

**NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes
Regional Approval of the Municipal Plans of the Towns of Wheelock and Newport
Thursday, April 23, 2020, 5:00 p.m.**

From Town Plan Review Committee: Mike Metcalf, Greensboro; Paul Brouha, Sutton; Gina Vigneault, Norton, Justin Barton-Caplin, Barton; Cynthia Stuart, Concord.

NVDA Staff: Alison Low

Representing Town of Wheelock: Jason DiGuilo, Selectboard; Ann Lawless, Selectboard, Carol Rossi, Planning Commission

Representing Town of Newport: Denise Daigle, Town Clerk and Treasurer

Prior to the opening of the Regional Approval hearing, the committee voted to have Paul Brouha act as Chair. The hearing opened at approximately 5:00 p.m. Paul asked Mike Metcalf to read the following statement:

“Due to the State of Emergency declared by Governor Scott as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and pursuant to Addendum 6 to Executive Order 01-20 and Act 92, this public body is authorized to meet electronically. In accordance with Act 92, there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting. However, in accordance with the temporary amendments to the Open Meeting Law, I confirm that we are:

- a) *Providing public access to the meeting by video conference, with additional access offered through telephone. We are using Zoom for this remote meeting. All members of the Town Plan Approval Committee have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through Zoom and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if desired, participate in this meeting. Members of the committee will pose questions to the representatives from the Towns of Wheelock and Newport, and the committee chair will also provide an opportunity for the members of the public to offer comment.*
- b) *Providing public notice of instructions for accessing the meeting. We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing this meeting, including how to access the meeting on Zoom with a computer, smartphone or regular telephone in our posted meeting agenda. Instructions have also been provided on the NVDA website at: www.nvda.net. Click on “About Us,” then “Committees,” and navigate to the desired meeting date.*
- c) *Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access. If anybody has a problem, please use the chat feature within Zoom (Alt + H), email or call Alison at alow@nvda.net or 802-424-1418.*
- d) *Continuing the meeting if necessary. In the event the public is unable to access this meeting, it will be continued to a time and place certain.*

Please note that all votes taken during this meeting that are not unanimous will be done by roll call vote, in accordance with the law.”

Paul then took a roll call, and he then asked Alison Low to explain the purpose of the hearing.

The purpose of the hearing, stated Alison, is to “approve” the Town Plans of Wheelock and Newport, according to 24 VSA 4350. NVDA regularly confirms the planning efforts of communities, which entitles them to a number of benefits such as eligibility for Municipal Planning Grants and Village Center Designation. A central part of the confirmation is to “approve” the plan by determining if it meets the requirements of 24 V.S.A. 4382 and is consistent with the goals of 24 V.S.A. 4302. She stated that NVDA staff has worked with both towns to review proposed plans. Staff has also prepared checklists of each plan to identify all the required elements and to determine if they were consistent with statewide planning goals.

The first plan to be reviewed was Wheelock. Carol Rossi spoke on behalf of the Wheelock planning process. She said that the plan was not an entirely new plan in terms of content. She has been on the planning commission for the past three plans, and there is much consistency in the vision for the town. What is different about this plan is the style in which it is written, with recommended actions and people designated responsible for implementation. It was noted by Paul, however, that specific action items didn’t have time frames for completion, or financial mechanisms. Carol responded that the Planning Commission felt it was best to leave time frames up to the people who were responsible for implementation. In terms of finances, “we just didn’t go there, although it would have been good.” It was noted by both Paul and Carol that some of the projects identified in the plan were “really major.”

What was the motivating factor to update the plan? Carol said that the major goals and proposals were consistent going back to 2005. The town has needed a garage, a town hall and flood regulations for a long time. The impetus on this update was that the previous plan had expired, and the town wanted to continue to be eligible for benefits, such as Village Center Designation, which was awarded in 2018.

Have they applied for grants for the town hall? There is a process, according to Carol, and having a plan is the important first step. However, applying for these grants also requires passing a bond vote. So the next step is the bond vote.

