

Addison County Regional Planning Commission

Full Commission Meeting

Wednesday, December 12, 2001

The Addison County Regional Planning Commission Meeting was held on December 12, 2001 at Kirk Alumni Center at Middlebury College with Harvey Smith presiding.

ROLL CALL:

<i>Addison:</i>		<i>Monkton:</i>	Thea Gaudette
<i>Bridport:</i>	Kent Wright		Charles Huizenga
<i>Bristol:</i>	William Sayre	<i>New Haven:</i>	Harvey Smith
	Jim Peabody	<i>Orwell:</i>	David King
<i>Cornwall:</i>	Don Shall	<i>Panton:</i>	David Raphael
	Bill McQuillan	<i>Ripton:</i>	
<i>Ferrisburgh:</i>		<i>Salisbury:</i>	
<i>Goshen:</i>		<i>Shoreham:</i>	
<i>Leicester:</i>	Joan Witteman	<i>Starksboro:</i>	
<i>Lincoln:</i>		<i>Vergennes:</i>	John Emerson
<i>Middlebury:</i>	Fred Dunnington	<i>Waltham:</i>	
	Karl Neuse	<i>Weybridge:</i>	
		<i>Whiting:</i>	

CITIZEN INTEREST REPRESENTATIVES

AC Chamber of Commerce:
AC Community Action Group:
Otter Creek Audubon Society: Judy Kowalczyk
AC Economic Development Corp:

STAFF:

Kevin Behm
Brandy Saxton

Public Hearing

The meeting began at 7:30 pm with a Public Hearing to hear comments and questions from the public concerning the amendments to the Population and Housing Section of the Addison County Regional Plan.

Brandy Saxton began the hearing by describing the committee's work thus far. Brandy also said that the committee has amended the introduction and several sections of the plan. She then handed out several new pages of the plan.

In the population section, the committee tried to refocus some of the goals and policies more directly on population. In the housing section, the restructuring of Goal A into a number of policies was broken down. On page 322, policy 4 (the Affordable Housing Policy), some language was reorganized, and new language was added. In section 5, E is a new statement.

At the last commission meeting there were questions about Table 3-14, Projected Number of Households and Housing Units. Brandy re-evaluated the model and found a problem with the projection. The pages handed out included the changes made to the numbers. Table 3-4 changed as well.

The Introduction and Consistency sections contained minor changes. The Consistency Section change occurred on page 10-5, Goal 4 dealing with transportation issues. The commentary on transportation was updated. Goal 11 on page 10-11, was updated as well.

Judy Kowalczyk stated that she thought the projected housing estimates were high for most of the towns. Brandy replied that the model runs off population models from 1950 to 2000. In addition, it projects the fall in household size, which has been going down since 1950. Because of this and population growth, additional housing units will be needed. Brandy also stated that the limitations of the model are discussed in the text.

State legislator Connie Houston talked about new dynamics with affordable housing, specifically mobile home parks. She said that in nonprofit parks, she has seen rents rise between 10% and 15%, making the rents 30% to 35% higher than in privately owned parks. She cited the high cost of ownership, financing, and the associated bureaucracy as factors.

Karl Neuse disagreed, stating that that privately owned parks are experiencing the same thing. He gave an example of one privately owned mobile home park that had seen rents rise 10% with no notice given to the renters and with no improvements being made.

Connie argued that nonprofit parks have the highest rents. Karl stated that although mobile homes are relatively affordable, the largest expense is the rent for the space in the park. Brandy mentioned that the plan does not discuss the ownership aspects of mobile home parks.

Kevin Behm reminded the group that there will be a second hearing on January 9, 2002 at 7:15 p.m., and that there will also be votes during that meeting to approve the amendments and readopt the plan. Kevin stated that 23 commission members representing 11 municipalities must vote in favor to readopt the plan and the amendments. Kevin then adjourned the Public Hearing.

Public Program

The Public Program was an open discussion with Addison County's Legislative Delegation, which included Connie Houston (A-1), Michael Fisher (A-2), Craig Scribner (A-3), Harvey Smith (A-4-1), Dean George (A-4-2), Betty Nuovo (A-4-2), Mark Young (AR-1), Senator Tom Bahre and Senator Gerry Gossens.

Connie Houston said that she was concerned with several issues including on-site sewage regulations and transportation. With regard to the transportation budget, Connie said that there is a huge deficit that will affect the county. She added that Friday mornings at the Ethan Allen Room, Statehouse cafeteria, county legislators are available to meet with Addison County residents to discuss issues of concern to the county. She encouraged everyone to attend.

Kevin asked about the fiscal situation. Connie said that there will be many cuts in every agency. She said that the budget is projected to be \$35 million below that of fiscal year 2001. She added that the state still hasn't felt the impact from layoffs at IBM and from the 18 businesses that have closed down. She estimated that approximately 1,800 jobs have been lost this year. Someone asked Connie whether the state had considered tapping into its "rainy day" funds. Connie replied that although there's a lot of money in the rainy day funds (approximately \$140 million), state legislators don't want to deplete them because doing so will negatively impact bond ratings.

Karl Neuse asked why the state changed the income tax rate, keeping it revenue neutral. Connie agreed that she's not sure they did the right thing.

State legislator Dean George said that the transportation budget is still declining, but not as much as general appropriations. He stated that revenue forecasts in July resulted in a \$2 million cut from local transportation issues, and that an additional \$4.1 million has to be cut from the FY02 transportation budget. He said that they are reviewing all state roadway and bridge projects that are expected to go through and be complete.

Dean stated that \$15.7 million in appropriations from the general fund will not be available in FY03 and must be replaced. He also said that there are no bridge or road projects that have been taken out yet for FY02. However, he cautioned that there are other areas, including \$20 million for rail initiatives that will be looked at very carefully. He also said the U.S. Congress had finalized federal appropriations and that they were level funded, although \$15 million in special appropriations has been designated for the Middlebury-Charlotte rail improvement project. He said that the biggest challenge will be in meeting the shortfall in FY03.

Senator Tom Bahre also spoke about the FY03 transportation budget. He said that funds have not been used wisely with regard to the town highway grants. He said there's going to be a significant effort made to increase regulatory fees, gas taxes, etc. Regarding the income tax situation, he said that there are many people who believe it is a good idea for the state to have its own income tax structure.

Tom then discussed a transportation project in Vergennes where a portion of 22A was rebuilt. He said that the project ended up costing much less than projected and was implemented far sooner than expected. He said that the main reason for this success was that the city had taken on responsibility for that section of roadway for the next 15 years. In doing so, the local people and the city manager were in charge of the project, enabling it to come in under budget. He argued that local officials can get more done with our tax dollars than can state employees. Local people aren't hamstrung with a list of wasteful projects, he said.

Connie added that the state had budgeted \$1.8 million for the project, which was completed for only \$430,000 in eight months as opposed to the estimated 4.5 years. She said the project even included additional work such as sidewalks and culverts that weren't in the state's plan. By taking responsibility for the project, the city of Vergennes now has assumed the liability of fixing the project down the road. Connie added that there is a grant for other municipalities that are willing to do the same.

State legislator Mike Fischer admitted that there are many inefficiencies with the state government. He said that regarding the income tax situation, if you take a relatively progressive tax structure, flatten it, and increase the rate, you shift the tax burden onto hard-working Vermonters that earn low wages. He said that while this is not an easy

solution, it may be the best one because more complexity is not a good answer either. He also said that making sweeping cuts to the budget is also not an easy answer. A lot of people aren't going to be happy with their budgets, he said. He also added that on-site sewage regulations aren't the best way to regulate growth, but that communities should be allowed to have some say in how their communities grow.

State legislator Betty Nuovo said that regarding the septic rules, her concerns are with public health and the pollution of our waterways. Any septic system needs to be sure it doesn't come to the surface, she said. She worries about increasing sprawl and she's not sure how the on-site sewage regulations affect that. She said as much money should be spent on fixing old roads as building new ones. She also stated that education is very important and hopes that that budget is not cut.

Senator Gerry Gossens said that the House will begin work on the budget and hopes to avoid any major cuts and new taxes. He would rather stop funding things that are less important. Taxes should be moderate, fair and broad based, he said. And he's opposed to closing the 10-acre loophole until alternative systems can be proven. The rule will be done away with by September, but Gerry thinks that's too soon.

Bill McQuillan said that a lot of people with building sites will be hurt if they close the 10-acre loophole. Mike Fischer said that the House would like to take action on this issue.

Karl Neuse said that since 1969, thousands of exempt parcels have been transferred and that no adequate notice was given to the public regarding the changes. He said that if people want to use their parcels, they'll have to do quick work by September. He said that people that have purchased parcels over 10 acres will not be able to build.

Judy Kowalczyk asked when people would be able to use the alternative systems. Karl said five years. Craig Scribner stated that alternative systems will be available by February or March of 2002. Craig also said that the Natural Resources Committee has had meetings and has asked to see the rules for the alternative systems. They've determined they can do it by rule, but the Secretary Chris Recchia has worked closely with the NRC on S27 and is going through these new rules. He expects the House NRC will take action on S27.

Kevin said that the Planning Commission helped develop some baseline data. He stated that there aren't enough systems in use, so there is not enough data. Kevin added that the commission is performing this testing at its own expense.

Judy asked why people must wait five years if some systems can be used early next year. Mike Fischer said there's pressure on the other side and that not everyone agrees that we should open every parcel to development. There are some concerns about how much these rules might be moving too far.

State legislator Harvey Smith said that this rule will have a big impact on the county, saying that if it's not done right there won't be any growth. He stated that the Medicaid program has cost \$30-40 million in the past, but is now going to exceed \$60 million. He said that it's only a matter of time before they will be deficit spending.

