

Natural Resources Committee

DRAFT Minutes

Sept 24, 2013

Committee Members:	Lynn Bisbee, Peter Grant, David Hamilton (Vice-Chair), David Ludwig, Andrea Ochs (Chair), Ed Payne, Mark Pumiglia, Paul Wagner, Kent Wright
Present:	David Hamilton, David Ludwig, Mark Pumiglia, Paul Wagner, Kent Wright
Staff:	Kevin Behm
Guest:	

Since Andrea was not in attendance, David H. called the committee to order at 7:10.

Kevin apologized for having to reschedule the meeting to Tuesday rather than on Monday.

In order to bring new members up-to-date, David H. provided an overview of the Committee's role within the Commission and its recent work updating the Natural Resource section of the Regional Plan. He pointed-out the current effort of reviewing the status of the Recommended Actions in that section. David H. and Kevin also reviewed the status of the VT Gas Phase I proposal and the upcoming Phase II proposal.

Kent expressed concerns that VT Gas is promoting the pipeline as a more economic alternative to fuel oil, propane or electric heating. He feels the price of all heating fuels will stabilize at a comparable level and homeowners will still need to pay off the cost of conversion to natural gas. Kevin mentioned that he had heard the VT Fuel Dealers representative estimate the average cost of conversion to be about \$10,000. Of course, this could be a biased estimate.

Paul asked "Who's attorney is representing the landowners?" He suggested that a town should hire one attorney to represent all the affected landowners in the town or possibly in multiple towns. Kevin asked Adam about the current Phase I hearings. Adam said that the individual landowners that are participating have their own attorneys. The hearing before the Public Service Board is to determine whether the project is awarded a Certificate of Public Good and the Public Service Department represents all the citizens of Vermont in the deliberations. However, the Vermont Land Trust has an attorney representing their interest in certain conservation easements. In terms of easement value, it may also be advantageous to have one appraiser versed in agricultural land value to represent affected landowners.

The question of NY vs VT permits was briefly discussed for the Phase II proposal – it is Kevin's understanding that there isn't overlapping permit review. NY will permit the pipeline on the NY side and VT permits this side. NY will also permit any changes needed at the paper plant.

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The Committee reviewed the Recommended Actions under Scenic Resources. While many of the Recommendations addressed generic review actions for proposed developments, the Committee felt Action #6 – ‘Arrange workshops on identification of scenic landscapes and the siting of telecommunication towers and alternative energy facilities....’ was valuable and actionable. Kevin noted that the RPC may be involved in siting alternative energy generation facilities under a proposal currently in the legislature.

The Committee also felt that lighting plans for developments should be encouraged but not mandated. The members felt that off-site lighting affects were irritating and could easily be mitigated. Mark mentioned the irritation of household lights from the NY side of the lake and David pointed-out a farm initiative to limit barnyard lights that was successful without regulation.

Air Quality actions were reviewed and #1 ‘Monitoring...’, #2 ‘Wood heating combustion....’ and #6 ‘Park & Ride lot locations...’ are currently being worked on. Monitoring is ongoing at the state level and we have access to results to track air quality. A recent Burlington Free Press article on air quality in the state noted that the results are improving. ACRPC has encouraged town plans and regulations to require outdoor wood furnaces to meet current State certification to limit particulates. Park & Ride lots are actively promoted by our transportation planner working with towns.

Paul noted that wetlands are a significant contributor to atmospheric methane. He feels that regulation of farm methane and the preservation of wetlands is contrary to improving air quality. Farm methane represents economic activity and wetlands do not add economic value.

The last Natural Resource section, Mineral and Earth Resource Recommended Actions were also reviewed. Several of the Actions refer to developing maps of the sand and gravel resources as well as groundwater resources. ACRPC has identified a groundwater resource map developed by the State Geologist which is available for the county. We are also aware of a surficial geology mapping effort in the Bristol area that will provide maps highlighting sand and gravel resources. Paula and Kevin also mentioned the Town of Bristol’s interest in evaluating the value, safety and longevity of the several gravel pits in proximity to the high school.

The Committee adjourned at 9:00.