Paul had a question about flood hazard strategy. It did not appear that the selectboard had applied to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. Actually, Carol said, the selectboard had voted to join the NFIP three times, but they had not held the required public hearing, nor had they adopted the required regulations. They did get it to a point where the selectboard could vote on the regulations, but the board at the time had two new members, who hadn’t attended any of the previous meetings, voted against the regulations and joining the NFIP. So now they have had to start the process over.

How can NVDA help the community going forward. “We’ll invite them back when we have the initiatives going,” especially when they address the flood regulations. Carol noted that NVDA had been helpful in the past in that regard.

At this point the hearing opened up to questions from other committee members. Mike

noted that they have 11 properties listed on page 34 that were in the 100-year floodplain (FEMA's area with a 1% chance of flooding in any given year), some of them local government properties. Were any damaged by flooding in the past? Carol said that they had been.

On page 14, Mike noted a possible typo, that the South Stannard-Wheelock Road connects with State Highway 5 in Lyndon, and thought it should be US Highway 5. Next page said that town ordinance on snow machines is scheduled for adoption in 2019. Was it adopted? If so, it should be noted. (Postscript: It is the opinion of NVDA staff that both of these corrections can be made without requiring an amendment of the plan.)

Finally, he noted that the population increased dramatically from 238 in 1970 to today's 811, a big increase in 50 years. Was the population peak really in 1810, as noted, or 1910? There were several mills and sheep farms in 1810. (Postscript: It is 1810.)

Mike and Paul noted that the plan was nicely put together.

Cynthia had a question regarding broadband. Is the town part of the local group that got together earlier this year? Jason DiGuilio said that at town meeting, Wheelock voted to join the Communications Union District. With Wheelock's typography, Internet access is largely limited to the paved road that runs through the Village, but not to any of the dirt roads. Running to the last mile hasn't caught up in Wheelock yet. With Ann's hard work, there is a hot spot at the town hall to help students and community members who are displaced by the stay-at-home order. The hotspot is a couple weeks old, and it's been successful so far. They want to work with whoever will work with them, but they know it's going to be "a long slog."

Justin Barton-Caplin mentioned June Tierney of the DPS, and there is an opportunity to improve service in the light of the pandemic. Justin was also surprised to know that Wheelock is served by four different utility companies. Overall he found it to be great plan, and really like the addition of the action steps. His recommendation was to pull them all action steps into a freestanding implementation plan. It will help the town keep organized and focused on priorities. Jason indicated that there is a facilities and a communications group already working on implementation in order to build consensus by the time the town is ready for bond vote. Also, Ann noted that the Vermont Council of Rural Development did a community visit, which resulted in the formation of the two groups. There were about 50 participants.

There being no further questions, Paul entertained a motion for NVDA approval. Cynthia made the motion, and Mike seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Next on the agenda was the Newport Town Plan. Denise Daigle explained that Alison had visited the planning commission last summer, and there were no major changes. The plan was a minor update, and it was driven by the fact that it was approaching expiration.

Are there any major initiatives to implement on the horizon? Denise said no, but it is

important to keep it updated in order to be ready for opportunities as they arise.

Are there any specific achievements that the town would like to accomplish? Not to the best of her knowledge. Paul noted that the sewer is only at 40% capacity, so there is no constraint to growth.

Page 5, Gina Vigneault spoke of the 201 Tax Bill. It should be 2019, maybe it's a typo. Paul questioned the median household income of only \$23,000, which seemed "awfully low." (Postscript: ACS 2018 5-year estimates place median household income at \$61,518. It is of the opinion of NVDA staff that both of these typos may be corrected without an amendment.)

Justin wanted to know about planning goals. There is a reference to the village vision document from 2004. Do you have a vision of growth for the village? The answer is no. There is very little land available for growth, and only two parcels that might be converted to parcels. One is a farm. Not a whole lot of room for growth, nor is there pressure.

Paul entertained a motion to recommend to the full NVDA board approval of the town plan. Mike made the motion, Gina seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The regional approval hearing was closed at approximately 5:34 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Low