

**Brandon Planning Commission Meeting - Draft
October 2, 2023**

Board Members Present: Jack Schneider, Cecil Reniche-Smith, Natalie Steen

Board Members Present Via Zoom: Sara Stevens, Neil Silins - Alternate

Others Present via Zoom: 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 – September 18, 2023

A motion was made by Sara Stevens to approve the September 18, 2023, Brandon Planning Commission meeting minutes. **The motion passed unanimously.**

4. Zoning Administrator’s Report

Jeff Biasuzzi reported permits continue to be submitted. The DRB had a hearing for 4 conditional use variance applications. They approved 3 of 4 that were setback waivers and the OVUHS detached modular classroom. He is awaiting the decision from the DRB on a variance request for the former Rutland Mental Health facility at 18 Franklin Street to go to 5 dwellings units. There will be a hearing scheduled on a similar project for conditional use going from a 1 to 3 family dwelling. The owners of the old high school have submitted a conditional use application that will include 2 dwelling units of condominium nature, plus some mixed uses like meeting spaces. It is hoped this will get some active improvements from its current status. Cecil Reniche-Smith noted the owner made a presentation to the Select Board and they will have co-housing beyond a condo unit, but it is not clear how that will be done. Jack Schneider stated the presentation is on-line in the Select Board packet and shows 6 co-housing units on the top floor and 3 visiting artist residential units and one caretaker unit that looks to be 10 dwelling units. Mr. Biasuzzi noted the DRB needs a clear application and the information packet will be received this week and the applicants will have to submit additional testimony prior to the hearing. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted in looking at the presentation, there are a number of co-housing units. Mr. Biasuzzi clarified a dwelling unit consists of having accommodations for sleeping, cooking, and bathing. Ms. Reniche-Smith advised there is a centralized kitchen with 6 bedrooms and 6 baths. Mr. Biasuzzi suggested as a to-do for the BLUO updates to include a definition for continued use. There are no provisions for when a use is continued and he works with the last permit that is in effect until something changes the status. With regard to the application for the structure going from a 1 to 3 family dwelling, this unit previously had 3 units and still has 3 kitchens but the last use was a single-family dwelling. There is no clear language under Act 47 that would provide for it to go back to 3 units. Mr. Biasuzzi reported VLCT is having their state-wide annual municipal day on October 20th at the National Life Complex in Montpelier. This is a seminar that offers a series of courses with guest speakers. The Town will pay the tuition if any Planning Commission member would like to attend. One can register on-line and submit the receipt to the Town for reimbursement. If it is known there are several members that want to attend, the Town can register the members. VLCT is also offering an on-line education on Act 47 and that will be held on October 17th. This seminar is from 9:00AM to 12:00PM. The DRB meets on the 4th Wednesday of every month and Mr. Biasuzzi noted there is a window of opportunity to warn applications but he would like to know by tomorrow. Jack Schneider advised he will discuss this with the DRB Chair.

5. Energy Committee Report

Jack Schneider reported the BEC has a Button-Up event scheduled for October 11th for landlords and businesses. There are only a couple of businesses signed up and a mailing will go out tomorrow in hopes of increasing the attendance. It starts at 5:30PM and there will be vendors and food. If there is not a large enough turnout, the event will be postponed to the next Button-Up event scheduled for November 18th. The BEC discussed the energy portion of the Town Plan and will meet with Jeremy Gildrien on Friday. There is discussion of creating an abbreviated version for the Town Plan and having a full enhanced Energy Plan as a stand-alone document to allow updating every couple of years. The Energy Plan was done in 2019 and it is 80% complete but the figures are out of date. Mr. Gildrien has generated numbers that are actuals based on heat pumps and EVs in Town. The bike racks have been painted and the BEC will work with a group that has 50 bikes stored in the basement of the high school to create city bikes that will be placed in the bike racks around town for people to borrow. The Committee discussed the \$60,000 the Select Board approved for researching a town solar array and land lease. The BEC will present a proposal to the Select Board about what the cost will be and how a bond could be paid for by the savings. Mr. Schneider noted the SolarFest event is scheduled for October 28th at the Grace Congregational Church in Rutland and will have workshops from 11AM to 4PM, followed by music until 10PM.

6. Public Participation and Comment

There was no discussion held.

7. Town Plan Update Session (Formulate Policies, Strategies and Action Items for sections on Recreation, Historical & Cultural Resources and Natural Resource)

Recreation:

Cecil Reniche-Smith reviewed the existing goal for this section. Sara Stevens suggested adding the word “accessible” and Ms. Reniche-Smith suggested adding the word “affordable”. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated a social environment would mean making everyone feel welcome, with accessibility being part of that and doing the programming to make sure that everyone feels welcome and comfortable. ***Proposed addition to the Goal: add reference to affordable. Proposed strategy: Working with other local municipalities to benefit from economies of scale to provide better recreation activities.*** There are a number of action items that had originally been noted as policies. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the items with the Committee and noted some were from the last Town Plan and others were inserted early in the process of reviewing the Recreation section. The Rec Director is to complete a master plan and Mr. Moore wants to do this but it has not been completed yet. Cecil Reniche-Smith stated currently recreation is ad hoc with the staff coming up with ideas for events and activities. Her understanding is to create a document that addresses current offerings and include action items for the Town Plan. The Recreation master plan could also include a master budget. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted one item discussed was turning the FEMA buy-out properties into parks in the future. ***Proposed: include green spaces acquired from the FEMA buy-out program.*** Natalie Steen suggested removing the first bullet regarding the Recreation Master Plan as the later items noted outline this item. Ms. Steen stated the items outlined could be individual strategies and should follow the goal. Sara Stevens noted some of the action items sound more suggestive and recommended making them more definitive. Ms. Reniche-Smith noted there will be a separate section for items that have been accomplished. Ms. Steen suggested there needs to be something to market the recreational resources in the area. ***Proposed strategy: Develop promotional materials for recreational activities.*** Jack Schneider stated many of the events are organized through committees like July 4th, Davenport, and Harvest Fest and are managed by the Rec Department. ***Suggestion for the goal: add events and programs.***

Historical & Cultural Activities:

Ms. Reniche-Smith advised each section to include goals, strategies, and action items. There is an active Historic Preservation Committee. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the strategies and action steps and noted for the inventory of historic structures there has recently been a grant received to complete this. With regard to heritage byway designations, Natalie Steen suggested removing this action item and adding it to the Scenic section to create a scenic byway. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated there are not that many structures in Brandon that have a historic preservation designation but there are historic districts that contain contributing structures that have historic value but are not in the Historic Register. Neil Silins suggested it would be good to have Heritage tourism. ***Proposed action item: develop a walking tour of the village historic district. Proposed action item: develop zoning regulations and/or guidelines to promote and preserve historic***

resources and buildings. Jack Schneider stated there was an effort to try to map all of the Town's cemeteries. Ms. Reniche-Smith advised there had been a request to the Select Board to fund this effort, but it was declined and it is not certain the funding was received. This project was for doing 3D imaging of each marker to have an on-line resource. There was a discussion of Brandon's role in the Civil War and was suggested this could also be a potential walking tour. **Proposed action: develop walking tours focusing on Brandon's historic structures and cultural resources.** Ms. Reniche-Smith also noted it would be helpful to have a map of the individual artist studios. **Proposed action: develop a map of Brandon's local artist studios.**

Natural Resources:

Cecil Reniche-Smith noted there is a list of action steps that are the same as the policy bullet points. It was suggested to remove the item referencing the Brandon Workbook as this item is outdated. **Action item: Create overlay districts in developing regulations for historic preservation.** There could be a grant to have a consultant develop this for the Town. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the strategies with the Committee. **Suggested change to goal: to identify, protect and preserve Brandon's natural resources for future generations.** This section requires the RRPC's review and recommendations. Neil Silins stated it looks like there are varied natural resources and he would like to also include something about the urban tree canopy. Mr. Silins advised the tree inventory is ongoing and a Tree Preservation Plan will be reviewed by a committee of Select Board members for future approval. Mr. Silins also noted the role of the Tree Warden is missing from the current information. Natalie Steen suggested removing the last item under policies. **A proposed addition: support conservation of undeveloped land through public or private entities.** Ms. Steen stated there are some action steps that could be changed to strategies. The Committee had a discussion concerning sand and gravel operations. New sand and gravel operations may be permitted in certain districts based on certain conditions. When a sand operation ceases, the land shall be properly reclaimed. Ms. Reniche-Smith stated Vermont has criteria that talks about reclaiming. **Suggested change: the land shall be properly reclaimed in accordance with State and local regulations.** Ms. Steen stated for prime agriculture once a house is placed on a piece of land it can no longer be considered agriculture. **Proposed change: Future development shall protect agriculture soils to the greatest extent possible.** Ms. Steen advised with regard to wetlands, one can build on a certain type of wetland. Currently there cannot be buildings on wetlands 1 or 2. Ms. Steen suggested the following change: **wetlands should be retained in their natural state.** Stricter guidelines could be developed in zoning for wetlands 3 and 4. **Proposed action item: Review and update the Neshobe River Corridor Plan.** Ms. Reniche-Smith noted the Town has used the FEMA buy-out program over the last few years and the plan is for these areas to be open space for the river. Ms. Reniche-Smith reviewed the remainder of the resources. **Proposed Action item: inventory, protect and maintain scenic and aesthetic resources. Proposed Action item: new development shall not have an undo adverse impact on scenic resources.**

8. Old/New Business

Jack Schneider advised the DRB would like to participate in the review of the BLUO when reviewing the section regarding variances.

9. Date of Next Meeting

Monday, October 16, 2023 - 6:00PM – Brandon Town Hall.

10. Adjournment

A motion was made by Natalie Steen to adjourn the meeting at 8:30PM. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary