

**Town of Hinesburg  
Planning Commission  
January 11, 2017**

Approved January 25, 2017

Members Present: Maggie Gordon, Barbara Forauer, John Kiedaisch, Russell Fox, Dennis Place, Joe Iadanza, Rolf Kielman, James Donegan arrived at 7:40 pm

Members Absent: Jeff French

Public Present: None.

Also Present: Dawn Morgan (Recording Secretary), Alex Weinhagen (Director of Planning & Zoning), Laurence Dean (Zoning Administrator interview candidate)

Joe I. chaired the meeting, which was called to order at 7:32 pm.

**Agenda Changes:** None.

**Public Comments for Non-Agenda Items:** None.

**Zoning Administrator Vacancy: Interview a candidate – Laurence Dean**

Alex W. provided background on the Zoning Administrator (ZA) job search to date. He explained that the position is unique in municipal government in that per State Statute the ZA is appointed by the Selectboard for a term of three years. However, ZA candidates are recommended to the Selectboard by the Planning Commission. Alex W. said that the candidate was in attendance at the meeting so the Commission could have an opportunity to interview him and decide whether or not to recommend him to the Selectboard.

Alex W. said that the Town co-advertised and co-interviewed with the Town of Richmond, as they are also hiring a 20-hour per week ZA. The thought was that there might be better applications if candidates would work for both towns – i.e., two part-time jobs that add up to 40 hrs/week. Alex W. went on to say that the positions are two separate jobs for two separate employers/municipalities. He said that at this point in the process the Commission only needs to be concerned about next steps in the Hinesburg selection process (i.e., PC recommendation and Selectboard appointment).

Alex W. said that the pace of development review has been slower than normal, so the Planning & Zoning office is not in staffing crisis mode. Given that, he said that the Commission should not feel obligated to make a ZA recommendation if they feel they need more time to consider the candidate. However, Alex W. said that Laurence is currently the only candidate, so if he isn't recommended and appointed then the job announcement will be reposted to try to get more applicants.

Alex W. said that the ZA selection process to date included:

- A rather long job posting period that began on October 27, 2016 – postings on website, on related VT planning/zoning email listservs, in the VT League of Cities and Towns job board and in one issue of Seven Days.
- Applications were received from seven individuals.
- Screening of applications resulted in interview offers to three applicants – one of which declined and dropped out.
- First interviews with two candidates by the Town Administrator, Alex W., and counterparts from the Town of Richmond (see below).
- Second interviews with two candidates were conducted by Alex W., John K. (PC representative), and counterparts from the Town of Richmond colleagues. Once applicant dropped out after the second interviews.
- There is now one viable applicant for PC consideration.

John K. asked if there is a probationary period to the position. Alex W. confirmed that from the Town's employment perspective there is. However, Alex W. went on to say that there is a Statutory requirement for the ZA position to be held for 3 years. Alex W. said that if, after the probationary period, it is determined that the candidate is not a good match for the position, the Selectboard would need to take special action.

John K. then asked if there was a confirmation of appointment after the probationary period. Alex W. said that for most Town employees, completion of the probationary period is typically an informal process. He reiterated that the ZA position is unique in that it is a 3-year position by Statute so confirmation is generally presumed and the Selectboard would need to take special action if the probationary period did not work out.

Joe I. asked the candidate why he is interested in the position and what excites him about it. The candidate responded that the position combines much of what he has done over the last 25 years (construction, legal work, design, etc.) and he felt those work well together in this position.

Joe I. inquired further as to whether the candidate is more excited about the project & development portion of the job or the prospect of working with different individuals or if there was another specific aspect of the position that he found interesting. The candidate responded that the development portion of the position is what he is most drawn to.

Rolf K. asked if the candidate had served as a ZA before, and if not what experience did he have that was specific to the position. The candidate responded that he has not served as a ZA before but he built his own home and worked with his Town officials in that capacity. The candidate said that he has also worked with developers and Town officials in his previous work and is familiar with the process of permitting, attending development meetings and adhering to zoning requirements.

Joe I. said that it sounded like a number of the candidate's previous positions were dealing with zoning from the developer's side of the project. Joe I. went on to ask the candidate to talk about some of the good and bad experiences and how he might approach things differently now. The candidate responded that he appreciates being able to review regulations and understand how things need to be done. The

candidate said that he has had previous experience where town officials showed a lack of consistency in implementing regulations and he found this frustrating.

Joe I. asked if he thought the lack of consistency was due to a lack of understanding of the regulations, personnel related or something else. The candidate responded that it seemed to be a personnel issue. Joe I. followed up by asking if the candidate's primary concern would be consistency and the candidate confirmed that knowing the rules and applying them consistently makes things easier when working with the public on projects.

