

MINUTES
TOWN OF TOPSHAM
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMMITTEE
TOPSHAM LIBRARY, FORESIDE ROAD
APRIL 23, 2018 – 6:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Larry Fitch, Chairman
Douglas Bennett, Vice Chairman
Joe Feely
Jennah Godo
Susan Rae Reeves

MEMBER(S) ABSENT: Mary Kate Appicelli, Sean Liedman, Matthew Nixon

STAFF PRESENT: Rod Melanson, Director of Planning, John Shattuck, Economic and Community Development Director and Susan Preece, Library Director

A meeting of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan Committee was held on Monday, April 23, 2018 in the Meeting Room, at the Topsham Library.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Fitch called the regular meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Patty Williams was present as the recording secretary. As it was Patty's first meeting with the group, Mr. Fitch asked each member of the committee to introduce themselves.

Mr. Fitch reviewed the agenda for the evening. He said we need to decide what we want to accomplish to work on for the May 14th extended meeting with the consultants. When the maps were presented at the last meeting, people were not sure what they represented, so we will have the consultants walk through them with us and tie the maps and graphs back to the plan and with the data.

An Open house is planned for June 23rd here at the library, and an effort will be made to reach out to the community to have as many citizens attend as possible. Susan is working on putting together an ice cream social for the event.

1. BIG IDEA DOCUMENT

Review/Discuss – It was noted that the Big Idea Document is a draft and does not include the overview or land use pieces. Scott Hanson is working on the historic piece. Mr. Fitch asked the group to consider if the pieces in the document line up with what we heard at the Charrette. Do they line up with what we have seen and what we think about things? If not, why not? What's missing? The committee offered and discussed several positive ideas relative to putting together an updated, motivating and beneficial Comprehensive Plan for the Town.

Streets for People – Mr. Bennett began the discussion saying he feels there needs to be something before this as an opening. We need to be more deliberate about growth. He said every street in Topsham should not be governed the same. Arteries need to be easy to cross. He added the various sections need to flow; a plan like this needs logic.

He distributed a narrative he wrote as an opening suggestion for consideration. *“For more than 200 years, Topsham has grown as a community across the river from Brunswick and now centrally located in a region that also includes Freeport and Bath, Bowdoinham, Bowdoin and Lisbon Falls. Our original development took place along the Androscoggin River, since mill power and water access were central to most economic ventures. More recently, the building of the interstate through Topsham opened further opportunities for development making Topsham a regional commercial center.*

There is much to be grateful for in the development of the past few decades. Topsham has emerged as a community of diverse and friendly neighborhoods. Residents agree this is a wonderful place to live, a place of beauty and good schools, with good access to employment opportunities, and also good access to stores and to recreational and cultural opportunities.

As the same time, there are growing issues that should be addressed if we are to continue to think this a most desirable place to live, work and play. There is risk of sprawl that will unduly stretch the town’s infrastructure (roads, water and sewer) and also stretch the town’s finances. We risk losing some of the rural and agricultural character. We risk losing forests and fields that provide natural beauty and wildlife habitat. Cares and trucks pass too quickly on many of our streets, and there are too few places that are safe for walking or cycling. We need to be sure we are continuing to provide a basis for the employment opportunities of a new economy. In short, we need to be more deliberate about growth.

We have heard Topsham residents call for steering our growth and development along these lines:

- *Make sure our neighborhoods have parks and gathering places (and be sure we build a waterfront park in the Lower Village);*
 - *Provide more varied housing opportunities for all the people who will want to live in Topsham;*
 - *Take care of our open spaces, both for our current residents and to attract new residents and visitors;*
 - *Provide more recreational opportunities, both indoors and outdoors;*
 - *Be sure we are providing the infrastructure and zoning opportunities that will allow businesses in the new knowledge economy to thrive; and*
 - *Make sur⁴ our roads have safer speeds for motor vehicles and are equally amenable to walking and cycling;*
 - *Provide more varied forms of transportation;*
 - *Provide more gathering places and more events to develop a sense of identity; Continue to make our town government open and accessible for all to understand and contribute.”*
- **Develop Comments and Questions**

When asked for his opinion, Rod Melanson said he was keeping his thoughts to himself at this point and wants to hear what the committee thinks.

There was a discussion whether Route 196 should be 2 lanes from Main Street to the bridge. Most agreed if the roads were narrowed, it would be an inexpensive way to add bike paths, but agreement was not reached on whether 196 could be workable at two lanes. There was

agreement that people need to be able to cross streets, especially Rte. 196 safely. Question was asked if there were maps showing all sidewalks in town. Rod Melanson said GIS data is available which shows them. Members also asked to see areas where there needs to be street connectivity. Suggestion was made to ask at the June 23rd meeting if any other streets should be added for consideration. It was agreed that one size for all streets does not fit. Need a street by street assessment or a neighborhood assessment.

Joe Feely suggested more consideration of Pocket Neighborhoods. This would involve changes to codes and ordinance sections. Suggestion was made on restricting driveways onto Route 196 from Main Street to the Lisbon Town Line. Mr. Feely said we are trying to sell concepts and feels the Action Plans are too vague. There are too many action items that make it too specific. He suggested dealing with ideas which are supported by examples.

Local & Regional Mobility – Members liked the section but said the presentation needs to be clearer.

Access to Nature and Open Spaces – Committee would like to see a connection to the inventory. Emphasize the importance of a downtown and bump up the emphasis on the Water Front Park. People have been talking about this for the past 20 years and enough interest is shown to now put some town funds into its development. More access needs to be made for easy water access. Work with TDI and the Conservation Commission to provide a way to explore trails.

Meet Your Topsham – Thought was that this item should be at the front of the plan after being more deliberate about growth. Question was asked on how to work more closely with the Fair Association to get them to show interest. Need more frontal discussion on the fiscal economy. Mr. Bennett said Topsham is a town that has gotten its fiscal house in order, has largely straightened out its ability to plan long term for capital projects and now is merging into a place where it begins to be able to set priorities and put them into place. He said “A big thank you to the Selectboard, a big thank you the Town Manager for getting us to this place.”

Support Knowledge Economy – Comcast is the monopoly supplier and currently supplying the fastest speed available. Real speeds currently cost \$80 a month. Mr. Shattuck said there is infrastructure coming down Route 196 from Lewiston/Auburn with spurs going to the school complex. There is more than one provider but few have bought into it. There are ways to do this but it is a huge commitment that requires a major buyer or being a South Portland size of economy. All agreed it WiFi speeds should be increased, but at affordable rates.

Be Deliberate About Growth – There is a lack of understanding of “value per acre.” Need to explain what that statement means. Basically a density issue. Committee needs to help reorganize. Suggestion was made to do a “mockup” on Wright-Pierce and the Red Mill – what kind of development could bring value to the town. We have land use zoning now and probably need a Long-Range Planning Committee.

Housing Diversity – This section not clear, needs work. Some of the action items are confusing. What is this section trying to say? What are some alternatives to developments

that are affordable? Tiny houses a better fit, but costly. “Sustainable Development”...nobody knows what that means.

2. JUNE PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

- **Framework of Event** – Rod Melanson said he, Doug and Larry met right after the last meeting and talked about a longer meeting on May 14th to dig into some of the comments made. He suggested meeting at 3:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and come up with everyone’s role for the June 23rd meeting. Rod promised pizzas! He said Vanessa agreed to be here early too. A meeting on May 21 may also be warranted.
- **Marketing and Invitations** – The committee agreed they need to start marketing to engage the public for the June 23rd meeting. The library is open from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. so thought will be given to the June 23rd meeting maybe from noon to 4:00 p.m. It will be a family event with music, maybe a band, and an ice cream social. Ideas were expressed on how to reach out to the community, i.e., Facebook, article in the paper at least two weeks prior. Can do a “Save the Date” page on Facebook.

Rod will put Larry on the agenda for the May 3rd Selectboard meeting to bring that board up to date.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patty Williams, Recording Secretary