



Town of Hinesburg
Planning & Zoning Department
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Selectboard & Town Administrator
FROM: Director of Planning & Zoning
DATE: December 11, 2014
RE: FY2015-2016 Planning & Zoning Budget

Please see the attached FY15-16 planning and zoning budget proposal spreadsheet. This budget proposal is based on ongoing operational costs (staff salary & benefits, postage, regional dues, etc.) as well as our anticipated projects for the next 18 months. It is markedly different from the budget presented by the Town Administrator, but only with respect to the following line items: salaries, professional consulting, FICA, and benefits.

Staffing

For the second year in a row, you'll see that the budget proposal includes increases for additional staff in the Planning & Zoning Department. The proposed budget would allow for additional professional level staffing equivalent to a 0.6 FTE position (24 hours/week at \$20/hr).

Currently the P&Z Department has 2.5 full time equivalent (FTE) employees which equates to approximately 100 hours/week, not including our recording secretary who covers minutes at PC and DRB meetings. In reality (as noted by the Town Administrator), that total number of hours is lower because the Town Administrator's office has been soaking up more than 50% of our shared administrative position (Renaë Marshall). In addition to restoring our administrative assistant support, we really need another 20-24 hours/week of professional level staffing. As I explained last year, the department has been working at or above capacity for several years. This is not sustainable. It negatively affects productivity and morale, and hampers our ability to deliver the services the community needs and expects. Some sobering perspective from recent community surveys:

Town Plan Survey – summer 2014 – 438 respondents

- **48% of respondents** said Hinesburg is NOT prepared for the challenges we will face over the next 5-10 years. Only 12.5% said we were prepared. We need more output from the P&Z department to address this. Our current staffing level won't allow it.
- **Only 52% of respondents** said that Planning & Zoning was providing an adequate level of service. This was by far the lowest of the nine municipal departments listed in the survey (average was 67%; range was 52% - 85%).

Economic Development Survey – summer 2014 – 159 respondents

- **41% of respondents** identified the “Permitting Process” as a barrier to successful economic development in Hinesburg. Local permitting is part of that process, and the P&Z Department is responsible for administering it. Permitting and regulation will always have detractors; however, our ability to make the process more efficient and understandable is a function of the time we have to manage and improve it. We have been struggling simply to keep up with day to day work flow. We have good intentions and ideas for reform and improvement, but we lack adequate staffing to flesh them out and implement them.

We all have different perspectives on our development review process – e.g., timing, reasons for delay, necessary level of detail, etc. As the Planning & Zoning Department head, my perspective is that the chronic understaffing of our Town government (several departments, including P&Z) is the ultimate cause of slow and sometimes frustrating municipal bureaucracy here in Hinesburg. If we could afford to be properly staffed, we could do more, accomplish it faster, inspire more confidence in the community, and have more satisfied Town employees and volunteers. Peter, Renae, and I strive to deliver a high level of service to everyone who calls, emails, or visits the office. Given our “bullpen” office environment, all of us spend substantial time helping people who drop by the office for information – e.g., landowners, Town committees, business owners, real estate agents, paralegals, developers, and lots of folks thinking of moving to Hinesburg. We’ve tried (and will continue to try) to improve productivity and process efficiency for a few years, but these efforts have not solved the issue.

Just recently, David and Maureen Blanck (owners of the Hinesburg Village Center on Mechanicsville Road) were lamenting to the DRB that it took nearly 60 days to get in front of the Board after having submitted their application. And this was simply for approval of a relatively innocuous small business to occupy a vacant space in their long-standing commercial building. Our longest serving DRB member (Ted Bloomhardt) expressed some dismay that it took so long to get in front of the DRB, but six to eight week lead times are typical due largely to insufficient staffing in the P&Z department. Another reason for my request for additional staffing last year, and again this year.

In the current fiscal year, \$10,000 of professional consulting was added to the P&Z budget to allow for outsourcing of some work. We’ve entered into a contract with the CCRPC to provide assistance, but at \$50/hour this funding only allows for 3-4 hours per week of support. Although I appreciate this additional resource, I remain convinced that it will not adequately address our staffing issue. I believe it would be more effective and more fiscally sound to eliminate this outsourcing, and simply budget for additional in-house staffing. Increased staffing levels will require some reorganization of the department, which I will be happy to plan for if the Selectboard supports the request.

Here are the P&Z Department ongoing and proposed projects for the next 18 months.

