

WEST WINDSOR PLANNING COMMISSION

Draft Minutes
October 21, 2009

Present: Hal Pyke, Joe D'Anna, Barbara Truex, Glenn Seward, Martha Harrison, Tom Kennedy, Bob Flint, Gareth Henderson, Dave Halpert, Scott Hammond, Deb Shearer, David Jaacks, Bruce Boedtke, Win Johnson, Ted Siegler, Glenn Drost

1. Call to Order - Chair Hal Pyke called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.
2. Public Forum: Economic Development – Hal welcomed everyone and introduced the speakers, Tom Kennedy and Bob Flint. Tom explained that this forum is being held in connection with the revision of the Town Plan to help the Planning Commission understand people's thoughts and concerns about Economic Development in West Windsor. Tom explained that the original plan for tonight's forum was to focus on the ski industry but the PC decided that focus would be too narrow. Tom said a discussion focusing on the ski industry can be arranged at a later date if folks are interested. Tom introduced Bob Flint from the Springfield Regional Development Corporation (SRDC). Bob talked about the types of activities that SRDC assists with: identifying issues and solving problems, connecting people with resources, workforce development, free small business consulting, and helping businesses get government contracts. Bob talked about the need for infrastructure to support economic development. Bob said this region of Vermont is having a hard time attracting people to fill higher end jobs. Bob said banks aren't lending, which results in inadequate cash flows. Businesses are implementing just-in-time manufacturing and eliminating bottlenecks. Bob talked about the lack of availability of cell phone and broadband service and the lack of workers with appropriate technological skills. Bob said SRDC also sponsor a business plan competition to stimulate entrepreneurship. Bob said the Vermont brand has value because products made in Vermont are perceived as being made well. Bob said SRDC is available to help people in West Windsor start businesses by matching them with available resources. Hal said housing, energy, education, and transportation are all part of economic development. Tom asked those present if they want more business in town. Hal noted that the Resort is the largest business in town. Hal added that there is some uncertainty as to whether the planned conversion of the talc plant into a pellet plant is going to happen. Joe asked if new businesses will lower taxes. Hal said small businesses can do that. Tom said the type of business that West Windsor is likely to attract is not going to have a great impact on the grand list but may attract more young families which will help keep the school open. Bob said there was some interest in converting the talc plant to a slaughterhouse. Bob asked those present if they would have wanted that. Dave Halpert said he thinks townspeople should talk about their goals before they talk about attracting more businesses so they can attract businesses that will meet their needs. Dave Halpert said so many industries depend on infrastructure, particularly broadband and other communication technologies. Dave Halpert said he has been working hard to bring EC Fiber to town because the town needs the infrastructure to provide flexibility in the kinds of economic changes that are possible in town. David Jaacks talked about how Costa Rica has capitalized on its greatest asset by making development decisions based on that asset. David Jaacks agreed that the Vermont brand has a special cachet but noted that Vermont is losing dairy farms even though people associate Vermont with dairy farms.

David Jaacks said it's difficult to attract young professionals to Vermont because there's the perception that there's not much to do here, other than skiing and horseback riding. David Jaacks added that young professionals can't make a living in Vermont without high-speed service. With regard to efficiency and energy consumption, David Jaacks said, West Windsor's three-phase grid is limited to the Resort and the talc plant. David Jaacks said the lack of three-phase availability limits the possibilities for small manufacturing. Ted Siegler said he doesn't think West Windsor is business friendly. Ted said in most of the town, except the village, zoning only allows a business if it's a home industry. Ted noted the absence of a sewer system, the distance from the interstate, and the distance from an airport as limiting factors. Ted said he supports EC Fiber. Ted also said the town continues to gentrify and will end up with a population that doesn't live here and that's a sad thing. Tom asked how far the sewer line should be extended. Ted said he thinks the sewer line should be in the village. Ted noted the difficulty that the General Store has gone through trying to expand without sewer capacity. Ted said his company is not in Brownsville because any building that he might use for his company is zoned residential except in the middle of the village. Ted said he thinks many small professional businesses would consider locating in West Windsor if the zoning would allow it. Hal agreed that requiring people to live in the building where their business is located is inconvenient. Hal said the PC can put that on the list for the next revision of the zoning bylaws. Hal agreed that not having EC Fiber doesn't help people who want to operate a business in West Windsor. David Jaacks said he considered the talc plant for its potential as a design incubator with a conference/retreat center, a copy center, and other services which professional businesses need that are not already located in this area. Ted said he supports maintaining the talc plant area as industrial. Ted said he would have been happy to have the talc plant converted to a slaughterhouse. Ted said he doesn't think we should eliminate the industrial area just because we might get an industry that we don't like. Ted said Act 60 wiped out the tax benefits of having industry in town but there are other benefits. Dave Halpert agreed that the talc plant should be used for something; otherwise, it's just going to deteriorate. Win said he was going to say the same thing about the slaughterhouse. Win also agreed that the PC should loosen up the zoning restrictions on small businesses. Win suggested doing some contingency planning for the demise of the ski area, which happened once and could happen again. Win said nothing is working in favor of ski resorts in this microclimate. Hal said the resort owns a lot of vacant land and he thinks they would like to expand residential housing, which doesn't have a tremendous impact. Deb said she likes living here because of the trails and the open space. Deb said the local school is also important to her. Win said he thinks successful development in Windsor would be a good thing for West Windsor also. Hal said Windsor is in financial difficulty because they don't have enough people to support all the services (e.g. wastewater treatment) that they need. Hal suggested that Windsor and West Windsor could set up a "fire district" to manage the sewer line if it were expanded into the village. Tom said, from a planning perspective, he thinks the ski resort is going to be West Windsor's biggest challenge. Tom said it is difficult for ski areas to make it without being multi-seasonal and having a strong real estate element. Tom asked those present how they feel about that. Tom said the Town Plan needs to be clear on this issue in case there's ever an Act 250 hearing on it. Win said prior town plans have encouraged resort development around the base area but if it starts to spread out then it becomes much more debatable. Scott asked if the town is ready to allow the resort to put

\$500,000 homes on the slopes. Win said the slopes are pretty geographically constrained. Scott said with a sewer system, you can put a house anywhere. Dave Halpert asked those present to imagine the impact of all those million dollar houses on the tax values. Ted said ski areas are real estate development corporations, which concerns him. Ted said he would support stringent restrictions. Deb said she doesn't think the draw is the ski area. Dave Halpert said if you allow the resort to be developed and then the ski area goes away, then the resale value of the properties goes down and it's a terrible cycle. Win said it happened here once before. Barbara asked about alternative economically viable uses for a small ski area. Martha suggested an assisted living/retirement community. Barbara agreed that there are possibilities for the buildings but she is wondering about the mountain itself. Hal said there is a need in the community for affordable housing and noted the presence of a large field at the east end of town that could be developed if there were an economic incentive for someone to do it. Hal said the town needs to find a way to attract young families to the community by supporting businesses that provide jobs. Win said he doesn't want everyone to forget the importance of the village and the lynchpin is extending the sewer line into the village, which is not as vibrant as it could be. Glenn Seward asked Win what he thinks the impact of the sewer line would be on open spaces close to town, such as the Bascom Farm. Win said there must be ways of controlling that. Glenn Seward said, given the current zoning there, he thinks it would be developed rather quickly. Glenn Seward said people value the town's rural character so there needs to be a balancing act. Win agreed but didn't think it was a reason not to put a sewer line in. Ted said he thinks the town needs to create a fund for the conservation commission to acquire scenic and recreational easements. Ted said he would support the town purchasing the development rights on the Bascom property if there were funds available. Glenn Seward said he is not opposed to extending the sewer line but the town needs to be aware of the impact on open space. Scott asked Glenn Seward what kind of development he thinks would happen on the Bascom Farm. Glenn Seward said he thinks it would be clustered residential housing. Tom said he thinks there could be home-based business there also and it would be a shame if it were strictly residential. Tom said he thinks there is agreement that the sewer line should be extended. Tom said when you extend a sewer line, you create a small taxing authority, or "fire district," and those who use the system pay a fee. Tom said usually the fee is so expensive that those who are in the fire district don't want to do it. Tom asked those present if they think the residents of West Windsor should pay for the sewer line or just those in the fire district. Ted said he thinks the sewer line is important for the community at large and, if you have a sewer line, it's easier to build affordable housing. Ted said we need an environmentally sound way to dispose of wastewater and it would help existing businesses expand. Ted suggested that the town finance the capital costs and the fire district finance the operating costs. Deb asked if the existing sewer line has excess capacity. Tom said yes. Hal said you need density to support a sewer line extension. Win said he doesn't think anyone envisions extending the sewer beyond the village. Scott asked what area is considered "the village." Hal said the village is the area between the bridges. Scott asked if the sewer would serve Brook Road and Seems Road. Hal said it probably would not serve Brook Road but would serve Seems Road. Tom said extensions are usually phased so the first phase would probably be along Route 44 and up the Brownsville-Hartland Road as far as the school. Scott said if the sewer line goes in, developing the Bascom property will provide the most "bang for the buck." Hal said we still have zoning regulations. Hal also

