

**NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes
Regional Approval of the Municipal Plan for the Town of Norton
Monday, September 16, 2019**

From Town Plan Review Committee: Jeanne Desrochers, Coventry; Paul Brouha, Sutton; Justin Barton-Caplin (on phone), Coventry.

NVDA Staff: Irene Nagle

Representing Town of Norton: Gina Vigneault, Planning Commission; Daniel Keenan, Planning Commission and Selectboard

Prior to the opening of the Regional Approval hearing, the committee voted to have Jeanne Desrochers act as Chair. The hearing opened at approximately 6:00 p.m.

Irene Nagle explained the purpose of regional approval of local plans as per 24 V.S.A. §4350, and the benefits it affords Towns.

Irene noted that the updated Plan contained all the required elements and was consistent with the State planning goals, and noted that Alison Low provided a review of the Plan and suggestions for future updates.

Dan noted that the Selectboard did not want the Plan to be definitive on the subject of ATV use on town roads. While the Norton recognizes the potential for economic development, individual property owners are hesitant to allow ATV use near their homes.

Paul asked if the town has good communication with the railroad, and the committee members and town officials discussed the difficulty of accessing state lands which lie to the west of the rail line. Paul noted the need for good signage at Black Turn Brook State Forest.

Paul asked about the water control structures on Norton and Averill Ponds, and noted that it was not clear what public benefit, other than property taxes, these structures brought to residents.

Dan said the Town does not feel it has a say in the activities controlled by the State, the railroad and Hydro Coaticook.

Tin asked about the zoning on Gaudette and Brousseau Mt. Roads. Gina said that the residences on those roads are used seasonally, and the Town does not plow the roads. The Town doesn't want to encourage more year-round development on these roads.

Jeanne asked about the Plan's recommendation for a nursing facility/assisted living facility. Gina noted that as town residents age they would like an opportunity to stay in town. She also noted that this type of facility brings local employment opportunities. Gina noted that the Norton store is only open a few days a week and there is a need for economic development. It was noted that the Town Plan mentions the possibility of seeking Village Center designation in Norton, as a tool for economic development.

Jeanne noted that an electric vehicle charging station might be a welcome feature for tourists who would like to spend time hiking on state lands, and could plug in for a few hours. Tin noted that a new round of grants are being made available from the State Agency of Commerce and Community Development for EV charging stations. Tin said that the town of Barton has an EV charging station which is free for now, and it gets a lot of use. They plan to transition to a paid EV station.

Paul asked about the historic border station and any plans for future use. Dan noted that the fact that the property straddles the international border makes it difficult to restore or redevelop.

Paul noted that the Plan doesn't mention weatherization activities, although Gina said that there have been weatherization events for residents.

Paul suggested that the Town review the assessment of the Coaticook dam structures, and wondered the value to Hydro Coaticook of those structures. Tin noted that Barton recently had its hydro structures in Charleston appraised, and it was very difficult and expensive to find an appraiser who specializes in this type of assessment.

Tin said that he liked the recommendation in the Plan to pursue trail development, and asked whether the town had asked the State to provide improved public access to state lands from Gagnon Road. Tin also said that the suggested study of the role of ATVs in economic development would be a good project.

Paul Brouha made a motion to recommend approval of the Norton Town Plan, which was seconded by Justin Barton-Caplin -- all were in favor.

The regional approval hearing was closed at approximately 7:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Irene Nagle