John K. asked if there was ever a time when the candidate took a project, went through the regulations, confirmed the project met the requirements and then received a different response from personnel. The candidate confirmed that he has experience working on creating a code review, in which it is assured that plans meet the codes and an understanding of the codes and how the project meets them is then drafted. John K. followed up by asking whether that was part of the candidate's job. The candidate confirmed that it was.

Maggie G. said that the job description mentions tactful interpersonal skills and diplomacy. She noted that some members of the public might have a negative response to a ZA telling them that they cannot move forward with a project they have planned. She asked the candidate how he would feel working with a member of the public under these circumstances and how he would go about relating to them. The candidate responded that he thinks that can be very challenging, but he believes that it goes back to being consistent in interpreting the regulations and working with them on how to fit their project to the regulations. He said that he would keep the interaction professional rather than personal.

Joe I. followed up by asking how the candidate would seek to move toward resolution in a situation where other residents feel that a developer or neighbor is moving forward with a project against zoning requirements or perhaps not meeting up to the conditions of their permit, etc. The candidate said that it would be situational and he would need to fully understand what the issues were before proceeding.

Joe I. then asked what personal skills the candidate thought he possessed to help in a situation like that. The candidate responded that he would keep to the facts as he knew them. The candidate then gave an example of a time that he was able to successfully work to an agreement between a contractor and a vendor who were at odds with one another

John K. referenced an example the candidate gave in a previous interview involving work on a church tower and the frustration the candidate felt in trying to explain the work to other church members. John K. asked the candidate to describe the situation in greater detail to the Commission. The candidate explained the example and said that it was an example of the challenge he sometimes has in explaining work that, because of his technical background, might be clear to him but not to everyone else. The candidate said that one way to approach this is to call on colleagues or other professionals for assistance in explaining so the developer feels confident that regulations are being interpreted correctly.

John K. said that in the ZA position, the candidate might find that he is the only authority and may not have others to call on for assistance. John K. went on to say that, as the candidate had noted earlier, the ZA would need to stick to rules and that can sometimes be difficult to get across to a layperson. The candidate said that he did not realize that the Commission would not serve as backup to the development process.

Joe I. said that the DRB would be the ZA's backup, but on the whole the ZA serves as the first person people work with and it is important that the candidate be able to understand and explain the regulations effectively while assisting people to complete the proper paperwork, etc. Joe I. went on to say that the ZA may be called upon to physically go out to a project and talk with someone whose project other residents have complained about, and that the ZA really serves as the face of the Town of Hinesburg.

Rolf K. expanded by saying that what most of the Commission members were trying to say is that there is a certain amount of empathy and diplomacy that goes along with being strong on enforcing regulations. He said that the ideal goal would be to avoid needing to go to the DRB for backup.

Russel F. said that it appeared that the candidate had the background and education to help people understand the scope of the regulations they are dealing with, but that most people would come in with a very clear idea that they are right and the ZA is wrong. Rolf K. added that some people might believe that their project plans are correct even though they haven't actually read the regulations. The candidate said that he has experience looking at projects from both sides and said that he believes the hardest part of the position could be dealing with personalities. Alex W. said that although the ZA would be ultimately responsible, there is staff in the same office who would be available to ask for historical context and to talk through challenges.

John K. asked Alex W. if the ZA would have time to watch projects more closely now that the department is slightly larger, and gave an example where buildings were built in a different location than the permit called for. Alex W. said that yes, the ZA would have a little more time to watch projects and agreed that the example given was an unfortunate situation. Alex W. said that as a result of the example given, both the Selectboard and DRB have created the expectation that projects will be more closely followed by independent parties.

Barbara F. said that, although Alex W. and Mitch C. would be the first people to serve as support for the ZA, it sounded like the candidate also had a well-developed personal network of colleagues to draw on. Barbara F. asked if the candidate felt that he had been in the area long enough to have knowledge of local developers and builders. The candidate responded that it was an interesting question and said that he does know a lot of people but does not necessarily have a social network of other ZA's. The candidate then said that when he first began discussing the position he was under the impression that there would be resources available to him in town. Rolf K. noted that there are currently 2 retired ZA's in town who the candidate could talk with.

John K. said that the candidate's resume listed software experience with AutoCAD, vector programs, etc. John K. then noted that the job description also requires proficiency in basic computer operation, file management, email, GIS software, etc. and asked the candidate what he could tell the Commission about his experience with those technologies. The candidate responded that he was comfortable with those basic technologies, including Microsoft Word and Excel and email attachments, but said that he did not have experience with GIS software. Alex W. said that the GIS software is used to help people draw maps of their projects and if the candidate is familiar with the other software listed he should not have much issue learning how to use GIS software.

Joe I. inquired about the number of different jobs the candidate has had, some long term and some short term, and asked if it was the nature of the business or if some of the positions weren't the right fit.

The candidate gave an example illustrating that sometimes in the business a person is hired thinking it will be a long term position but then if projects don't materialize then the person is let go. The candidate also gave an example of a position that wasn't a good fit. He summarized by saying that sometimes is was due to lack of work and sometime due to fit, but that he always learned quite a bit at each position.

Joe I. asked if the candidate would be looking for the ZA position to be long-term, mid-term or short-term. The candidate said that he would like it to be a long-term position and is excited by having a new challenge that combines all of the things that he's done in his life so far. The candidate gave an example of his work at Mad River Canoe and the importance of planning to avoid potential issues. The candidate said that he tends to look at things backwards, beginning with the end goal and then considering what needs to happen in order to reach that goal.

Barbara F. asked what the candidate likes to do for fun, and the candidate said that he sings in various choruses as well as an acapella group that performs at nursing and retirement homes. John K. asked if the candidate still canoes and the candidate said that hip and knee replacements now limit his ability to kneel in the canoe but he does still take groups out to teach.

Joe I. asked if the candidate has had the opportunity to read Hinesburg's zoning bylaws. The candidate responded that he has reviewed quite a few.

Joe I. asked if the candidate has read the regulations on energy efficiency and asked what advice the candidate would give as a developer. The candidate said that he is familiar with the State's goals and would advise for passive construction with an emphasis on creating infrastructure upfront. There was a brief discussion about the State's and Town's energy efficiency goals.

Joe I. asked if the candidate was familiar with stormwater issues. The candidate said that although he does not have specific experience with stormwater issues he has worked on projects with stormwater engineers.

John K. asked if the candidate had any questions for the Commission. The candidate said that his question of what resources would be available to him had been answered, and that his other questions were more logistical in nature and more appropriate later in the hiring process.

There was some discussion about if anyone knew how far along the Town of Richmond was in the hiring/interview process, and how far along they were in the revision of their Town Plan.

Joe I. thanked the candidate for his time. Alex W. and the candidate left the room to tour the building.

The Commission decided to discuss the interview at this meeting. There was some discussion about how the hiring of a candidate would be impacted by the Town of Richmond's hiring decision and what the prorated benefits might be. There was also discussion about timing of a hire, given the current lighter work load in the DRB office.

John K. said that he had 2 concerns about the candidate, the first being that the candidate had no ZA experience. The 2<sup>nd</sup> concern was the frustration the candidate expressed when working with people who didn't understand. John K. said that some of the language the candidate used to describe people who didn't understand bothered him.

Rolf K. and Joe I. agreed that the candidate's personality seems to be one where he is more comfortable working with details and less with people. Rolf K. said that he did get the sense that the candidate would be able to manage the people side of the position. Maggie G. said that it would be helpful to work in an office with colleagues who would be able to coach him on the best approach as the face of Hinesburg. Barbara F. said that she also had some concerns about the candidate's interpersonal skills, until the candidate spoke of canoeing with groups, teaching, etc., which demonstrated that he does have the skills to work with people.

Russel F. said that his resume shows experience with technical and detailed positions. He said that it speaks well to be able to manage things in a law firm but that it does take a certain skill to teach with patience.

Dennis P. said that he is leery of someone who works short-term positions and hopes the candidate would not get tired of the position quickly. John K. said that he can appreciate from his experience in architecture that it is not always possible to hang on to people, even if an employer might want to. Joe I. noted that although there are many transitions, there aren't a lot of gaps in employment. Rolf K. said that one employer rehired the candidate, which is also a good sign.

There was additional discussion about the candidate's interpersonal potential. There was also additional discussion about the difficulties of finding appropriate candidates and the nature of the ZA position (part-time, limited benefits, rate of pay, requiring a certain level of knowledge and experience, etc.).

Alex W. reminded the Commission that they do not need to vote to recommend the candidate to the Selectboard tonight, and are free to take additional time. After some discussion, the Commission determined that they would appreciate additional reference checks followed by additional discussion at the next meeting. Alex W. said that he would discuss the matter with the Town Administrator and that John K., as a member of the hiring committee, would be the appropriate person to perform the reference checks.

**Minutes of 12/28/16 Meeting:** John K. made a motion to approve the 12/28/16 minutes as revised and Barbara F. seconded the motion. The Board voted 8-0.

#### **Other Business & Correspondence:**

State Wetlands Office Notice – wetland impact permit application notice – proposed solar array – 952 Magee Hill Road – 4 sq. feet of wetland impact, 713 sq. feet of buffer impact – comment period ends 1/13/17: Alex W. notified the Commission of the notice. No discussion about the matter followed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn Morgan, Recording Secretary