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**Town of Pownal
Planning Board Minutes
Wednesday, July 20, 2022
Workshop Meeting**

Members Present: Matt Altieri, Secretary Christine Watson, Brian Stornelli, Todd Mellin, Marcia Bowen, Orion Breen, Ben Smith with North Star Planning and Recording Secretary: Alison Purinton

Public Present: Tom Hall, Paul Schumann, Andy O'Brien Selectboard, Craig Vosmus CEO, Heidi Curry Selectboard, Pat Hodgdon, Susan Pefers, Heidi Richards, Matt Welch, Bradbury Mountain Wellness, Conservation Commission, Janet Lynch

Meeting held via Zoom

Call to Order at: 7:42 pm by Matt Altieri

Matt- Let's take a 5 minute break.

We are going to take a few minutes break. Please put your name in the chat box for attendance. Welcome, and thank you for showing up. We planned this as a planning board last month, as we are in the beginning stages of an overhaul of our zoning ordinances. The last couple of workshops the conversation have been productive. We have gotten ideas and thoughts of how to implement the objectives of the comprehensive plan. Some can be done thru the zoning ordinances. We're reluctant to move ahead without input from different board members and interested residents so it gets adopted in the end. What do we want in terms of implementation of the comprehensive plan? Other committees or boards are more suited to handle these items, therefore we wanted to talk thru some of those with you. I was hoping to have a discussion and share some of the tools that we have thought thru. You see the word "rural character" over and over again. It means different things to different individuals. It certainly means different things to the public depending on how long you have been here and how you use the land around here. We have some criteria around how zoning works. Typically, that's dimensional; how many lots per square foot or acre. What are the product requirements? What are standards rather than subjective terms like rural character which individuals can interpret differently. We are looking at tools that can create something objective and consistently throughout town. Once you attend a few meetings it becomes apparent early on folks think the planning board has the complete power to grant or deny projects based on if they like or dislike a person, project, or subdivision. Both under state law and under existing ordinances, we do not have the ability to prohibit subdivision. We do hear them regularly and we do have to apply ordinances. This can be tough and difficult to interrupt and can be a little inconsistent. One goal is to make sure our ordinances are consistent throughout. The other major goal is to figure out an objective set of standards to maintain open land and really preserve open character. We have spoken with the Select board and they have agree we will serve as a steering committee along. Northstar will handle the drafting of the actual ordinance. We will provide oversight throughout that process, and they will get approval from the Selectboard. Ben Smith from Northstar planning whom is an expert of planning, planning considerations and policy will discuss some tools the Planning Board consider. The background on why those tools are considered in preserving rural character spaces in town. After that I would like to open the floor to hear what you have to say, and gain an initial set of reactions. We should be doing a lot of listening to hear what people are thinking. We want to make sure you hear the guidance we are getting. I think in some situations are not very intuitive, or not very obvious. We want to make sure we are avoiding pitfalls.

Ben- Shows a presentation that has been built on conversations that had happened with the board and shows folks what these ideas are. I was struck by how much was in the comprehensive plan around reserving Pownal's character and open space. We can have a conversation of what that means and what

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we do with it. Planners love to make plans and love to see plans get implemented. Based on a very broad goal does the town want to reduce the potential of the overall community or minimize the impact of landscape and rural function? Where should most of the homes and business be allowed in town? Are there places to project growth and places to protect from growth? A number of ways to approach is from the point of zoning. It is a big one but not the only one. Dimensional standards apply to shape development. When the planning board reviews projects how are they laid out? How is the design of new structure going to fit in with the existing infrastructure. One is affordable housing. We will have to wait and see what legislature decides around that, and how it impacts us. At the state level there is a policy to encourage affordable housing. Right of Way standards can be used as a way to discourage or shape development. Road standards should be looked at, it has a big impact on the environment from a storm water standpoint. What the road looks or feels like which is an important to rural character. Open space plans, The Royal River Conservation Trust has goals they are working on. It might be worth considering how an open space plan can add value. Tax programs, The Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program is a cousin to the forestry use program. Those programs are used for productive uses rather than development. A program that reduces the property owner taxes in exchange for conservation for twenty years. It can buy you some time. The slide show is presented. How do we regulate development? Today, we use minimum lot size. Density and dimension are not the same. How is development going to happen within parts of town? That is the community conversation to discuss. Matt- Anyone have questions for Ben?

Tom Hall- Is there any talk about managing the revenue base in the Town. As we grow to whatever level services would need to be updated?

Matt- One area that comes in very clearly is the impact ordinance. I think that is in the process of being amended. We need to consider the effect on town services and revenue. That is a category of things that can't be a planning board decision. That is really guidance from the selectboard and perhaps the finance and capital plan committees. It is something to think about, it is not the scope of work the Planning Board.

Ben- The 20-acre field with the house in the corner is not demanding. There may be a couple of kids in school. If you think of that same field with 10 houses in it. They would be demanding more services. The farmer that farms 20- acres of woods. Is low demand but also low value. Where communities feel a pinch, is when they get in between places.

Comment- How would they pay their own way when it is the value of the lot. The value of the lot doesn't go to the town. It goes to the person that sold the lot.

Ben- Value is more the taxable value of the property. Every year the value of that property is demanding certain services but also paying a tax revenue.

Comment-I have a hard time seeing how that would work in Pownal? We are so small.

Paul- I really was not referring a need for growth for the town of Pownal. Our services are growing faster than our revenue. It's time to update facilities and you only have a few supporting that. It's a balancing act.

Andy- We have 3 zoning districts. Residential A & B which are virtually identical. Then we have a Village District. Are you looking at everything as separate districts? Maybe make the Village district a little less restrictive?

