

Town of Hinesburg

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Wednesday October 26, 2011

Approved November 30, 2011

Members Present: Jean Isham, Joe Iadanza, Carrie Fenn, Tom Ayer, Bob Linck, Ray Mainer, Kyle Bostwick, Tim Clancy, Johanna White

Members Absent: none

Also Present: Alex Weinhagen (Planning/Zoning Director), David & Barbara Lyman, Dennis Casey, Dennise Casey, David Fenn, Elly Coates, Rob Farley, Mary Crane, Paul Wiczoreck, Tom Dillon, Michelle McGee, Bill Lippert, Enrique Peredo, Ken Brown, Carol Jenkins, Bill Marks, Larned & Micki Ketcham, Sally & Chuck Reiss, Maggie Gordon, Jim Goldsmith, Andrea Morgante, John Roos, Jean Miner, Lenore Budd, Miriam Granat, Andrea Haulenbeek, David Hirth, Joe Colangelo, Margery Sharp.

**NOTE – there were several more attendees, some didn't sign in.

Rural By Design Community Forum

Alex W welcomed everyone, and then gave a PowerPoint presentation explaining the Planning Commission's rural area zoning work to date. He explained that tonight's forum was designed to have discussion and get feedback on two facets of this effort:

1. Expanding options for rural landowners by adding to the list of allowed uses to better enable innovative farm/forest based operations not currently allowed.
2. Improve development design standards so as to guide development within Hinesburg's rural areas while preserving important resource areas.

He noted that additional forums will be held to cover the third facet of this effort, which deals with defining maximum residential development densities.

After the presentation, forum attendees were assigned to one of five small discussion groups. These group discussions were facilitated by Planning Commissioners. A list of possible discussion questions was given to each group to help get the conversation flowing. The discussion questions follow, along with the notes taken by the Planning Commissioners for each group.

Discussion Questions:

Rural Uses

1. Would you be in favor if a neighboring farm wanted to have a music and food event once a week through the summer as a way to generate more revenue, boost name recognition, attract customers, etc.? What if neighboring farm or forest land owner wanted to start a weekly day camp during the summer for kids (e.g., Audubon camps in Huntington)? What might your concerns be?

2. Would you support a commercial agricultural use like the cheese caves at Jasper Hill Farm locating on a Hinesburg farm? What about a commercial composting business (like Intervale Compost)? What might your concerns be?

Wildlife

3. Do you think minimizing development impacts in the VT Fish and Wildlife 700+ acre core habitat blocks AND in the corridor areas will adequately address wildlife habitat?

Forest/Farm Access

4. Would you be willing to share your neighborhood road (i.e., private, development road) with logging equipment (infrequently, but intensively during harvests)? What about sharing your road with farm equipment (frequently during the growing season)?

Agricultural Soils

When subdividing property, impacts to important agricultural soils must be minimized pursuant to existing standards in both the local and state-level review process.

5. Not all existing farm land is comprised of important agricultural soils. What's more important to protect – the best agricultural soils or the existing pattern of farm use? Another way to put it... Are you OK with changes to the existing pattern of farm use (e.g., new houses on the landscape, driveways, etc.) if the future potential of productive agricultural soils is preserved?
6. Demand for farm land is not constant. Should future subdivisions be required to keep agricultural areas open if not in active farming – e.g., at least annual or bi-annual mowing or brush-hogging?

Scenic Resources

Development that blocks important scenic vistas from public roads is easy to address once we identify those vistas. The impact of new development within a view or within a larger scenic landscape is more difficult to address.

7. At what point does a cluster of houses (e.g., to minimize impacts on sensitive natural resource areas) look out of place in the rural landscape? Possible factors – context, number of new homes.
8. Are you comfortable with the following general design standard to help retain Hinesburg's scenic character? Development, "Shall be within any woodland contained in the parcel, or along the far edges of the open fields adjacent to any woodland (to enable new construction to be visually absorbed by natural landscape features)."

Discussion Group Notes:

Group 1 – facilitation and notes by Tom Ayer and Carrie Fenn

1. Music and food events – noise is the biggest factor. Need a time limit. Music festivals should not be allowed due to traffic and other community impacts. Day camp idea is OK if scale is reasonable. Event venue (e.g., weddings) is OK, but again scale is an important factor.

2. Cheese cave type of use OK – creates a small amount of traffic. Slaughter house discussed – would need to be buffered, creates waste products and traffic. Need for slaughter house capacity is great within the agricultural economy. Group members disagreed as to whether this use would be appropriate. Commercial composting would need to deal with traffic and odor issues – would need to consider scale and buffering.

3. Wildlife habitat – Focusing on just 700+ acre habitat blocks may exclude smaller areas that also have value. Minimizing development in core habitat areas is a good idea.

4. Access – Logging beats up on roads – shouldn't be expected. Sharing development roads with farming equipment is OK.

5. Agricultural Soils – Preserve existing patterns – agricultural soils are usually used if they really are good. Preservation of agricultural soils is important.

6. Keeping agricultural areas open – no conclusion from the group. There is a need for some mechanism to preserve agricultural soils. Biodiversity of forests is also greater on good soils.

