

**Minutes of Planning Commission Special Meeting/Town Plan Community Forum  
May 21, 2023**

**Planning Commission Members Present:** Cecil Reniche-Smith (Chair), Bob Foley, Jack Schneider, Natalie Steen.

**Others in Attendance:** Dorothea Langevin, Bill Moore, Ray Marcoux, Shirly Disorda, Brent Buehler, Amber Lee, Erin Kilpeck, Tom Kilpeck, Sandy Mayo, Paul Gamba, Neil Silins, Ed B ove, Liz Ross, Pat Snow, Vicki Disorda, Erica Zimmer, Nita Hansen, Jim Leary, Bob Clark, Nancy Leary, Liz Montgomery, Lucas Montgomery, Kathy Clark, Mat Clouser, Miranda Jane, Jim Emerson, Barbara Ebling, Judy Bunde, Helyn Anderson, Karl Fjeld, Wendy Fjeld, Shannon Bryant, Shelly Potterf, Greg Smith, Terry Zimmer, Kerri Quinn, Shannon Bertrand, Carol Bertrand, Eva Fillion, Laura Peterson, John Peterson, Sarah Pattis, Louis Pattis, Annie Stratton. (Note: not all attendees signed in, so not all are accounted for)

Meeting called to order at 6:15 PM by Chair Reniche-Smith

Chair Reniche-Smith made brief introduction to Planning Commission's mandate to draft and update the Brandon Land Use Ordinances (BLUO) and the Town Plan

Ed Bove from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission spoke about the importance of an update Town Plan for regulatory and funding purposes

Committee Member Natalie Steen explained the format of the forum portion of the meeting and divided the attendees into four groups. Each group was assigned an initial topic from the following list: Public Services and Facilities; Historical, Cultural and Natural Resources; Housing and Development; and Economic Development and Transportation. A Planning Commission member served as the moderator for each topic category.

The groups were given 15 minutes per topic category to discuss the issues that they believed should be addressed in the Town Plan in terms of policies, goals and action items. As comments and suggestions were made, the moderator or another group member wrote it down on a stick note and affixed the note to foam boards provided for that purpose. After 15 minutes, the moderators switched groups, and the process continued until each group had an opportunity to address each topic category.

After all the groups had an opportunity to discuss all the topic categories, the moderators summarized the comments and noted the areas that created the most comment and discussion.

The following is a summary from each category of the comments, as prepared by the individual moderators:

## HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

There was broad consensus among all four of the groups that a serious shortage of affordable housing exists. Creating a path to ownership, fostering greater diversity of housing types and adding more low-income options were repeatedly voiced during the 4 sessions.

There were many suggestions duplicated among the groups and the nearly 30 exclusive ones are listed below.

- The number one suggestion was to allow greater housing density, i.e. the zoning regulations should allow more dwelling units per acre.
- Many residents suggested the old Brandon High School should be converted to apartments or condominiums
- New housing should be 'walkable' to downtown
- Existing older unoccupied homes should be retrofitted, energy-weatherized and put back on the market
- Town should identify unused properties to be renovated into housing
- There should be limitations placed on homes turned into AirBNB's which reduce full-time housing
- Development should include more rental units not just homes for sale
- There should be an effort to infill empty lots close to downtown
- More duplexes should be built, not just single-family houses
- Loosen zoning to allow for more multi-family housing
- Several residents mentioned cozy cottages in Rutland as a model to follow
- Adams Motor Lodge cabins (Autumn Mt now)
- Cluster multiple housing around common area
- Encourage a cohousing option for larger houses
- Allow multiple living units in single house
- Why does a 1,000 square foot house have the same zoning as a 10,000 square home?
- Encourage a greater mix of commercial and residential housing in town
- Town underwriting of homes that don't pass inspection but buyer has VHFA approval
- The town should research grants to incent building more rental units
- Build housing off of Mill Lane
- Restrictions on flipping of houses which raises prices

