agriculture. Mr. Biasuzzi noted many people do not want to deal with anything that has Act 250 jurisdiction when purchasing property and suggested going to a 10-acre status and look at setbacks that make the density easier to work with. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated ADUs are the future of affordable housing and encouraging people to add them would be a way to add income. Mr. Biasuzzi stated another complication is that a lot of existing housing stock is going to short-term hospitality like Airbnb.

Ms. Reniche-Smith stated much of the suggestions are about making it easier for people to move here and work in town. An action item from the meeting was to review the Wallingford and Hubbardton town plans. Mr. Biasuzzi suggested the RRPC could possibly have suggestions as to how to change the Plan. Ms. Reniche-Smith agreed it would be good to have a booth and solicit community input and to reach out to the Chamber to advise what the Planning Commission is working on. It was suggested the Planning Commission members could attend a Chamber meeting. Mr. Biasuzzi noted the Town

Plan is the guidance document and Act 250 hearings and the PUC do use the Town Plan, rather than the zoning regulations. Ms. Reniche-Smith advised the Planning Commission is not going to do a complete rewrite of the BLUO but will review things like lot size requirements and setbacks and possibly change some numbers. Ed Bove will be attending the March Planning Commission meeting to assist in starting this process. There was discussion of doing neighborhood walkthroughs to visualize what the setback changes would be. The focus of the grant is affordability and accessibility of housing and there are specific things that can be done. Mr. Bove can help tweak what the Town has and it is feasible to be able to do the Town Plan and the BLUO simultaneously, but the Town Plan has a hard deadline. Jack Schneider advised the Energy Committee is going to work on the Energy section and is working with Barbara Noyes Pulling.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday, March 14, 2023 at 6:00PM at the Town Hall.

8. Adjournment

A motion was made by Bill Mills to adjourn the meeting at 7:47PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary