

**Planning Commission Meeting - Draft
September 18, 2023**

Board Members Present: Jack Schneider, Cecil Reniche-Smith, Sara Stevens, Natalie Steen, Neil Silins - Alternate

Board Members Present Via Zoom: Bob Foley

Others Present: Bill Moore, Ray Counter, Steve Cijka, Seth Hopkins, Tom Kilpeck

Others Present via Zoom: Mark Brothers

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00PM by Cecil Reniche-Smith – Chair.

2. Agenda Approval

A motion was made by Natalie Steen to approve the agenda. **The motion passed unanimously.**

3. Approve Meeting Minutes – August 21, 2023

A motion was made by Jack Schneider to approve the August 21, 2023 Brandon Planning Commission meeting minutes. **The motion passed unanimously.**

4. Zoning Administrator’s Report

There was no discussion held.

5. Energy Committee Report

Jack Schnieder reported the BEC provided a 6-month update to the Select Board that included the installation of bike racks, providing research assistance to the school district regarding e-school buses, the creation of a bookshelf at the Town Hall on energy-related books and information on the monthly articles for The Reporter regarding various items such as heat pumps, EVs, etc. The BEC will be working with SolarFest and OVUHS regarding solar installation workforce training. There is a suggestion to the Select Board for the use of ARPA funds to investigate a community solar array. This year the SolarFest event will be held at the Grace Church in Rutland on October 28th and will include workshops and performances later in the afternoon.

6. Public Participation and Comment

Mark Brothers was present to discuss an application that was approved that needed amending and was told to issue a letter, but he has not received a response and asked how to go forward with obtaining an amendment. Jack Schneider advised the DRB discussed this item last week and Mr. Brothers should follow up with the Zoning Administrator. It was noted that Mr. Biasuzzi is in the office on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

7. Town Plan Update Session (Formulate Policies, Strategies and Action Items for Public Facilities/Services, Housing, Childcare and Transportation Sections)

Cecil Reniche-Smith reported the Planning Commission has reviewed the Town Plan for grammatical corrections, formatting, structural issues, and data updates for the upcoming update that is due by February 24, 2024. Steve Cijka provided numbers on wastewater and a rundown of what has been done to the facilities and what is to be done. For each section, the Planning Commission needs to formulate town policy and what is guiding each section, the strategies to implement the policies and specific action items over an 8-year time plan. The current plan has action items that have been accomplished, some that are still being worked on and some that will likely not happen.

Water District: Ray Counter advised the Brandon Fire District #2 is now part of Brandon Fire District #1. Mr. Counter will make additional track changes to the Water section and forward them to the Committee. Mr. Counter reported the

Fire District has done work on updating its distribution system. Overall, this is one of the best systems in Vermont. There is a storage tank in Forest Dale that was installed in 1908 and the Water District is looking to relocate it to a different area in Town. They have identified 7 different areas that are potential tank sites and have had some initial conversations with the property owners. It is the intent to work with other entities in Town to understand where the growth will be and with what the Planning Commission comes up with will help them drive their decision of where to relocate the tank. They have talked about extending fire protection in different areas of Town that they serve. **Action Item:** recommend a location to relocate water storage tank. **Strategy:** determine a suitable place that ties into town development. Natalie Steen advised the site would be recommended to the Prudential Committee who makes the final decision. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted this could also tie into future land use and development. Jack Schneider noted the EPA and Vermont Geological Service provided a report in 2008 to identify additional services. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the section and noted there is potential to expand services. One reason they are looking for a different location is that one pipe that was installed in 1908 has the two tanks connected to that one pipe. The thought is that one tank could be in one area and place one in another area to assure if an issue occurred, they would still be able to provide drinking water. Mr. Counter suggested keeping the information from the EPA and Vermont Geological Service in the Plan. As far as existing infrastructure, they are finishing a long-range plan to work with the Town as there are a couple of streets that need to be addressed for compliance issues. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated for each section there will be specific goals, strategies and actions and suggested placing these items following the informational material for each of the subsections. Bill Moore suggested an executive summary at the end or beginning of the document for quick access to topics that people are interested in. Natalie Steen suggested some towns place the information both in each section and as a separate section in the document. Ms. Reniche-Smith will reach out to the RRPC to obtain their recommendation. Mr. Schneider reported the BEC is meeting with Jeremy to go over updated maps and stats for the enhanced energy plan. Natalie Steen advised some sections could be an appendix, like the energy plan, to allow for additional updates.