Harvey stated that property taxes are another big issue. He stated that the state has to find a way to fund education without driving people from their homes. He added that it's a near-crisis situation. Another issue is Act 250, he said. The 800-ft rule (any development w/ more than 800 ft. of road must go through Act. 250 process) is being dealt with.

Harvey said that on the agricultural front, the Lake Champlain Conservation Project survived the cuts. The project will create a buffer zone adjacent to the lake. He said that \$1.8 million will go to the lake basin to help reduce non-point-source phosphorous pollution in the lake.

Jeff Whiting suggested that the mountain towns are going to have Champion lands and asked if any consideration has been given to that. Craig answered that the state doesn't have any authority with regard to National Forest lands.

State legislator Mark Young said that he's concerned about conservation of land blocks around town centers. If we don't want sprawl and septic and growth centers, he said, then we have to be careful to allow growth adjacent to town centers. Betty said that areas of green are important, but there must be a balance.

Fred Dunnington said that Middlebury is well endowed with green areas. He cited a recent example from Middlebury, where the Middlebury Land Trust wanted to preserve additional land, but the Selectboard did not agree and did not approve the project.

Kevin thanked the legislators for attending and the public program was adjourned.

Business Meeting

Approval of Minutes: November 14, 2001

Jim Peabody moved to approve the minutes from November 14, 2001. Thea seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Board Minutes: November 28, 2001

(?) moved to approve the minutes from November 28, 2001. (?) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Don distributed the treasurer's report, and Kevin announced that the Commission is in good shape. **Jim Peabody moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. Charlie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

Committee Reports

TAC: John Emerson said that they've worked on the Bristol parking and pedestrian issues study and will send it out soon. A final public meeting for the bike plan will be held January 24, 2002. A question was raised about transportation to and from Burlington. John replied that the Middlebury-Burlington train will tie into the bus system in place. Kevin said that on January 15, 2002, there will be a 502 hearing to discuss the River Road Bridge on Route 116. John said there was discussion on the park and ride facility to be constructed in Ferrisburgh. He said that work is slated to begin this summer with a 2003 completion date. He stated that \$70 million worth of construction projects are designed and waiting for funding and that it should be five years before those projects are completed. He added that there's not much hope for new projects in the future.

Fred Dunnington said that they made a presentation in Middlebury outlining the communities need and status of bridges. There's a bridge in East Middlebury can't carry a fire truck or oil truck. Even though it was supposed to be a local project, the State is still involved. He added that the State is not making progress on the signilization of Cork Street.

Harvey said that the process used to take seven years, now it takes 13-14 years. John said that in the case of the Vergennes project, the truck traffic was an issue of significance and the fact that a lot of people made noise about it. State projects are actually 80% federally funded, but doing a project through the state still means you have to meet federal mandates and that increases the cost.

Local Government: Don Shall said there has been no meeting.

Act 250: Fred said that the committee has not met.

Natural Resources: David said there will be a meeting on December 17.

Housing: No report.

Joint Partners Report

Harvey said that there was a meeting on the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. That process is moving along, he said, and it is about one quarter completed.

Staff and Delegate Recognition

Harvey recognized Thea Gaudette for receiving a Certificate of Merit from the State Planners Association. He also recognized Kevin Behm and Chris Davis for the build-out model program they worked on.

Old Business

Municipal planning grants: Kevin reported that six towns have been awarded planning grants: Bridport \$5500, Ferrisburgh \$12,150, Leicester \$10,000, Orwell \$8,150, Vergennes \$10,000 and Whiting \$8,500.

New Business

Town assessments for 2003: Harvey said that town assessments will stay at last year's level except for allowances for population increase.

Jeff Whiting said that Goshen and Waltham are paying twice as much per capita as other towns. He suggested that assessments should be done on a straight per-capita basis.

Fred suggested that this should be an issue for the Executive Board, which could then make a recommendation to the Full Commission. Jim Peabody moved to remand this issue to the Executive Board for consideration. Harvey was not sure this was an issue that could wait for another month. Jim then amended his motion to revise the assessments for Whiting, Goshen and Waltham. Charles Huizenga seconded the amended motion. Kevin said the bylaws require both a per capita and a minimum amount.

Jim withdrew his amendment and proposed a new amendment to set the minimum at \$202.03. Bill McQuillan seconded the motion. David Raphael asked that if assessments are changed to a per capita basis, will there be adequate funds for the commission to provide services. He said the issue should be examined further and decided at a later time.

A straw vote was held, indicating support for the motion.

Jim withdrew his motion and Fred moved to adopt an assessment of \$0.89 per capita, with the minimum set at \$200. Jim seconded the motion. The move passed with Kent Wright voting in opposition.

Adjournment

Jim moved to adjourn. Fred seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 PM.

Submitted by Ursula Jones