Matt- How should we think about the existing zoning districts that are in place. We have started the process in thinking about that from very early on. We want to make sure that opinions are heard/voiced. Should we have very significant differences between the village and residential districts? Should we think about contemplating new districts all together? Talk in the past has been about how special North Pownal is. Does it need its own set of zoning requirements to preserve it?

Andy- Look at village district and see what the limits could be vs. where they are now. Encourage some growth in that area to support the town's future needs.

Matt- Andy your thoughts would be to increase some residential growth?

Andy- Not residential necessarily but some commercial that would fit within our comprehensive plan.

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Matt- We should focus on allowing commercial development within the village district.

Andy- That is what I think. I think that is what Paul was driving at.

Tom- How much latitude do we have to restrict development? In rural areas you can do X. In larger areas you can do Z. Do we have the right to restrict like that?

Ben- The town has the ability to set zoning standards. You certainly have the right to shape development. What is tough is if you try to downsize development. There are ways to work with folks outside of zoning. Zoning is something the town has control over which is important. It also has the potential to create tough conversations.

Matt- I would love to hear folks reaction to what Ben just mentioned.

Janet- This presentation has been very interesting; zoning is just one instrument. A more creative approach makes sense.

Andy- Restriction of lot size is cutting off your nose. You will have a accessory building(s) and they will cover that lots in quite a few outbuildings.

Ben- That is a fair point. There is a way say we go from 3 acre to 10 you will not discourage the number of building permits. Except instead of 30 acres, it will be 100 acres. The way it presents itself will be the opposite of what you are looking to achieve.

Heidi- I think about what I hear is dis-hearting.

Matt- Please feel free to submit comments in writing.

Heidi- I appreciate all the comments about residential development. I also want to bring the conversation back to the expansion of Village district along the Route 9 corridor. As far as residential development I feel our current zoning has created a lot of sprawl with a driveway every 300 feet. A home close to the road and the open space out back. We are losing our rural character with just that. I would be in favor of looking at a open space requirement. What would that look like as a cluster? The maintain to open space and I don't think we are doing a good job of that now even with the minimum lot size.

Brian- I agree with Heidi. We could increase road frontage which would limit the number of homes but would also spread houses out. Setbacks are a big thing. Pushing homes back especially when you have homes 30 feet from a 50 mph road. Setback to see more trees and fields.

Matt- Ben, how do you see setbacks about density?

Ben- Larger setback or buffers are important. Goes to slide.

Setback alone is the one silver bullet. When you look at a group of homes where there is a driveway every 250 feet and the hayfields are now front yards here are just big lawns.

Matt- Are there tools to use that we can be flexible to address those needs?

Ben- There are some great examples that Towns have adopted standards and did the development around them. Looking at zoning for things that are not in that process. People can go into the field office get the lot approved and then 5 years later get the next lot approved the same way. Over a period of time you have less control than you would have if you looked at it all at once. You can set some boundaries in the zoning ordinance itself around a few of those concepts.

Matt- I want to move the conversation to other areas that other boards maybe pursue outside of what we are able as a board. My perspective there are two big categories that fall outside the scope of our work.

1. Potentially identify parcels of land that may be put into conversation. It would accomplish a lot in Pownal. That falls to the conversation committee. The Selectboard needs to be involved with approval. Does anyone on the conversation committee have thoughts on this?

Janet- By the times someone comes up with a proposal you are in a reactive space. It would be good idea to identify these areas whether it is environmental, forested, or land the towns people enjoy walking, hiking, etc. It does seem a good idea.

Matt Welch- We are working on that. It is great idea to have a list of properties to work on Allen farm is over 100 acres and already on our radar. There has already been some discussion to the Maine Farmland Trust.

Matt- We are happy to be a sounding board.

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Matt Welch- If people have specific property, please let us know. If people want to donate a specific amount of money earmarked for conservation is that a possibility or does it go into a pool?

Brian- You could talk to Allen with Royal River Conversation Trust. You could also do something like the Berry Farm.

Janet- Question for Paul. At Town meeting didn't we talk about gifts to committees and how that works, or was that with the recreational committee?

Paul- It gets a little gray with the town buying property.

Janet- Definitely speak with Royal River Conservation trust. You can say I want my gift to go to Pownal. The other category is highlighted in the comprehensive plan. There are grants for Maine Community Foundation, it's something to look into.

Matt- I would like to Segway into what are next steps are; The board tonight scheduled a workshop in terms of zoning. I am guessing we really won't have a change from Ben until at least two more workshops. We will provide public notice of those. I will try to include you in those notices, and it will be a fair amount of work. Our work needs to be productive and move along to get approved.

Ben- I would encourage people as they think about this more, think about setbacks and buffers are certainly issues. We need to do something dramatic, or we won't recognize this place in 20 years. I personally know that ordinances are a constant change. Should we think this is the first step in a multistep process or are we going to go for an ambitious set of changes?

Andy- There are changes that need to be made but we need to weigh the pros and cons so we are not re-inventing the wheel every six months. We need to move forward cautiously but with purpose.

Janet- I don't want to move to quickly with commercial development. I would like to see it defined.

Paul- We should go far enough to add some clarity. No one agrees on what a village district is. More clarity to help us get a handle of rural character and tax base that would support it.

Todd- The website the Marcia posted to the board spoke about the same idea that Ben did for a different take. Living on a Merrill Road and some developments going up here I feel a sense of urgency. Even if we make mistakes plan for the mistakes to be corrected.

Heidi- A lot of people live in Pownal because of a rural lifestyle. Lots of little lot sizes, changes the priority over time.

Matt- I appreciate the conversation it has been very productive.

Thank you meeting adjourned at 9:01pm

Respectively submitted,

Alison Purinton

Planning Board Recording Secretary