- Clarify residential animal guidelines and introduce a noise ordinance
- Get volunteers to rehab senior citizens' homes
- Allow residential units on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of commercial buildings
- Develop the old barbershop as a restaurant
- Attract a bike shop, outdoor equipment store, laundromat
- Add rental and house for sale listings on town web site
- Encourage building of an elderly & assisted living facility
- Turn Compass Center into low-income housing
- Brandon should own and manage a low-income mobile park like Addison County does

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## **HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

### **Leverage Natural Resources**

1. Strong desires to have more walking trails with access to downtown and around town. Provide river access and picnic areas. Trail around Brandon ( TAB)
2. Create Bike paths both Mountain and Road
3. Create ATV trails
4. Develop Hiking trails in Brandon Town Forest. Make it a destination

### **Historical**

1. Redefine and promote Historic districts
2. More Historical site signage
3. Map of Historical areas
4. Bring kiosk back to Downtown
5. Find funding to help business owners with Historic buildings

### **Natural Resource Protection**

1. Protect Drinking water
2. Protect Flood Plains
3. Provide more green spaces and plant more Trees
4. Promote. Brandon water; find a way to monetize it

## **Cultural**

1. More ethnic choices for shopping and eating
2. Keep concerts
3. Provide Movies for summer
4. Geo Tourism
5. Town mural project like in Rutland

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## **PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

The four groups all had many suggestions related to public facilities and services, with a heavy emphasis on improving accessibility/walkability, information sharing, and recreational opportunities. The following are suggestions made (in no particular order, except for the first)

- The issue that received the most discussion was the state of the town's sidewalks and the challenges faced by people with mobility challenges. Many attendees noted that they would like to see the town spend funds on repairing and extending the town's sidewalk systems before spending money on other projects. Also improve and upgrade crosswalks; use "speed table" design to slow traffic. Extend sidewalk from downtown to Neshobe School. Create sidewalk/path to connect OVUHS and Neshobe School
- The second most discussed and popular topic was to build a community/regional recreational center with an indoor swimming pool, ball courts, skate park and winter ice rink; possibly at Estabrook Park; could also have meeting and event rooms (wedding receptions, etc) and a teen center.

- Off-road multi-use paths for cycling, running; connecting downtown to Forest Dale
- Safer bike lanes on roads; new paving or construction should include room for safe cycling
- public bathrooms and information center, maybe in old barbershop; clean up and preserve the barber shop as historical artifact but add bathrooms and info center
- Many residents suggested the town seek out a developer for, and facilitate the development of a new laundromat/dry cleaner in commercial spaces that are currently unused or for sale; the same for a movie theater
- A “hop on/hop off” tram or shuttle service around town
- Create an on-line community calendar that brings together the events for the town and every public group (like the library, senior center, Chamber of Commerce, DBA); erect a “hard copy” community calendar in a public place like Kennedy Park that is regularly updated
- More public parking, better signage identifying current parking options
- Expand the Farmers Market to include more produce and food items; hold it on a date and time that does not conflict with other regional farmers markets
- Move and expand the EV charging station in a safer, more visible location
- Partner with OVUHS to erect solar panel “car ports” over the parking lots
- Bus shelter at bus stop(s) with “blue light” direct phone line to BPD
- More solar farms
- No more solar farms
- Expand/improve the Seminary Hill playground
- Use the Methodist Church as a community center
- Purchase the old Pilates Studio (owned by Hoyt Gahagan?) on Rossiter Street and use for a recreation center
- Town-funded or supported day care
- Town-funded or supported mental health services, outreach and facilities
- Town-funded or supported mentoring and job counseling services
- Create a town volunteer network or clearing house identifying residents with particular skills that can be called upon for help by other residents, or even just help with shopping or errands
- Identify multiple uses for town properties to increase efficiency, save money
- Find ways to work with/derive business from the Ridgeline Outdoor Collective or other outdoor groups active in the area
- Purchase a film projector that could be used for the outdoor screen at Estabrook Park AND indoors at Town Hall in the winter

- Promote hunting and fishing; offer classes for
- Rope tow for Neshobe sledding hill
- Local emergency notification systems (sirens)
- Summer programming for kids similar to the. Boys & Girls Club

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORTATION**

SUMMARY UNAVAILABLE AT TIME OF POSTING