FY15-16 Proposed Projects

1. **Town Plan update** (no funds requested) – work with Selectboard to review, revise, and approve PC proposal
2. **Shoreline District Zoning** (no funds allocated) – after Town Plan work
3. **Rural Residential 1 District Zoning** (no funds allocated) – after Town Plan work
4. **Zoning Regulation housekeeping changes** (no funds requested) – if time allows
5. **Official Map update** (no funds requested) – if time allows
6. **Village Growth and Rural Zoning revisions** as necessary (no funds requested) – if time allows
7. **TBD project** (\$4,000, Special Projects) – local match for potential FY16 State planning grant – project to be determined (may be one listed above)

FY14-15 Current Year Projects

P&Z Department Projects

- **Sidewalk Feasibility Study** (\$4,500, Special Projects, carried over from FY13-14) – local match for CCRPC funding – nearing completion
- **Village Stormwater Study** (\$6,000, Special Projects) – local match for CCRPC funding – completion May 2015
- **GIS/Computer Mapping** software upgrade and training (\$4,500 Technology capital budget) – delayed, originally planned for FY13-14

Planning Commission Projects

- **Town Plan Update** (\$2,500, Special Projects) – completion May 2015
- **Shoreline District Zoning** (no funds allocated) – ongoing; began January 2013
- **Rural Residential 1 District Zoning** (no funds allocated) – ongoing; began Jan 2013

Development Review Board Projects

Unpredictable, major projects include:

- **Hinesburg Center Phase Two** (74+ dwelling units plus non-residential uses)
- **Norris** (24 dwelling units)
- **Black Rock, Haystack Crossing** (225+ dwelling units plus non-residential uses)
- **NRG/Blomstrann – anticipated** (100+ dwelling units plus non-residential uses)

Selectboard Projects

- **Stormwater Regulation Revisions** (no funds allocated) – PC proposal sent to Selectboard Nov 2014
- **Hannaford Court Case** (no funds allocated; \$1,000 authorized for mediation; Town Attorney costs ongoing) – court process underway; likely to extend into FY15-16

Capital Budget:

For the third year in a row, the budget proposes a \$3,000 capital transfer to build a reserve to pay for a comprehensive overhaul of the Zoning Regulations. As explained in previous years, I would like to budget for this for three years (FY13-14, 14-15, 15-16), in order to have enough

money to hire a consultant with a fresh pair of eyes to help us with this. Hopefully, we can also leverage some grant funding as a comprehensive rewrite may cost more than \$9,000. Without grant funding, we may have to delay, and continue saving funds for a couple more years. The problem is that after 40 years of tacking on new provisions and adjusting other existing provisions, I feel that our Zoning Regulations are overly complicated, difficult for people to understand, frustrating for us to administer, and likely to collapse under their own weight. My goals for this future effort are to make the regulations shorter, simpler, and easier to understand. I'd like to add graphics, drawings, and other visuals to better explain standards/goals – i.e., add a picture, delete 1,000 words. I'd also like to use this effort to consider a unified bylaw (combines Zoning and Subdivision Regulations), and possibly to consider form-based codes for the village growth area.

Revenue Projection:

Actual revenues from zoning permits, DRB fees, and compliance statements (Bianchi statements) came in above our projection for FY13-14. With that said, overall zoning permits were lower than usual in FY13-14 (compared to the last 5 years), and this year looks to be similar. Zoning permits constitutes the bulk of our P&Z revenue. Given that, my revenue projection for FY15-16 remains the same as our overall projection for this year (\$42,500) – i.e., conservative with no increase. Our lack of municipal water capacity for new development in the growth area may also be a downward drag on applications and revenue.

Important projects/funding recommended for other departments

Town Administrator/Selectboard:

- Capital budget & plan update
- Water & Wastewater allocation system
- Local match for Route 116, Charlotte Rd intersection improvement (amount??)
- Village infrastructure impact fees

Buildings and Facilities:

- Local match for sidewalk construction grants (VTrans bike/ped, VTrans transportation alternatives, CCRPC bike/ped, etc.). We have cost estimates ready.
 - Village North Sidewalk phase 2 – from Riggs Road to CVU Road
 - Route 116 – east side from Mechanicsville Road to Commerce Street
 - Sidewalk segments from this year's feasibility study with CCRPC
- Local match for bike/pedestrian planning grants – CCRPC Unified Planning Work Program. To study and develop cost estimates needed for future construction grants. Per suggestion from Trails Committee.
 - Richmond Road – from Mechanicsville Road to North Road
 - Charlotte Road – entire

Highway:

- Funds for continued planning and design of the new Town Highway Garage and overall site (including CSWD transfer station)