Wastewater Department: Cecil Reniche-Smith reviewed the current stated goals for the department noting they are strategies not actual goals. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated Steve Cijka had brought to the attention of the Select Board that sewer lines will need to be replaced. Ms. Cijka advised most of the system was installed in the 1930s and the question is how much longer it will last and there needs to be discussion of what areas to target first. Ms. Reniche-Smith suggested specific actions can be provided. Mr. Cijka recommended relining or replacing the line from Stone Mill dam to Wheeler Road that goes through swampy area by the police station but cautioned when fixing one problem, one can create another as fixing the lines could cause more water in other areas. The fix would be to the benefit of the sewer plant because it has a design flow. This is a suggested item with the understanding it may require drainage if the sewer gets fixed to handle the additional water. Mr. Cijka advised the other problem is all the building sewers are also old and the Town's lines could be replaced but the lines coming from the buildings to the town line could also have problems. These lines are individually or business owned. **Proposed action item:** to replace or repair 22 miles of sewer lines. Mr. Cijka also noted there is a lot of water coming from Park Village and some day that will have to be addressed as the lines are old there as well. Mr. Cijka stated it would be economically better to do the sewer lines when the Fire District does the water on a street. Natalie Steen suggested an overall strategy is to coordinate replacement of services at the same time. Tom Kilpeck asked if there is an accurate inventory for sewer, drainage, and wastewater systems and whether there is grant money available to do an inventory. Mr. Cijka reported Aldrich and Elliot did a mapping, but there is not an inventory of the building sewers, just the mains. **Suggested action item:** create an inventory of all building lines. Mr. Cijka noted someday the river crossings will need to be replaced but that will be a major project. Mr. Hopkins agreed with Mr. Cijka regarding the collection system as it is the biggest item. He has been working with engineers in the resolution of this matter. Mr. Hopkins advised he received a note from the engineers indicating the wastewater could use an additional \$3 million not included in the current work as the Town has entered into this project with what funding sources would carry, but to address every inefficiency it would be an additional 40%. **Suggested action:** to identify and upgrade what is not already being addressed by the current wastewater project.

Fire District: Cecil Reniche-Smith noted the stated the current plan does not have any action, goals, or strategies for the Fire District. Tom Kilpeck will send the Committee a rewritten draft of the section. One of the goals is to continue increased staffing. The fleet has grown over the years and another goal is to reduce the fleet number to do the job with fewer vehicles that are better equipped. The Fire District also covers the towns of Leicester and Goshen under contract. There are 87 square miles of land for one fire station. The fire protection has been extended since the last town plan. Mr. Kilpeck stated with the water system upgrade, there could be additional fire protection. **Proposed action:** upgrade fire protection that is currently lacking. Mr. Kilpeck advised OVUHS does not have a sprinkler system because it does not

have a well. By extending the water system, if moved south of town, there would be the capability to add the school with domestic water from the Town. Natalie Steen asked if there is a strategy around security for the water system. Ray Counter stated cybersecurity is huge and they have a plan. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated all public facilities need to be aware of cybersecurity. Mr. Counter advised the current water goes as far as the Legion and to the corner of McConnell Road and Basin Road. The wastewater goes as far as the Legion and to Nickerson Road and Syndicate Road. Seth Hopkins noted there is tax stabilization that could be offered to developers as an incentive for funding these services and there are grants and low interest loans geared towards mobile home parks that Representative Jerome has provided information on. Mr. Counter noted most potential for growth would be south of Town with the addition of water and fire protection.

Police Department: Ms. Reniche-Smith asked if anything needs to be added for police protection. Seth Hopkins stated there is a goal to be able to provide 24-hour on-duty coverage as opposed to some on-call periods that could possibly be accomplished with increasing the Brandon police budget to recruit additional officers or to look into collaborating with other entities.

Solid Waste Disposal: Seth Hopkins advised the transfer station is on a lease with a private operator and maintaining that has been satisfactory. There is an effort to host more hazardous waste days in Brandon.

Brandon Public Library: Cecil Reniche-Smith noted this is a separate 501(3)c. Natalie Steen suggested for these entities that it be noted there will be continued support for these areas.

Rescue Squad: This is a private corporation. Natalie Steen will be in contact with this entity.

Senior Center: – Ms. Reniche-Smith advised Kathy Mathis provided an updated description.

Insect Control District: Cecil Reniche-Smith provided an overview of a discussion the Select Board had with the Trustees of Public Funds regarding this topic. Currently Brandon is a member town and has a budget line item. Traditionally the Town has asked the Trustees of Public Funds to fund a portion of the bill. Mr. Hopkins noted for many years the Town has had a portion offset with funds from the Trustees. Last year they declined entirely and this year they have provided a portion of what the Town requested. They believe that the Town's 1978 vote to enter into the insect control district is too far in the past and they would like the Town to put this to a vote. Mr. Hopkins stated one item the Trustees asked to find out from the Insect Control District concerned what Brandon's residents think about the District. It was advised that there are approximately 1700 dwellings and only 17 requested to opt out of spraying and 1% of opting out is indicative of support. It was noted that the request is for public health, sanitation and in general other betterments to the village not funded by taxation. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated a blanket statement of remaining a member of the Mosquito Control District could be included in the Plan.

