Minutes for Planning Commission Meeting 3/12/2019

Attending: Dawn Bower, Jeff Wheeler, Tom Johnson, Vance Bell, and Bill Dunkel(chair)

Call to order at 6:40

Decision was made by the members to delay the acceptance of the Public Hearing minutes until the next meeting.

Bill Dunkel discussed the attached comments from Nick Low concerning the problems of defining a Ridgeline as all land above 2,000 foot elevation in the Zoning Regulations, as well as in the Enhanced Energy policy and Town Plan. An additional difficultly is that there are numerous properties in the Rural Residential districts above the 2,000 feet that would be totally off limits to any development under the current language in our Zoning Regulations. These include the lands in the following areas: Timber Ridge, Harrington Road, Windham Springs, east of Abbott Road and Woodburn Road, South of Route 121 and Popple Dungeon Road, as well as the old Timber Ridge ski area. Vance showed that some areas east of Abbott Road have slopes greater than 20%, which in our zoning are not permitted to have development. One option we discussed for dealing with this problem is to add another exception to appropriate sections of the Zoning Regulations and Enhanced Energy Plan which would allow these parcels to be developed according to the permitted and conditional uses in Rural Residential districts (Sec. 201.4). Bill will work on drafting language to this effect and will run it past Attorney Low.

Jeff researched other towns for possible solutions and found that Stowe uses a “Ridgeline and Hillside Overlay District” in Section 9 of The Stowe Zoning Regulations. From the Stowe regs -“The purpose of the Ridgeline/Hillside Overlay District (RHOD) is to protect the scenic and ecological resources associated with lands characterized by high elevations, steep slopes and visual sensitivity in a manner that allows for carefully designed, low-impact development.” This was discussed as a possible solution if an appropriate map of Windham could be developed which would specify the scenic resources and ridgelines which we want to protect from all development.

Vance also bought up the idea of developing a map that would highlight the areas of 2000 foot elevation but exclude land in Rural Residential zones. This might allow us to maintain the old definition of a ridgeline as all land above 2000 feet, while providing an exception for parcels in residential areas.

Vance volunteered to work on developing such maps. Bill has contacted Jeff Nugent at WRC about assistance in providing us with better visualization of existing buildings and parcels of land which are above 2000 feet in each zoning district. Bill and Vance may meet with Nugent at the WRC in Brattleboro later this month or early in April.

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, April 10, at 6:30 PM.

Meeting adjourned at 8:10PM.

Respectfully Submitted by Vance and Bill