said that sewer lines are expensive and we'd have to find a way to pay for it without making the fees too exorbitant. Ted said he thinks the town would have to have a bond issue to finance the sewer and include enough to acquire the development rights to the Bascom property. Deb asked about a municipal water supply. Hal said everyone is still going to have to depend on wells. David Jaacks said the Green Mountain Horse Association is an asset and if there were a few more such associations, West Windsor would have a horse cachet, which could be leveraged with any new development. David Jaacks suggested that the town leadership decide what type of businesses they are interested in attracting (e.g. agrarian, sustainable). Tom asked those present about the pros and cons of allowing small businesses in residential areas. Win said if it were uncontrolled, there could be problems with noise and light but with proper performance standards, those things could be mitigated. Glenn Drost said there's a business in his neck of the woods which has been nothing but a nuisance. Glenn Drost said delivery trucks, worker trucks, diesel trucks and noise have changed the neighborhood. Tom asked Glenn Drost if he thinks such businesses should be prohibited or just smaller in size. Glenn Drost said the business is relatively small. Dave Halpert said a professional office that doesn't require much parking and is open during regular business hours would probably work well but how do you distinguish between that type of business and another type which might change the neighborhood. Dave Halpert said it would be tough to write standards that would allow one and not the other but he thinks it would be good to have that type of business opportunity in town; a clean technology business with 5 or 10 employees in a residential building. Dave Halpert said if there aren't traffic issues, he thinks it would be very desirable to be able to do that and not have to live in the same house. Ted said if you have a home business you can basically do whatever you want. Ted said it would have to be controlled and asked if the DRB would be allowed to put a lot of conditions on businesses in residential areas. Glenn Seward said a home business is a conditional use so it is reviewed by the DRB. Ted asked if the DRB could have the same type of review for a small business that was not a home business. Glenn Seward said he thinks that's "do-able." Ted said if we really are concerned about climate change, we should allow small businesses in town. David Jaacks asked if light manufacturing (e.g. snowboards) or office space (e.g. medical) could be permitted at the Resort. David Jaacks said it might make more sense than 60 single-family houses. Scott asked if the town is ready to become a real estate broker to facilitate alternative uses at the Resort if necessary. Hal said the town does not want to go through another bankruptcy situation with the Resort. Hal said the Resort is currently zoned Resort/Residential and allows only limited commercial businesses such as the restaurant, but there's nothing to prevent the Planning Commission from moving in the direction being suggested. David Jaacks said making it unique is what gives you the leverage and manufacturing isn't allowed at any other mountain in the country. David Jaacks also suggested a tie in with the Army Corps of Engineers Cold Weather Training Facility. Tom thanked everyone for coming.

3. Other Business – None
4. Adjourn – **The PC adjourned by consensus at 8:25 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison