

WEST WINDSOR PLANNING COMMISSION

Draft Minutes

May 2, 2012

Present: Hal Pyke, Al Keiller, Barbara Truex, Jason Rasmussen, Scott Hammond, Cathy Boedtger, Martha Harrison

1. Call to Order – Planning Commission Chair Hal Pyke called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.
2. Changes or Additions – Barbara noted that she recently toured the talc plant property, which she could talk about with regard to the recreation plan.
3. Public Comment – None
4. Review Hammond subdivision for conformance with Town Plan – The Planning Commission (PC) reviewed Scott Hammond’s sketch plan. Hal signed a letter to the Development Review Board indicating that the subdivision conforms to the Town Plan.
5. Recreation Plan – Hal noted that “trail activities” were favored by a majority of those who attended the PC’s last meeting. Cathy Boedtger asked about the municipal planning grant that the town received. Hal explained the purpose of the grant. Cathy asked if the grant is for developing a plan. Barbara said yes and explained that the funds will be used to pay for Jason’s assistance, among other things. Martha said the state is not requiring the town to update its Town Plan; the town wants to create a Recreation Plan and an Economic Development Plan to provide us with some direction. Al asked if the PC’s task is to narrow down the list of recreational activities and come up with the steps involved in developing those activities. Al said a plan should have objectives, steps and outcomes. Al asked Jason what a plan would look like. Jason reviewed the statutory requirements of a Town Plan. Jason said the Recreation chapter usually covers the municipally owned facilities in town (e.g. parks), but he thinks we’re looking for something broader than that. At the last meeting, Jason said, we were hoping to get feedback on the activities that most people are interested in. Jason said the Town Forest Committee (TFC) just developed a Town Forest Management Plan so we have a good idea about those resources. Jason added that there’s interest in expanding the trail network so an Act 250 application has been submitted. Jason said he thinks the town wants to update the Recreation Chapter and tie it into the Economic Development Chapter, and the Town Forest Management Plan could be tied in as well. Jason asked if the PC wants to start with the Town Forest trail network. Jason noted the interest in competitive events from the March 29th meeting and asked the PC about using the trail network for competitive events. Barbara said the town may need to acquire land or rights-of-way in connection with the trail network. Scott said he thinks the PC should start with the town forest as the driving engine for the recreation plan. Barbara said she thinks the PC should consider alternate uses for the mountain if it doesn’t re-open as a ski area. Barbara said she doesn’t think the town is going to buy the mountain and run the ski area but it might provide a connection to other trails in Windsor. Jason said there are trail networks in Windsor and at the Ascutney State Park, and some land was purchased in Weathersfield so there’s been some talk about an “around the mountain” trail. Cathy said there are many people already doing the things the PC is talking about so it’s just a matter of getting the right people in the same room. Cathy said she doesn’t see things like knitting as contributing to economic development. Cathy said she thinks the town should have short term goals and long term goals and the TFC is already addressing the short term goals with the current recreational trails. For the long term, Cathy noted that the talc plant property would make a great golf course. Martha said she was hoping that the Recreation Planning process wouldn’t immediately focus on the ski area and the town forest trails because there may be other less obvious opportunities like the talc plant property. Cathy said if we think the talc plant property may actually be donated to the town, we should be discussing it now because they’re going to take all that beautiful sand and bury it. Jason said some questions are: what are the facilities that you have in town and what are the facilities that you want? And what will it take to get there? Jason agreed with Cathy that the town may need short-term and long-term action steps and policies. Barbara said we might include a statement in the town plan articulating available locations for group activities such as knitting and quilting. Barbara

noted that the Town Hall is mostly unutilized. Barbara also noted the insurance issues that are interfering with the use of the school gym for town recreation. Barbara said there may be people in town who are interested in theater and we should make it known that there's space available for that sort of activity in the Town Hall. Martha said the town has limited resources so we need to know where we can best focus our efforts. Martha added that she was hoping the brainstorming session would have answered the question "what do people want to do?" because that's where we should focus our efforts. Martha said "cultural activities" is way too vague so we really don't know much more than we knew before the brainstorming session. Martha asked if the PC should do a survey to get the information they need about where to focus their efforts. Cathy noted that we're limited in the number of people that can be accommodated in the Town Hall but we could talk to Orange Lake about having concerts there. Cathy said Jackson Gore offers free concerts every Friday all summer. Martha said we need to know whether people would be interested in something like that here in West Windsor, and we didn't get that information at the last meeting. Hal noted that a survey of recreational activities was conducted at a community breakfast in March. Hal asked how much detail we want for the recreation plan. Jason asked the PC if they think they need more information. Scott asked what prompted the recreation meetings; was it the 1300-acre town forest? Scott said mountain biking is one of the biggest revenue generators in this area so he thought the meetings were going to focus on the town forest trail network first. Al said Scott is suggesting a very specific project and maybe that's what the PC should do – dedicate our resources to evaluating the expansion of the trail system starting with the town forest. If the objective is to survey our community to understand what people are interested in and inventory the resources we have, Al said, that's another project. Jason said he thinks the plan is an inventory and a vision for what you want. Al asked if "you" is everyone, or the few people who come to the PC meetings. Jason said the plan should reflect what the community wants. Al said Scott has suggested that the resource that most people are interested in, and that can be of most benefit, is the trail system, so do we start with that or a broader survey. Martha said if the PC does a broader survey, they'll find out what people are most interested in. Cathy said she hopes the PC will not reinvent the wheel because the Town Forest Committee has spent the last two years developing a plan for the trail system. Scott asked about the Act 250 permit. Cathy said the town hopes to get the permit in the next few weeks. Al said maybe the town forest should not be part of the broader discussion. Barbara asked how we would connect a town-wide trail network to the trail network in the town forest. Jason said a survey would answer the question "what else is out there?" Hal said we only have a small sampling of interests so far. Hal added that the work of the TFC needs to be considered. Martha agreed that the PC should not reinvent the wheel but it would be helpful to know the percentage of people using the town forest trails and what specific activities they're using them for. Martha added that half the trails in the network are not on town property, they're on resort property, and that's a huge threat. Martha said she thinks trails need to be considered in a broader context that includes parking, access, and long-term connections to Reading, Hartland and Windsor. Martha said she thinks a survey will confirm that people are very interested in trail activities and in reopening the ski resort but she thinks we need to find out what else they're interested in. Martha said she was not aware that the school gym was no longer available to the community until Matt Kantola said something at the March 29th meeting. Martha said working to eliminate barriers like that should be part of the recreation plan. Barbara said the framework for a plan is already present in the Town Plan. Martha agreed that we need broad goals like the ones in the Town Plan, but we also need specific action steps to achieve those goals. Barbara said it's conceivable that we might have a part-time Recreation Director in town someday. Martha agreed that a number of people at the March 29th meeting suggested a Recreation Director or a Recreation Committee. Martha said she thinks a calendar of recreational activities is also a good idea but to put them all on the town website would be overwhelming. Cathy suggested a link on the town website to a recreation calendar. Barbara noted that there are many trails on private property. Cathy said the Conservation Commission is applying for a grant to fund a map and is asking property owners whether or not they want to be on the map. Hal said communication among the various committees is important. Hal said he thinks we need to do a survey because we need input from more than 18 people. Hal said the survey will also help raise