7. Impact of development on scenic vistas – good design is important; need to use common sense and also have landscaping requirements.

8. Design standards – focus on the degree of visibility; forest lands should be preserved.

Group 2 – facilitation and notes by Ray Mainer and Jean Isham

Rural Uses:

- Consider traffic generation caused by the use.
- Need to set criteria, take into consideration the intensity of the use.
- Farm store – consider allowing the sale of other Vermont products
- Compost Facility?
- Slaughterhouse – must meet all state regulations; industrial district might be more appropriate for this use.
- Consider quality of life issues, especially noise generated.
- Consider if the use is going to cost the Town in terms of services and necessary infrastructure.
- Many variables – e.g., type of road (private, paved, gravel), scale & intensity of activity, frequency, neighborhood, noise, vermin, odor, dust, smoke
- Subdivisions should include access for farming or logging vehicles.

Wildlife:

- Preserve corridor areas.
- Preserve the ability for hunting – to safely hunt so that we don't become overrun with any species of wildlife.
- Protect biodiversity by allowing hunting.
- Land on the west side of Hinesburg has more habitat diversity.
- Avoid fragmentation of habitat.
- Consider distance from the village area.

Forest & Farm Access and Agricultural Soils:

- Regarding design standards to have houses in woods or on edge of fields – 1) need to appreciate what it looks like; 2) ecology has as much impact as aesthetics – e.g., a house in the middle of a meadow may be more ecologically sound than one on the edge.
- Regarding road sharing – 1) forestry us is the best use in a designated forestry district; 2) consider compatibility with the area and the uses in that area.
- Remember that certain agricultural and forestry uses are regulated only by the State.

Group 3 – facilitation and notes by Joe Iadanza and Tim Clancy

- There should be incentives for development that is south facing for passive solar in the rural districts.
- Solar, wind and all renewables should be incentivized by not having to pay property taxes on the increased value.
- On open fields and open land - instead of mandating we should educate; perhaps through rural landscape possibilities?
- Much discussion on having commercial business and value added commercial establishments coupled with rural zoning. The devil is in the details...traffic considerations predominate....trailer trucks throughout the day, perhaps not what one expects in a rural area...noise also a consideration.....discussed conditional use perhaps as each situation is somewhat unique. Definitely should not slam the door shut to commercial rural area enterprises related to agriculture/food. One more consideration...does the commercial enterprise change the rural character for others?
- Views and viewscapes...should town get involved...no one opposed...considered a very important part of Hinesburg.
- Elements of a working landscape were fine with folks.
- People liked the idea around primary and secondary zoning/development considerations.

Group 4 – facilitation and notes by Johanna White and Alex Weinhagen

Question #1 – Rural Uses (events, camps, etc.)

- Need to be fair in application of standards – consider keeping uses and standards general so as to be equitable.
- Need to know parameters of the use – might be OK, but need to know more
- Consider noise and frequency
- Consider adjusting existing or creating new performance standards for parking, traffic, etc.

- Consider whether the use is connected to existing uses or is a stand-alone use.
- Consider road capabilities and impacts (public vs. private).

Question #7 – Scenic resources and housing clusters in rural areas

- Clustering should be an option rather than a requirement.
- Clustering is a good idea, but can be problematic – e.g., adequate water supply, impacts on roads, etc.
- Objective should be to keep more land open.
- Clustering provides an ability to multiple homes to have access to the best land for development and the best views – e.g., Orchard Commons project.

New Question – What about the impact of scenic vistas on a landowner’s ability to site a new home?

- Scenic resources are very subjective.
- Scenic issues should become a factor that would require troubling or costly plan revisions.
- With that said, concern was expressed about placing solar trackers very close to the road (e.g., like the 7-8 trackers along Charlotte Road in the village area). The Town installation near the wastewater lagoons is better because it is set back from the road. It was noted that this was also a scenic resources issue, so if we’re concerned about this, we should also be concerned about new house sites in scenic areas too.

Question #3 – Wildlife Habitat

- Are the rules of the game changing for landowners?
- The proposal aims to increase predictability in the development review process, which is a good thing for everyone.
- We should try to maximize our wildlife resources.

Group 5 – facilitation and notes by Kyle Bostwick and Bob Linck

Rural Uses:

- With any use, traffic is a concern, especially on unpaved roads.
- Owlshead blueberry farm in Huntington is more the norm of Hinesburg, as opposed to Boyden Valley Farm in Cambridge.
- Impact of three hours of music, twice a week, seems like a small price to pay to keep farms going.
- Consider destination weddings.
- On-farm cafes – true field to plate?
- Windican Farm – conferences, meetings.
- Bread & Butter Farm in Shelburne
- Pizza on Earth in Charlotte
- Possibly identify parameters (traffic impact, hours of use, etc.) and ask people to submit ideas to fit within a “form-based code”.

Wildlife:

- Compensation options to landowners need to be considered to incentivize open spaces.

Scenic Resources:

- Everybody has their own special place. If the whole town was surveyed, the whole town would be off limits.

Jean I closed the meeting @ 9:15pm.

Next scheduled meeting: November 9, 2011

Respectfully Submitted,

Alex Weinhagen
Director of Planning & Zoning