

**Johnson Planning Commission  
Working Meeting  
Meeting Minutes  
Sept 8, 2015**

Planning Commission members in attendance: David Butler, Kim Dunkley, Paul Warden, David Bergh, Ben Waterman, Phil Wilson.

Other attendees: Staci Pomeroy, Jim Ryan (both ANR), Melinda Scott (LCPC), Lois Frey, Sue Lovering, Noel Dodge, Ann Marie Bahr (all Conservation Commission), Lea Kilvadyova

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*1. Call to order*

Lacking quorum at the beginning of the meeting, the meeting was not called to order until 7:35 p.m.

*2. Review of River Corridors: Presentation by Staci Pomeroy*

Staci Pomeroy explained that, per legislative request, ANR developed the concept of River Corridors to prevent and reduce future flooding damages to property. During the evaluation of land use permit applications, the State will look at how the proposed development relates to the River Corridor and, if the development is within the corridor, the project may not be permitted.

The River Corridor is defined as a land area adjacent to a river that is required to accommodate the movement of the river over time. The River Corridor consists of this land area and a 50-foot buffer adjacent to the land area.

The State created River Corridors maps for all streams that have a watershed size greater than two square miles. To define the River Corridors, ANR collected a lot of field data. In locations where field data has not been collected, ANR is looking for input from local communities to confirm the accuracy of the River Corridor maps.

Communities that adopt a bylaw that constraints development within the River Corridor get a greater share of reimbursement from the State for expenses associated with repairs necessitated by natural disasters. When adopting the River Corridor maps, communities can make administrative changes to the maps in areas where, for example, a river corridor intersects the downtown, or where an existing road falls within the River Corridor.

In terms of framing Johnson's approach toward River Corridors, Staci suggested that our municipal plan could say that the acceptance of River Corridors is vital along Lamoille, Gihon and lower portion of tributaries highlighted on the map. The upper portions may be less in need of a River Corridor and further investigation is needed to finalize what those would look like.

Kim felt it was important to educate the community about the financial incentives stemming from adopting the River Corridors. Staci said that addressing the River Corridors in the town plan can set us up for further discussion about the Corridors. David Butler said that we can also include in our Plan the goal of working with Staci and develop of what we feel is the most accurate map for our town.

Staci explained that stream crossings are not regulated by the River Corridors. If a stream crossing washes out, the repair of it would be regulated by Stream Alteration Permit regulations.

## *2. Discussion about proposed Energy Chapter of the Town/Village Plan*

Lea suggested that, due to a short amount of time available tonight, we focus on discussing the topic of the siting of large energy projects, particularly the siting of wind turbines. Lea said that she invited the Conservation Commission to participate in the discussion to obtain their viewpoint on how commercial energy projects might impact Johnson's natural resources. David Bergh said that when the Planning Commission discussed this topic in 2013, it could not arrive to a conclusion about how specific we should be in defining the restrictions for wind power development or whether the issue should be mentioned in the plan at all. In the end, the Commission decided not to make any statement about the wind turbines in the plan.

Lea said that the draft language contains a policy that states that Johnson discourages energy projects on Sterling, Butternut and Laraway mountain ridges. Kim said she was surprised that the plan includes specific locations where projects are not encouraged and was not sure how she felt about that statement. Lea said that an alternative statement, also included in the proposed plan, would not specify the locations and instead say that proposed commercial energy projects should be screened by a number of factors including their impacts on wildlife, aesthetics, quality of life, etc.

David Butler pointed out that each ridge named in the plan incorporates three towns. The question is whether our plan should only refer to lands within Johnson's boundary or whether it should refer to view sheds reaching beyond the boundary of the town. Ben Waterman said his understanding was that the plan carries weight only if surrounding towns within the range of the mountains also have the same statements in their plans. Kim said that, having thought about the statement naming the specific ridges where energy projects would be discouraged, she felt comfortable with endorsing it as written. David Bergh said that the reason the statement naming specific ridges jumps out is that it becomes a proxy for an argument of being pro or anti wind. Kim said that she is pro wind but she cares about how it gets developed. The proposed language gives the town some teeth to give an input to the development of wind projects. Ben said that it is hard for him to formulate an opinion without hearing the opinion of the Conservation Commission. Lois said that the Commission has not had a chance to discuss this topic recently. Noel Dodge said that he is a wildlife biologist by profession and in the past seven years his focus was on assessing the impacts of large commercial wind and solar projects on wildlife. Noel thought that the last policy stating the town's position toward large energy projects is worded well. The language is in line with what is already required on the State level.

Noel said that our screening criteria for energy projects could include watershed. David Butler said that the pressure to develop will primarily occur at mountain privately owned mountain ridges. There are small pockets of ranges in Johnson that are privately owned and could be impacted. Kim asked whether, instead of naming specific ranges, we could talk about all ranges surrounding Johnson. Melinda thought that if our plan has a statement that energy projects are discouraged everywhere the town's position on the issue will be weakened. David Butler thought that we should not name specific areas. We should say clearly whether we are supportive or not. He said that naming specific areas where wind projects are discouraged implies permission to develop on other ridges not specifically mentioned.

*3. Approval of Paul Dreher's last invoice*

**David Bergh moved and Paul Warden seconded the motion to approve payment of Paul Dreher's last invoice. All voted in favor.**

*4. Review and approval of minutes*

**David Bergh moved and Paul Warden seconded the motion to table the review and approval of meeting minutes from August 2015. All voted in favor.**

*5. Municipal Planning Grant*

Lea said that from the topics brainstormed earlier as potential themes for municipal planning grant applications, she did not see a theme that would rise to surface as a solid candidate. Lea said that river corridors could be a potential theme but she did not think the Planning Commission had capacity to take a project of that magnitude right now. The Planning Commission agreed to not submit an application. Lois Frey asked whether the Conservation Commission could apply to inventory of natural resources. **David Bergh moved and Ben Waterman seconded the motion to support the Conservation Commission's application, should they decide to pursue it. All voted in favor.**

*6. Adjournment*

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

----- Notes taken by: Lea Kilvadyova