

**Brandon Public Hearing
October 13, 2015
Readoption of the Brandon Town Plan**

NOTE: These are unapproved minutes, subject to amendment and / or approval at the subsequent board meeting.

In Attendance: Doug Bailey Seth Hopkins, Devon Fuller, Tracy Wyman, Ethan Swift.

Also in Attendance: Dave Atherton, Richard Baker, Daryl Burlett, Kathy & Wayne Rausenberger, Linda & Jeff Stewart, Anna Scheck, Jeff Guevin

The hearing was called to order at 6:30 pm by Chairman Doug Bailey.

Doug Bailey asked Jeff Guevin, Chair of the Planning Commission, for the highlights of significant changes.

Guevin provided a review:

- They added a section on planning and property rights.
- They did a lot of work on the energy section. He said it is not yet where they want it to be, basically due to lack of public interest. The Commission felt it was important to at least adopt something. Right now, the Town does not have a town plan approved by the Regional Planning Commission. The Town does have a town plan but without approval by Regional, we can't apply for a state grant.
- Work was done on the housing section.
- They touched on the child care section a little.
- There was some reorganization, rather than rewriting, of the natural resources section. The prior plan had things about flood protection and flood hazard mitigation, fluvial mitigation. It now has its own section. They added in a couple of things and changed language. Now the popular term is "river corridor" as opposed to "fluvial hazard."

Bailey asked what changes were made to energy and what else they wanted to do. Guevin said there is a lot of debate discussion at the state level about solar and citing solar fields. The Board Board did not have the time, money or input to make any real decisions on citing other than include what we had in the past, which says that all solar and other installations should be appropriately screened from view.

There was discussion about the potential for wind farms and Guevin said there could be potential for farm or small production. Bailey said, as a citizen, he has questions about solar and / or wind. He said they are creating controversies in other places. This town plan will last another five years or more and thought perhaps it should be addressed. Guevin said discussions about natural gas and wind have both died. Bailey said they could come back. Guevin said something needs to be in place. The Commission would like to make smaller changes and do chapter by chapter revisions. Solar is something that needs to be addressed.

Bailey said there was a buzz last week in the media about a 100 acre solar field in Brandon but the Town does not know anything about it yet. There has been a proposal for a seven acre project. Solar fields are cropping everything. Guevin said the Addison County Regional Plan is really pushing for Addison to be a solar county.

Atherton said one of the additions is about flood resilience. Richard Baker had pointed out that this plan sent to us from Alyssa does not have the maps. They need to be updated. Guevin said he can get them. Baker said also the appendices need to be added. Atherton said there were some in the last draft and we could use those.

Fuller asked about the statement about the municipality achieving zero net energy. What does that mean? Guevin said it would mean that the Town consumes the same amount of energy as it generates. Fuller said it is an ambitious goal but one worth shooting for and it would make taxpayers happy if the Town did not spend any money on energy. The LED lighting downtown is saving \$15,000 in energy a year.

Linda Stewart said at a recent Planning Association forum, she learned that there are very high rebates for towns and schools who would put solar panels on their roofs. They should give 50%.

Atherton said these are goals. We will try to reach for them but we may not necessarily obtain them completely.

Fuller said the state goal is for 90% of our energy being renewable for 2050. He said he would like to see hydro. Guevin said his understanding is the hydro situation now is mired in legal issues. Fuller said we can keep our eye on it. Ethan Swift said there are some small projects around the state.

Hopkins said he read the town plan in detail and thanked the Planning Commission for all their effort. He found that some data referenced was from the 2010 census and some from 2000. Some figures refer to a timeframe from 1989-1999. He found some outdated references like about the Neshobe Sportsmen Club. He asked why the variations and why it wasn't all updated. Guevin said the Commissioners probably missed some items. Sometimes they had to use whatever data was available. There were some areas left out because they did not have updated data. Statutorily, there is no requirement to put in any data. He said they would like to move away from the data references. If there are some things very outdated, we can take them out. Bailey said he saw mention of the Sportsmen Club and Grand Union. Guevin said Regional also reviewed and these are items missed. Hopkins said updated information should be included, if we know about it.

Jeff Stewart read a prepared statement and it is attached.

Ethan Swift said he read the town plan in detail and he has questions and comments. He said if there are any considerations for developments or if the Town is going to be pursuing grants, it is important to include certain details. For example, with regard to

public facilities and services, the wastewater treatment plant is going to need attention in the future. That should be in a capital budget plan and should be noted in the town plan. It could help with applying for grants. He said the Neshobe School Principal has stated the school would love to accommodate a full time pre-kindergarten but they don't have the capacity. That could be a recommendation in the town plan. It was noted that Brandon Recreation was referenced as Rec.