Educational Facilities: Natalie Steen will send this section to the RNESU office for updates. She will also add this to the OVUU agenda for discussion. An overview of the common level of appraisal was provided by Mr. Hopkins. Currently there are 2/3rds of towns in Vermont out of compliance due to the real estate market and there are not enough appraisers in the State to fix this issue. Mr. Moore advised the legislature just passed a ruling to push out the compliance.

Childcare: Cecil Reniche-Smith provided an overview of the section. Data was updated by Logan Solomon indicating there are 6 registered days in Town, 4 are licensed centers and 2 are run by schools, others are residential facilities. **Proposed goal:** support and expand the childcare facilities to assist in demand. **Strategies:** Natalie Steen suggested it would make more sense to encourage a mix of childcare types to accommodate the differing needs of families. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the current goals. **Another suggested goal:** to encourage the establishment of a child/teen center and support efforts of the Neshobe School to provide additional services.

Transportation: Cecil Reniche-Smith suggested any action items or accomplishments should be brought to the Committee's attention if they are not noted in the Plan. One accomplishment for transportation is the addition of a new parking lot near the town hall. The current goal is to support the provision of a balanced transportation system to meet the needs of Brandon through movement of people and goods. Natalie Steen suggested adding "safe" to the comment. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the strategies with the group and stated previously there were action items relating to an Amtrak

whistle stop that will be removed as it has been advised this will not be possible. The RRPC will be updating the information on roads. Bill Moore advised there needs to be an update on the Park and Ride as it will be moved to the downtown parking lot. Seth Hopkins noted this is a multi-modal Park and Ride that has a bike rack and charging stations. Mr. Hopkins reported there is a possible subdivision by Steinberg Road that will fall under the construction of new roads. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the current action items. Mr. Hopkins noted Complete Streets is used for new road construction. Ms. Reniche-Smith asked if bike paths are a requirement. Natalie Steen suggested this may not belong in the Town Plan, but the Plan could indicate it supports sidewalks, bike paths and Complete Streets and the BLUO can be more specific. Ms. Steen suggested the Town should prioritize the assessment and safety of bridges. Mr. Hopkins reported the Town has an active bridge and culvert inventory. **Proposed action step:** maintain and continue to update the current bridge and culvert inventory with the emphasis on safety. Mr. Hopkins noted the Town has also installed “Your Speed Is” signs. **Suggested action item:** to maintain safe crosswalks at all appropriate locations and evaluate for additional crosswalks with appropriate signage. **Another suggested action item:** to implement an in-town shuttle service. The Town is currently doing a scoping study and will support the use of multi-use connecting paths. There was discussion about parking and whether there is enough parking in Town and will be an ongoing discussion. **Proposed action items:** development of more parking resources or better use of current resources, develop a way-finding system for parking and study the need and feasibility of additional parking areas.

Highway Department: It was suggested to add a Highway Department section. In keeping with the other sections, an informational paragraph would be needed, along with goals, actions, and strategies. Ms. Reniche-Smith will create a Highway section and provide the information to the Town Manager for his review. **Proposed actions:** assess the suitability of the current site, build a net-zero building and build a salt shed.

Housing: Cecil Reniche-Smith reviewed the current goal and strategies. Natalie Steen to review and suggest an alternative goal. Ms. Steen noted the preservation of historic homes should be encouraged. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted a possible community senior program could be developed that assists with repairs and suggested the encouragement of volunteer programs could be included in the Plan. Neil Silins suggested working with Hannaford Career Center or Stafford for student support. **Proposed action:** work with local agencies, non-profits, and school-based projects to assist with maintenance. Sarah Stevens noted the Moosalamoo program also does projects of this nature. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the action steps for this section. Ms. Steen suggested encouraging residential mix use in general, not just in the downtown area and advised the pedestrian and bike-friendly development should mirror the same verbiage as in the Transportation section. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted some of the action items relate to Act 47. **Action item update:** local zoning shall include provisions for the review of site conditions. Ms. Steen noted the Town can be creative with zoning to allow cluster development to be flexible with the criteria. Ms. Steen stated that much of this information would go into the BLUO and this is talking about development in general and the last bullet belongs in development, not housing. She also noted that some of the action items do not belong in housing. **Suggested action items:** educate property owners, rehabilitate old, historic, or substandard buildings, encourage developers to make use of tax incentives for new housing stock and create incentives for private developers to include affordable/senior housing.

8. Old/New Business

Cecil Reniche-Smith recommended a second meeting next month on October 16th to continue work on the Town Plan. It is the intent to approve the draft Town Plan and schedule the hearing during the November 6th meeting.

9. Date of Next Meeting

Monday, October 2, 2023 - 6:00PM – Brandon Town Hall.

10. Adjournment

A motion was made by Jack Schneider to adjourn the meeting at 8:47PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,
Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary