Plainfield Planning Commission Minutes

Monday July 21st 2025

Present: Will Colgan, Jesse Cooper, David Scheckman, Charlie Cogbill, and Alicia Weiss

Will called the meeting to order and asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting. Jesse made the motion and David seconded it. The motion was approved.

Will said the first item on the agenda was to continue the discussion of the subdivision amendments. David suggested going line by line and Will said it would be best to use the Word document with the strike outs so we can see all the changes rather than the PDF which just shows the additions for clarity.

David felt the definition of applicant didn't mention that a potential buyer of one of the proposed lots with a purchase and sales agreement should have standing in the Development Review Board (DRB) procedure. He thought that the potential buyer should have standing in the hearing. He also felt that not just anyone the owner gave permission to should have the standing to bring an application for a subdivision to the DRB. He felt in a small town the person doing the subdivision should be at the public hearing rather than an intermediary. Direct communication with the principal of the project is important.

Charlie described the preliminary meeting of the DRB getting information about the East Village Expansion Project and how applicant listed was an unincorporated, unorganized group. The DRB ruled that the person representing the group was allowed to be the applicant. Charlie said he felt strongly that the applicant should be the entity that gets the permit. If you give the permit to other than the owner it's a Pandora's Box. In this case an outside organization was trying to develop else's land. The applicant should be the owner even if they have representation by others. He felt that the new language came from an outside developer and the zoning should not come from a response to a particular development. He recommends removing all the proposed changes for applicant and the applicant becomes the owner of record who receives the permit.

Alicia stridently seconded the thoughts of David and Charlie. She said it was egregious when a town's zoning changes are driven by any project. The zoning should be driven by principles that are good for the town not in reaction to third party applicants or other entities who would like to message the zoning to facilitate a particular project. It fraught with danger and just plain wrong.

Will said the existing language in the zoning doesn't mention owner. He said a better definition of applicant should be suggested that addresses these concerns. David said one possibility to consider would be when someone wanted to buy a property contingent on getting an approved subdivision permit. That would be a situation when the original land owner would not be the applicant.

Jesse said he remembers Karen Storey (ZA) saying there were instances where there were representatives who were filing applications. He wasn't sure how much of an impact that had on the process.

David said he was leery of architects, engineers, or lawyers being the sole representatives in the process. Someone who is representing the owner needs to hear from the community directly.

Will reminded everyone about Charlie's recommendation that the applicant should be the land owner who receives the permit. Will said that the sketch plan is complicated enough that outside professionals needed to be involved so the applicant should be the landowner who can hire professional help to meet the requirements of the regulations.

There was some discussion on whether to use subdivider or applicant. This was left for a later decision.

Will described the proposed change to have the subdivision plan be separate from the plat which is the copy filed in the town records. This would be consistent with other towns. The amendment structure would be to simplify the DRB review process and it would no long distinguish between minor and major subdivisions but would keep the exempt single lot. He mentioned that the street tree section was moved and the sketch plan requirements are in a different location but referenced in the first mention of sketch plans
He described the steep slope section (3.19), which mirrors the Marshfield zoning, and incorporates the details discussed in the last Planning Commission meeting.

There was discussion about eliminating the minor subdivision and just having all the subdivisions except the single lot exemption go through the same process. David said since the DRB has the ability to waive some of the requirements then this a way to make a simple subdivision easier.

There are still the minor amendment process for changes to the subdivision plan and if they are deemed by the Zoning Administrator to be major changes those changes go back to the DRB. This is the same as the old version.

Will said he added the warning provision for the sketch plan review. So the warned hearing is earlier on in the process.

David wanted to be sure all the sketch plan review requirements from the old subdivision section are in the new amended version even though they are in new locations. Will said they were but we can all take the time to check for that.

Will said the applicant/subdivider should be the entity who receives the permit and be precise about who that can be.

Jesse said we should consult with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) about common definitions of applicants or subdivider. Getting a broader perspective form other towns would be good.
There are legal terms that are beyond the scope of the Planning Commission and should be researched.

David said he found that having the subdivision regulations separate from the zoning regulations made it easier to read and they had narratives in the regulations that were useful.

Will said the current trend is to have what are called Unified Land Use Regulations where everything is in one document. We could look at added narratives if that made the document easier to interpret.
Will said he would contact the CVRPC and get more information on the definitions and terms used in the subdivisions around the area.

The next meeting will be on August 4th, our regular meeting date and time.

The meeting adjourned 8:15