

**NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes**  
**Regional Approval of the Municipal Plans of the Unified Towns and Gores and the Town of Brunswick**  
**Monday, February 10, 2020**

From Town Plan Review Committee: Jeanne Desrochers, Coventry; Paul Brouha, Sutton; Amada Carlson, Coventry (participating by phone); Gina Vigneault, Norton (recused from review of UTG Plan).

NVDA Staff: Irene Nagle

Representing Town of Brunswick: Brendan Whittaker, Selectboard member

Representing the UTG: Craig Nolan, Planning Commission Chair; Barb Nolan, Board of Governors; Gina Vigneault, UTG Supervisor.

Prior to the opening of the Regional Approval hearing, the committee voted to have Jeanne Desrochers act as Chair. The hearing opened at approximately 4:10 p.m.

Irene Nagle explained the purpose of regional approval of local plans as per 24 V.S.A. §4350, to ensure that the plan contains all the required elements and is consistent with the State planning goals. She noted the benefits it affords Towns, including eligibility for Municipal Planning Grants.

Brunswick's Plan was reviewed first. Jeanne asked what prompted the update of the plan and whether it was a major or minor update. Brendan noted that the Brunswick Plan had been expired for several years, and that the approval of an updated Plan was something the Planning Commission wanted to achieve before Brendan's retirement. One of the issues that was noted in the Plan was that the local zoning should be amended to allow accessory apartments should be permitted wherever single-family homes are permitted, in accordance with State statute.

Brendan noted that the habitat and forest connectivity issue was already accomplished through conservations easements held on large tracts of forestland in the town. He noted that speed on Route 102 is a major concern, and is especially hazardous for farmers using farm machinery. Town officials would like to see the speed reduced to 30 MPH along sections of Rt. 102. Paul asked whether ATV use is an issue in Brunswick. Brendan indicated that it was not really a problem, and that since NH allows it, ATV users have opportunities there for use.

Jeanne noted that it was unclear in the Plan whether the historic Town Hall served as the current municipal offices. Brendan said that it did not, and that the current municipal office building was built in 2001. He noted that the omission of this information was inadvertent, and suggested that the third paragraph on page 10 be corrected to add "except for the municipal offices built in 2001." NVDA can make this technical correction to the document.

Jeanne asked about broadband access, and Brendan indicated that it had not come up as an issue in town.

In regard to the Energy section, Brendan indicated that the Planning Commission chose not to state in the Plan that they are opposed to wind towers. Paul noted that conservation easements or state ownership would not necessarily preclude the erection of towers on this land in the future. Brendan said the Planning Commission felt that there was not consensus on the issue of towers, and chose not to take a position.

Paul moved to approve the Plan, Jeanne seconded, and all voted in favor of regional approval of the Brunswick Plan.

The UTG's Plan was reviewed next. Jeanne asked about the formation of the UTG, and whether each town had a select board. Craig explained the formation of the UTG, from the Unorganized Towns and Gores to the Unified Towns and Gores. He explained that all towns form a single municipality, which is governed by the Board of Governors.

Craig noted that the Plan was a minor update. The biggest issue of concern is the fluctuation of water levels in lakes and ponds due to the presence of dams owned by Hydro Coaticook. It was noted that water rights were assigned hundreds of years ago, before VT existed as a State. Barbara said that they had come to an agreement regarding water levels with Hydro Coaticook. She noted several groups were involved in the discussions, including VT Agency of Natural Resources, and the Public Utility Commission. Water fluctuations are now minimized and protect the fish breeding areas.

In regard to ATV use, Craig noted that their use was controversial in town, and the Planning Commission chose not to put strong language regarding their use in the Plan. Most of the UTG is off-limits to ATVs and other motorized vehicles due to the presence of state and federal lands and easements. Craig did note that the Fish and Wildlife Dept. gave permission to use ATVs and snow machines for the purpose of volunteers assisting with the stocking of brook trout fry during specific windows.

Amanda noted some typos in the Plan and recommended some formatting changes be made on pages 5, 12, 19, 25 and 26. Amanda noted that it would be helpful, in future editions of the Plan, to include a discussion of how the municipal government works, since it is so different from other municipalities. Jeanne noted that the Town Plan could be used as a public relations tool.

Brendan recommended that future updates include a discussion of the value of the railroad line that passes through the UTG. He also noted that the discussion on page 8 regarding timber harvesting included terms that are not accepted silvicultural terms. It was also noted that the reference to 1987 should be removed, since there was a more recent version of Acceptable Management Practices. Craig noted that the land encumbered by easements must conform to standards set by the State for timber harvesting.

Paul noted that the Granite State Power Link might become an issue in the future, and the Planning Commission may want to discuss this potential impact.

Jeanne noted that she has bicycled in the area in the past and that it would be helpful to have a store with basic supplies, a portable toilet and possibly an electric vehicle charging station as services to tourists using the trail systems.

Paul Brouha moved to approve the Plan, Amanda Carlson seconded, and all voted in favor of regional approval of the UTG Plan.

The regional approval hearing was closed at approximately 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Irene Nagle

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