

**TOWN OF HINESBURG
PLANNING COMMISSION
Rural Areas Public Forum & Discussion Session**

February 27, 2008
Approved March 12, 2008

Commission Members Present: Jean Isham, George Bedard, Rodman Cory, Carrie Fenn, Fred Haulenbeek, Will Patton, Johanna White.

Commission Members Absent: Kay Ballard, Joe Iadanza.

Also Present: Alex Weinhagen (Director of Planning and Zoning), Karen Cornish (Recording Secretary), Matt Ketcham, Tammy Ketcham, Kristen Sharpless, Howard Russell, Deb Howard, Lenore Budd, Gerry Livingston, Charles Kogge, Kris Perlee, Larry Ketcham, Matt Baldwin, Dorothy Pellett, Matthew Probasco, Dave Hirth, Dana Hirth, Roger Kohn, Randall Kay, Fiona Fenwick, Gary Fenwick, Tom Dillon, Andrea Morgante, Sarah Armstrong, Jim Collins, Colin McNaul, Wendy Patterson, James Donegan, Chuck Ross, Jonathan Trefry.

A public forum was held in place of the regular Planning Commission meeting. The forum began at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Alex introduced the topic and explained that attendees would be invited to work in small groups that included one or more PC members as facilitators. Each group would be asked to discuss the same six questions. General responses as well as some specific comments were recorded for each group (**see below**). Groups re-assembled in the main hall for a summary of the evening's discussions, as recounted by Planning Commission members. Alex noted that this was the first of several forums that would take place on the subject of rural areas planning and that future meetings would not be limited to discussing these six questions. He also invited participants to join regular Planning Commission meetings, held the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month.

Questions and Forum Group Responses

1. What do you value most about where you currently live in Hinesburg? What attracted you and what keeps you there?

- Agricultural landscape, woodlands and wildlife: *"quiet surroundings"; "value of the working land"; "5 acres gives the freedom to do what I need but keeps me close to neighbors"; "like to live on a dirt road"*

- Proximity to Burlington: *"good business location"; "nearby a large university and Lake Champlain"; "central, convenient location"; "I came here to start a business; Hinesburg is convenient to Burlington and I wanted to have horses"*

- Small town, sense of community: *"low crime"; "I enjoy the connectivity of the community"; "young families, good place to raise a family"; "What keeps me here is the chance to feel like I'm part of a community, a quality that is elusive to many other towns"*

- Recreation and hobbies: *“garden space”; “go out back door and hike in woods”; “town forest for mountain biking”*
- Active farming: *“sustainable”; “I looked for a farm to buy”; “I grew up on the family dairy farm; it is now a working crop farm; it is a nice place to work and very peaceful”*
- Hinesburg Village: *“close to amenities”; “I live in the village; I like the idea of being in a village and walking out the back door into the Russell sugar woods”*
- Affordability: *“reasonably-priced land, at the time”; “Moved here in 1970 because it was reasonably priced back then, something we could afford and good place for kids”*
- Privacy: *“dead-end road”; “In summer I can’t see my neighbors but I know they are close”*

2. Now that we are proactively planning for dense development in the village growth area, do you feel we should plan for more open space and less development in the town’s rural areas? Why or why not?

Most participants responded “Yes”, with these comments/concerns:

- Open space: *“need open space for people to use”; “there is a need for contiguous open space in Chittenden County”; “concentrate growth in the village”; “open space is probably the reason you first bought your property; even if the cows are gone, the rural feeling is still there”; “important wetlands must be conserved”*
- Loss of farm land: *“want farm land to keep it’s value”; “concerned about farm land being considered “wet land”, it just needs to be worked”; “yes, but preserve for agricultural use, not recreation - farmers need a mix of land types, including wet fields, to make it through all kinds of weather years”; “without farmers, the land would not be open, but forested or developed”*
- Planning and execution: *“no single solution”; “2-3 acre zoning is best - can't maintain larger parcels of 5-10 acres”; “area-based density with small lots and larger open, shared land”; “zoning is perceived to be what it shouldn't be”; “put rules and regulations in place now - we have depended for a long time on heavy clay soils and poor drainage to keep housing low but now the state is allowing different septic systems and more housing will be allowed”; “How do you do it fairly? Some people want to subdivide”; “Define open land -- land can be managed for cleared land or forested land”*

3. Should cluster patterns of development (parcels divided into small clusters of house sites with accompanying open spaces) be encouraged in the rural areas, as opposed to traditional patterns (parcels divided evenly by larger house lots)? Why or why not?