awareness about what the PC is doing. Hal said he thinks the “product” of this effort will be an updated town plan and a detailed recreation plan. Jason asked if the survey should cover both recreation and economic development. Hal said he thinks we should focus on recreation for now. There was discussion about the type of information the PC hopes to get from the survey. Jason agreed to draft a survey. Al noted how difficult it is to design a useful survey. Al said he thinks the survey should describe the existing recreational resources for those who are not familiar with them. Jason said the PC could create a recreation map as an inventory of existing facilities. There was discussion about not including private trails, especially those that are only used once a year for the Vermont 50. Regarding economic development, Barbara said talc plant owner Glenn Bowman indicated that our Light Industrial district is not well located for its purpose. Barbara suggested thinking about rezoning that district. Cathy said the building contains asbestos and it would be better to get rid of it and use the land for something else. Barbara agreed that the flooding last year has made the property even less desirable. Hal said the cost of taking that building down would be enormous. Cathy said there might be funding to help with the removal of the building. Jason suggested considering the Brownfields program. Jason asked about mapping recreation facilities. Martha said she doesn’t think that’s necessary. Jason asked about doing a survey. Martha said she thinks a survey would be useful. Barbara said she would like to have some categories. Martha suggested activities and facilities. Cathy asked if the categories can be probed from a short-term and long-term perspective. Cathy mentioned a golf course as a possible long-term goal. Al said golf courses have been overbuilt and are struggling to attract players. Hal said we need hard information about what people want. Jason asked the PC if they want to focus on public recreational facilities; what they are and what they should be. Jason said maybe we don’t need to care as much about knitting as we do about ball fields. Martha said she doesn’t think the PC should decide what we care about and what we don’t care about; she thinks we need to know what other people care about. Hal agreed but said he doesn’t think we should just present a checklist of 60 recreational activities. Martha suggested that Jason draft a survey for the PC to look at. Al suggested including a list of current recreational resources and a statement about the objective of the survey. Martha said she thinks the objective is to develop a recreation plan that will support the interests of the people who live in the community. Al agreed. Cathy asked if promoting economic development is a second goal. Martha said her opinion is that we’re trying to develop a recreation plan and an economic development plan and the two are going to overlap but we’re not focusing only on the area where they overlap. As Courtney McKaig has pointed out, Martha said, there are other important byproducts of recreation, including health and social interaction. Barbara asked if we know how many people take advantage of the fitness center and the pool. Martha said that could be a survey question. Jason asked if the survey should include both town facilities and other recreation facilities. Barbara said she thinks that would be good to know; there may be people who don’t know there’s a pool at the fitness center. Martha said it would also be good to know why people decide to join, or not join, the fitness center, and how many people used to ski at Ascutney when the ski area was open. Martha said the survey can be educational, including questions like: “West Windsor has a 1300-acre town forest with 25 miles of trails. Have you ever used the trails in the town forest?” Al suggested asking what types of recreational facilities the town should invest time and effort in creating or expanding. Jason asked if the survey should be available on-line or as a hard copy. The PC agreed that a hard copy should be mailed out to residents and non-resident property owners with a link to an on-line version. Jason noted that Ludlow did a recreational survey, which was heavily influenced by responses from second home owners and didn’t necessarily reflect what year-round residents want. Barbara suggested asking whether the respondent is a part-time or full-time resident. Scott said all property owners should be included because the non-residents have a huge impact on recreation. Barbara agreed. Barbara said she thinks there should be a committee to brainstorm about the talc plant property. Hal said the Conservation Commission, the Town Forest Committee, and others should be involved. Martha said the talc plant property could be on the survey as a possible future facility. Hal and Al agreed. Scott asked about access to the talc plant property. Barbara said there is a right-of-way. Al asked if the town would have to accept the buildings. Barbara said no; the buildings are on a separate parcel. Barbara said the parcel that may be donated to the

town includes about 160 acres. Al asked if the pond remaining on the property could be a swimming pond. Barbara said no; it's too small. Cathy said there are ten ponds; eight of them will be reclaimed and two will be left open for monitoring for the next five years. Cathy said pond #5 is the larger of the two ponds and has the potential to be a swimming hole if it could be left open after the monitoring is complete. Barbara said she thinks pond #5 may be a class 2 wetland. Martha said any future town use of the property would have to go through permitting. Jason said he will come up with a draft survey and start updating the recreational facilities inventory. Jason asked how the PC feels about the ski area becoming a four-season resort. Martha suggested asking that question on the survey and added that it might be helpful for the owner of the resort to know if people want an alpine slide or a zip line. Al said Courtney McKaig was wondering if the PC would like to attend a community breakfast in June to describe their efforts. Al added that Courtney offered to assist with access to existing facilities. The PC agreed to meet on Thursday, June 7th at 6:30 PM. Jason gave Martha some recent employment data for West Windsor. Barbara said if we find that West Windsor is just a bedroom community, that information may affect our recreation and economic development planning.

6. Minutes: March 29th – Consideration of the minutes of March 29th was tabled.
7. Adjourn – **Barbara moved to adjourn at 8:15 PM. Al seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison