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Planning Board Meeting – Public Meeting

October 10, 2023, Town Hall

Final Minutes SEP

Members Present:

John Schneider (Vice Chair), Rich Marcou, Logan Snyder and Ben Stonebraker (alternate).

Members Absent

Greg Meeh (Chair), Joshua Gordon, Anne Dowling, Kent Ruesswick and Hillary Nelson (alternate).

Others Present:

Central New Hampshire Planning Commission Executive Director Michael Tardiff and CNHRPC Director & Senior Planner Matthew Taylor.

Residents: Ken Stern, Lenore Howe, Edgar Rivera, Kathleen McKay, Sue Russell, Sumner and Kathleen Dole, Felipe Salas-Ogilvie, Frank Tupper, Alison Witschonke, Clifton Mathieu, Kerry Pfrimmer, Dave and Anne Emerson, Mark and Brenda Travis, Ellen Bassett, Beth Blair, Tom Perlet, Justina and Patrick Velodrz-Ko, Jean Herrick and Peter Helm, John and Hope Jordan, Nancy Roy, Calvin Todd, Beth McGuinn, Mindy Beltramo, Arnie Alpert and Judy Elliott, Tom Franco, Pastor Becky Josephson, Lisa Carlson, Ariel Aaronson-Eves, Jim Chryssostom, Randi Johnson, Lisa Lach, Steph Sosinski, Board Secretary Lois Scribner, and Recording Secretary Ray Carbone

1. Call to order by the Chair

In the absence of the Chair Greg Meeh, Vice-Chair John Schneider presided over the meeting. He opened the meeting at 7 p.m., noting that, since there was not a quorum of the board present, it would only be a “Listening Session.” (Later, Ben Stonebraker (alternate) arrived, so a quorum was reached.)

Vice-Chair Schneider introduced Mike Tardiff, executive director of the Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission (CNHRPC), and Matt Taylor, a planner with the CNHRPC. He said the meeting would look at several issues related to the Planning Board’s ongoing review of the town’s Master Plan, i.e., “Plan for Tomorrow.”

41 Tardiff said that, at the board's previous public meeting on the Plan for
42 Tomorrow, there was a request for information that would make the process of
43 reviewing the Master Plan a little more understandable. To that end, he
44 distributed a small packet of information outlining how the Master Plan review
45 works: The document is a Planning Board advisory document that reviews issues
46 that are of interest in the community and allows the board (and, later, Town
47 Meeting voters) to consider possible changes to zoning regulations related to
48 growth and land use issues.
49 CNHRPC has been hired by the town to assist the Planning Board in this
50 process and, as part of that process, the organization works with the Planning
51 Board to organize public meetings and listening sessions like this one. The
52 CNHRPC also drafts initial documents for the board's review; helps the board
53 analyze data related to demographics, natural resources, etc.; and tracks trends
54 and decision in other communities. (Public input, as well as input from other town
55 boards, is also welcomed as the process proceeds.) When the Plan for
56 Tomorrow is completed and approved by the Planning Board in the fall, it will
57 include an executive summary that will outline the major issues addressed.
58 (Later in the meeting, a resident asked how much the town is paying CNHRPC
59 for its services. Tardiff said that the fee is paid by a grant.)
60 At this time, the Planning Board has already indicated that it is only considering
61 incremental changes to the zoning ordinance this year, Tardiff noted.

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63 **2. Review of Demographic Trends and School Enrolment**

64 Tardiff introduced Matt Taylor who reviewed another handout related to
65 Demographics and School Enrollment.

66 Taylor noted that while the town's population saw a significant increase in the
67 1970s, it actually peaked in 1820. It has remained fairly consistent since 2010,
68 and is projected to retain its modest growth rate for the next 40 years.

69 Canterbury is somewhat unusual because its housing stock is almost exclusively
70 single-family units, he added.

71

72 However, the town's population is aging, which is common throughout New
73 Hampshire, Taylor said. Whereas the median age was once 48 YO, it's now
74 older, with a significant rise in people over 55 YO.

75 One aspect of this change is related to enrollment at Canterbury Elementary
76 School (CES). The school population peaked at 140 students in 2000, and it's
77 now a little more than 100. School-related costs are significant – roughly one-half
78 of the town's property tax bills – but there are fixed costs in education, i.e., the
79 number of teachers, building maintenance, etc.

80 One resident pointed out that the school-age population in Canterbury may not
81 have decreased as much as the CES figures indicate because there may be an
82 increase in parents who either homeschool or send their children to private
83 schools.

84 Taylor agreed, but said that the decrease in the younger population is seen
85 across the state. (At this time, CES is not in a situation where any significant
86 school population issues need to be considered, he added.)

87 Taylor recalled that in two previous public meetings related to the Plan for
88 Tomorrow, it was apparent that Canterbury residents place a large emphasis on
89 “community character,” i.e., the town’s rural, historic character. “Character is a
90 big issue,” in Canterbury, he said.

91 In addition, there’s been an acknowledgment that there is an ongoing change in
92 the town’s demographics, and the idea that, “It would be good to attract young
93 people to stay in town and get involved in the community,” Taylor explained.
94 It’s also been noted that there is a lack of housing diversity in town and, as the
95 average household size decreases, it’s becoming more difficult for younger
96 families or older residents who want to stay in town to find affordable housing.

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99 **3. What we have heard regarding areas Exit 17, Exit 18, and Rte. 106**

100 People at the earlier meetings also recognized that Interstate 93 and NH Route
101 106 may present options for development in the town, which could produce
102 added tax revenue.

103 There’s also a need for improvement to the town’s infrastructure, and Tardiff
104 noted that there are gaps in broadband internet service. However, the Board of
105 Selectmen has recently indicated that there could be options to fund
106 improvements in this service soon.

107

108 Tardiff also pointed out that the earlier public discussions addressed the idea of
109 increasing mixed-use zones in the areas off I-93’s exits 17 and 18. Some
110 development could be tied to “character-based zoning incentives,” so that new
111 projects could either utilized old farm structures or replicate those structures in
112 design.

113 Finally, the idea of cluster neighborhoods was also raised at earlier public
114 meetings – again, with a “character-based” zoning requirement.

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117 **5. Ideas for zoning updates in areas Exit 17, Exit 18, Rte. 106**

118 Vice-Chair Schneider opened the meeting to questions and comments from the
119 public.

120 One resident suggested returning a large lot in the exit 18 area to an agricultural
121 zone. Sue Russell suggested that a large lot could be used as a solar farm.

122

123 Felipe Salas-Ogilvre said that, as a new, younger resident, he could see how a
124 community center could be attractive to younger families. “There’s not much in
125 town that stays open after 5 p.m.,” he said. (Later, he noted that the center could
126 also be used by local artisans to teach their crafts to others.)

127

128 Another resident suggested that the Plan for Tomorrow be developed with an eye
129 towards tax policy. Otherwise, the town might look to alter its zoning ordinance
130 in a certain way when smart tax policy would advise against the approach.

131 Later, he added that taxes, as well as education and public safety issues, should
132 be wedded together in the 10-year Master Plan review process. “To me, that’s
133 productive planning,” he said.

134 Finally, he also suggested that the town look at economic development zones,
135 which could have more impact on certain kinds of commercial development than
136 simple improvements to regulations related to water wells or septic systems.

137
138 Tardiff noted that there’s not a lot of available acreage for development around
139 exit 17, particularly because much of the area is under conservation. There’s
140 much more around exit 18.

141 One resident noted that there is a Commercial Zone in the area near exit 18.

142 Taylor noted that there is some soil-testing going on in the areas around both
143 exits 17 and 18 to evaluate whether they may be suitable for wells, septic
144 systems or other infrastructure improvements.

145
146 One resident noted that that the Town zoning ordinance can encourage or
147 discourage certain kinds of development, but the property owner decides what
148 they want to do with their land in the end.

149
150 Another asked if there’s a way to access information about the town’s various
151 boards – their membership, meeting schedule, etc. Kathleen McKay, who is
152 working to update the town website, said her job has been made more difficult
153 because some of the code used to establish the website is no longer available.
154 But she asked that people email her with any relevant questions or information
155 requests at administrativeassistant@canterburynh.gov

156
157 One resident asked about Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU). Vice-Chair
158 Schneider said they are allowed right now, but only under a Special Exception
159 issued by the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA). One possible zoning ordinance
160 change the Planning Board is considering would allow ADUs in certain zones
161 without the ZBA approval.

162
163 There was some general discussion about encouraging more options for smaller
164 households. “There’s a terrible housing shortage in this state,” one resident said.
165 Another suggested that the town look to CATCH Neighborhood Housing to help
166 fund Affordable Housing projects. “There are people out there in New Hampshire
167 cracking that (housing) nut.”

168 McKay noted that good low-cost housing options usually involve a “walkable”
169 town center.

170
171 Another resident confirmed the earlier discussion about the character of
172 Canterbury, and wondered if the Plan for Tomorrow could support maintaining
173 historic homes by repurposing them. Tardiff and Taylor confirmed that was an
174 issue that has been recently addressed by CNHRPCC and the Planning Board.

175

176 One resident said that he likes Canterbury the way it is and he's not in favor of
177 making any significant changes. "They say growth is inevitable but it's only
178 inevitable if we don't fight it," he said. If any changes are coming, he said, they
179 should be focused on improving the lives of current residents by expanding
180 broadband or enhancing the Transfer Station.

181 Another resident agreed, adding that she doesn't want to live near Section 8
182 housing. "I like the space," she said.

183 But a different resident noted that every town in New Hampshire is under legal
184 obligation to have some Affordable Housing in its housing stock.

185
186 One resident asked if there was anything preventing several homeowners from
187 banding together and building a group of homes in an area. There is not, he was
188 told.

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190 **6. Adjournment**

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192 Without objection, Vice-Chair Schneider adjourned the meeting at 8:26 p.m.

193

194 Addendum – message to Planning Board from Tom Franco, Morrill Road:

195 "I mentioned this at the Oct 11. meeting but I don't see any note of it in the
196 minutes.

197 I am concerned that future growth impact to the tax base may not be positive.
198 The regional representative could not indicate any facts that show a positive
199 impact in any of the other NH towns that have created business/industrial/mixed
200 use . I am all for future growth and these land usages for many reasons, but I am
201 against using positive tax base impact as a reason to move forward. It is all
202 conjecture unless facts can be shown. I know there are many factors involved in
203 why the positive tax base impacts have not been calculated but there is a bottom
204 line."

205

206 (Draft Minutes prepared by Ray Carbone, Recording Secretary: Final version
207 posted by Lois Scribner, Secretary)