A cluster pattern of development allows for greater housing density in certain areas so that separate larger areas may remain open. Most participants responded “Yes”, with these comments/concerns:

- Sense of community: *“promotes communication between neighbors”; people can share garden and recreational spaces”; “there is a shift in development patterns, people want to live in smaller houses on smaller lots with access to common land”*

- Resource preservation and management: *“less fragmentation”; “easier to manage stormwater”; “it’s impossible to log 10-20-30 acre parcels, better to keep forested areas shared for easier management”; “preserves wildlife habitat”*

- Execution: *“clear covenants are needed to determine use of land”; “tuck houses in at tree lines”; “shorter driveways means less impervious surface”; “higher density bonuses can be given for clustering”*

Other participants noted these challenges to cluster development:

“Cluster housing does not work in rural areas, the look and feel does not fit in”

“Each parcel has unique land characteristics, some not suitable for clustering”

“How do you get the preserved land worked so that it stays open? Who does the work?”

“Look at the capacity of the town first; even with clustering, the town cannot support more houses without enough resources for services such as road maintenance, fire/police, etc.”

4. How will intense rural development affect the town’s dirt roads?

Most participants agreed:

- Dirt roads are expensive to maintain and will be more so with more development: *“will need more gravel”; “there will be more pot holes and ruts”*

- Dirt roads are preferable over paved roads: *“provide scenic value”; “make Hinesburg a nice town to live in”; “walking and biking is critical to our community”; “paved roads are more dangerous”; “water quality issues are less with dirt roads due to managed swales and less impervious surface”*

Other comments included:

“What is our ability to economically afford all the roads we already have? Is it reasonable to be encouraging development when road maintenance is already an economic strain?”

“Dirt roads can’t be re-built to anticipate or sustain more development”

“More public transportation is needed; encourage population growth in the village, making it more of a hub”

5. Are there elements of the official map concept that you think should be carried over to the rural areas of Hinesburg? An official map shows future public spaces & infrastructure improvements – e.g., future roads, trails, parks, etc.

An official map designates space for public infrastructure or amenities on public and/or private land (e.g., roads, parks, sidewalks, school sites, etc). If and when the landowner wished to develop the land, the development plan would have to be designed to allow for what is shown on the official map. If not, the Town is given time to initiate the survey and purchase of the land at fair market value.

Many comments concerned what areas or amenities were important to locate on a map:

Trails: *“Trails maps are tricky to create due to issues with privately-owned land”*

Resources: *“identify important natural and community resources such as water sources, prime agricultural land, large forest tracts scenic view and ridgeline protection”*; *“putting resources on a map can help steer development away from them”*

Other comments addressed the official map concept directly:

“I don’t like the official map concept because it tells people what to do with their land”

“An official map can help with the development process because potential issues have been teased out ahead of time”

“The presentation of an official map is important to prevent the feeling that land is being taken”

“The town should not dictate what people can or cannot do with their land”

“Landowners know their land and what it can provide better than anyone else”

“An official map can make development more predictable, easier for a landowner to know what the land is going to be”

“An official map or plan would help the Select Board do budget and other long-term planning”

6. What energy efficiency requirements (if any) do you think are most important to include in the rural zoning?

Discussions were focused mainly on the affordability of building energy efficient homes, and whether the town would mandate requirements that were not economically feasible for everyone. Comments included:

“Don’t mandate requirements if it takes the affordability out of homes”

“Provide town property tax exemptions for energy efficiency measures on improvements and new buildings”

“Provide community solar access”

“All new construction abides by state energy codes”

These topics were also discussed among participants:

Area-based density and other development incentives

Market values of traditional development versus cluster development

Affordable housing, whether this can be achieved in a rural setting

Large landowners’ need to get value from their land; what are alternatives to development?

Landowners who wish to carve off a small parcel(s) for family members

Scale of development should be a “Hinesburg scale”

Wastewater management and how it affects the LaPlatte River

Other business

Jean passed out a draft letter regarding one of the Bissonette project parcels that is due to be purchased and preserved permanently as farm land. The letter is a response to the Vermont Land Trust, which asked for Planning Commission comment. George MOVED to approve the letter as written. Will SECONDED the motion. The motion PASSED 8-0.

The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for March 12, 2008.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted: Karen Cornish