

NVDA Town Plan Review Committee Hearing Minutes
Regional Approval of Barnet Town Plan
Wednesday, March 13, 2024 at 6:00 P.M.
Barnet Fire Station, 151 Bimson Drive, Barnet

From Town Plan Review Committee: Justin Barton-Caplin, Barton; Paul Brouha, Sutton; Mike Metcalf, Greensboro

NVDA Staff: Alison Low

Representing Barnet: Eric Skovsted and Sue Sinclair, Barnet Planning Commission; Shirley Warden, Zoning Administrator; Gregory Jackmah, Barnet resident

Prior to the opening of the hearing at 6:05, the Town Plan Review Committee opted to have Justin Barton-Caplin act as chair. Alison Low explained the purpose of the hearing, which was to receive public comment on a request to regionally approve the local plan as per 24 V.S.A. §4350. She mentioned that Nicole Gratton had already completed the staff review and found that all the required elements were present and that the Barnet Town Plan was consistent with the State planning goals. She also noted that the review committee would receive comment and pose questions in this public hearing (required by statute) and make a recommendation whether to request approval of the Barnet Plan from the full board of NVDA, which was set to meet Thursday evening, March 21st.

The first question to the Barnet planning commission and town representatives was the nature of the plan amendment: Was this a minor or major update? It was considered a fairly major update, because the planning commission wanted to reorganize the plan and update its approach with an emphasis on housing, roads, and education systems (to address the realignment of the school district). The flood resilience section, which was previously very detailed and technical, was condensed. The plan also revisited town properties and how they were described, making it clear, for example that the “town forest” was not really a town forest per se. Rather, the 169 acre property is a gravel pit and former dump site, and it’s not open for recreation. Also, the plan addressed the Harvey’s Lake dam as a priority and established a policy on town properties. (The old Town Hall is currently under renovation, and there is a question about what will become of the current property on Route 5 once that project is complete.) Eric mentioned that some people in Town complained about not being able to find the old elements of the plan, since it was reorganized. He indicated that they’d try to get more people involved on the front end of the plan development in subsequent updates.

The committee asked about the strategy to adopt a capital budget and plan. It was noted that the Town had not adopted one per se, but that the selectboard sets aside \$50K to \$80K a year in reserve funding, and that the highway department has a truck fund.

The committee wanted to know how NVDA could help in the future – and what is the next step? Eric indicated that the board had already started talking about revising the bylaws. Planning grants might help in the future. There is also a need for industrial/commercial standards. Paul Brouha suggested looking at the Sutton bylaws, which have very specific performance standards for industrial uses, such as noise, fugitive light, and lot coverage. There is also language in the Sutton Plan that supports these standards. There was a question about the need to amend the plan in the future. Alison stated that the bylaws always need to be consistent with the plan, so the planning commission should look at the language in the plan and make sure that the bylaw revisions and plan continue to be in agreement. If necessary, the town can always propose a plan update at the same time. It was also noted that there was some language regarding heavy industrial development in the plan that was changed from the previous plan. The current language will not provide any guidance on an Act 250

review. Gregory Jackmah noted that there was an Act 250 hearing on a glamping development, and that the plan or bylaw did not provide any guidance in that case. He suggested having proposed bylaw updates reviewed by an attorney. He also noted frustration in being able to contribute to the plan and hoped that there was a more robust invitation to participate in the future. Shirley Warden noted that there were three hearings with minimal participation from the public.

Paul Brouha suggested that the next plan contain more detail on goals, policies and actions by more strongly defining the “who, how, and when.” He noted that the new Brownington Plan identified “better communication” as a priority action. Maybe the Town Plan could be a topic of discussion at Town Meeting? Eric Skovsted indicated that it could be a good idea to make the Town Plan a discussion point on a yearly basis. He also revisited the merits of establishing a separate planning commission and a development review board. Currently they have one board that does both so it’s hard to carve out time for developing and revising the plan.

At this point Paul Brouha suggested that the committee make a recommendation to the full board of NVDA to approve the Barnet Town Plan. Mike Metcalf seconded the motion. The motion passed with all voting in favor. The full board of NVDA meets on March 21st, and they will entertain a motion to approve the plan.

Paul made a motion to adjourn the hearing. The hearing adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Alison Low