Swift said in the flood resiliency section, it looks like there should be more consistency. There should be acknowledgement that we have certain status from the state which would give us an additional 12.5%. He said where departments have specific recommendations for their own needs and we know we are going to be looking for grants in the future, it would be important to include the information.

Fuller recommended including the water department. He asked if we are we still using the water tower and Baker said it is a reserve; we are not drawing on it every day. Guevin said a lot of things deal with water and it was a challenge to find where to put them in the plan.

Hopkins asked if it would be helpful for people to submit to the Commission where they see errors and items and Guevin said written comments would be very helpful. He said the Commission can incorporate changes, as long as they are not substantive, and then send them back to the Selectboard for approval. The Planning Commission is having a meeting next Monday. Bailey asked for the information to be given to the Planning Commission by then. Atherton said they are tentatively scheduled for approval at the RRPC.

Fuller asked for opinions about Mr. Stewart's paragraph. Guevin said the Commission did change the language and did it deliberately. He said perhaps they took out too much. It was changed because to some people, the old language made it sound like Brandon was only the downtown and we all know it is not just the downtown. It is Forest Dale and everyone else. There are great parts of Brandon that are not walkable. He said for the point of a vision statement, he can see where there is an argument to be made to put the language back in. He asked for Select Board member's thoughts. Fuller said he would like to see a combination of the two paragraphs. He said the Commission included Forest Dale and the whole community but listening to the original, he feels that there is something lost.

Bailey said the Forest Dale people have been strongly discussing their feelings in the barn raising meetings. Atherton said also Park Village. Fuller said we are unique that the town is so walkable and thanks to Mr. Burlett, we are going to be so even more. A goal is to connect the village of Forest Dale to Brandon.

Richard Baker said I think this is an excellent step in the right direction. He thinks it would be better to delay Regional and not rush it. It would be good to get comments to the Planning Commission by next Monday. He feels like it sounded like a committee document. Some sections were very tight and others sounded like a discussion. The

census references were inconsistent. It wouldn't take a lot to get some 2010 census figures. The town plan is something a lot of outsiders look at before investing here or moving here. We should make it as excellent as we can and he said he doesn't think it is there yet.

Atherton said Regional meets monthly. Bailey asked for comments to come in before the Commission's next meeting. The Select Board will have another hearing on the subject tomorrow.

Being no further testimony or comments, the hearing was closed at 7:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Mondlak

Attachment to
Brandon Public Hearing Minutes
October 13, 2015
Readoption of the Brandon Town Plan

Responding to the call for comments on the new Town Plan, I've read the plan in comparison with the former plan dated May 18, 2009. And while I think the new plan in general is well written, it has a major shortcoming which I see as a very serious problem.

After the opening statement on purpose, use, and statutory authority, here's the lead paragraph and opening sentences of the 2009 Plan. It reads **VISION: Brandon is an intimate, warm and walkable small town with a strong sense of place and significant community and historic assets, including a compact and full-service downtown. Brandon's downtown is unusual in that it still provides the essential goods and services that have moved to the outskirts of many Vermont towns...**

Compare that with the similar opening sentences of the proposed 2015 plan. After many initial paragraphs about overview, use, statutory authority, preparation, etc., we come to Vision and this most important opening paragraph: **Brandon is a real Vermont town, from Downtown to Forest Dale, Brandon and its residents have a strong sense of place and are proud of our significant community and historic assets. Brandon's downtown and Forest Dale village provide the essential goods and services that have moved to the outskirts of many other Vermont towns...**

Note that the words **intimate, warm and walkable** have vanished. Likewise, **a compact and full-service downtown**. And while the new plan says that Brandon's downtown and Forest Dale village provide the essential goods and services that have moved to the outskirts of many other towns, the new plan fails to make the point that Brandon's downtown is unusual.

There's a book titled *Above and Beyond* written by Julie Campoli that is used up at UVM. It's thrust is how sprawl is overwhelming significant parts of Vermont and uses aerial photographs to show how so many of our towns are becoming Anytown, USA. It says, loud and clear, that Vermont still has two classic towns where their pedestrian nature makes them unique and special. One of these two towns, hailed by the book, is Brandon; the other is Bristol.

Our pedestrian nature is what makes Brandon unique and special. It's what brought our new bookstore to town. More than anything else, it's our pedestrian nature that brings people to Brandon and to soft pedal our uniqueness in what is one of our most important public documents is a terrible mistake.

As a final point, as head of Brandon's Designated Downtown organization I need to point out that we're charged by the State to protect and enhance our down town. So I'm frustrated and upset when a key document walks away from what makes our downtown so very, very special. Therefore I urge, in the strongest way possible, to restore the thrust of the initial, introductory paragraph from the 2009 Plan into the current version. I leave the wording to you.

Sincerely,

Jeff Stewart