

*Pownal Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting*

September 29, 2020

6:30pm @ Mallett Hall

Present: Coren Wheeler, Heidi Curry, Christine Watson, Russ Schmidt, Susan Peters (All via Zoom)

Excused: Kathy Hogue, Joan Mueller

Absent: Jon Morris, Adam Haynes

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:35.
2. The minutes of September 8 2020 were unanimously approved with one addition.
3. Finances: Susan had nothing new to report as there have been no new expenditures.
4. Marcia introduced the topic of land use by indicating that there have been 53 new building permits granted since 2016, an average of around 10 per year. She got those statistics from the Town's spreadsheet provided by Molly White. She also said that there were varying population estimates, once indicating that the population had grown by around 200 since 2016 and another indicating that it had grown only by 40. Coren said she had found the same issue and also wondered what additional statistics needed to be provided in the housing section- number of houses? Affordability? It was suggested that the Town Assessor could provide the exact number of houses in town and perhaps mean or median value. Coren will contact her.
5. There was a lengthy discussion on the need for a State Approved Plan. Russ caught up with Will Johnston and Tom Miragliuolo from State Planning. Russ asked Will whether seeking an exemption (as Durham has done) or defining a growth area would be preferable. Will emailed back saying that he would consider and will get back to him. He said he would be a best resource for style and formatting. Heidi said a third option is not to get bogged down with getting approval from the State. Russ said that in speaking to the State, Tom thought it would be viable to secure an exemption and Russ thought it would not be a lot more work. The advantage is that it lessens liability from lawsuits and could be helpful for grants/loans. Also, without a State- approved plan and designated growth area, we cannot set a building permit cap. Russ said Tom said very few towns have exemptions. There was agreement that do not want to make "something up". Heidi is not aware of grants that we have gotten in the past so this should not be a big deterrent. She does not think legal issues will be a problem since we have a Town attorney. If we can't set building caps, Heidi thought "buttoning up" ordinances would address the issue. Russ indicated that the state would be the one that establishes the minimum number as a building cap using an algorithm based on previous permits. Susan wondered about the repercussions by Town residents if our plan is not accepted by the State. Russ also said that the information that the state gave us was generated in 2018. We need to get our plan completed by April 2021 in order to rely on that information (it is regenerated every 2 years so expires in spring 2021). Since our plan was to have the document approved at the town meeting in 2021, our information would need to be updated unless we were able to complete earlier and vote on at a special town meeting. Heidi felt that the Plan is a tool for the Town and is based on resident opinions and that approval from Augusta in her

mind was not important. Susan thought that surveys brought in such a low proportion of residents, she didn't feel it was important. Christine agreed that she did not see a benefit. Russ thought it might be worth the extra effort, perhaps 15%, that could be devoted to getting better information. We should ask Will but our notes reflect that he felt it was not so important. We should ask selectmen, etc. what information would provide the best tools for their needs. Russ felt that if we keep going as we are and try to secure an exemption, we will likely be approved but no big deal if we don't. Marcia said that regardless of whether we submit the plan or not, secure an exemption or not, it will be important to think about how we plan for future growth. Heidi felt it was not the Plan's role to do this. Christine noted that survey respondents wanted a village plan and also to keep Pownal rural. She felt the ideal growth area would be in the village. Coren also reiterated that town's people wanted improvement in the Town center and there were other unmet needs (public works, affordable housing, etc.) – where and how will that take place? Russ said that Tom from State Planning said we can NOT designate a growth district (defined as 75% of development occurs there) but we are simply “kicking the can down the road”. Christine felt given the survey results it would behoove us to have some plan for the village. Marcia wondered if we should assign a committee to further develop a development plan for the Town center. Christine felt that was actually what we were supposed to do, perhaps the role of an economic development committee. Heidi said the plan's goal is to present survey results and didn't want us to get bogged down. She urged committee members to consider joining the Planning Board or starting an economic development committee. Russ asked other members to send him thoughts on land use for him to incorporate into the section. Coren felt that we were basing a lot on only 20% of the Town's survey returns (note: there were 375 surveys returned). Christine felt that those that cared responded. Coren wondered if we needed to consult other committees. Heidi said that the Planning Board was eager to get the plan so that they can begin rewriting ordinances. Marcia said earlier we had considered sending the goals and strategies to some of the committees- some have been written but not reviewed. Russ will plan on submitting the plan with a request for an exemption; Marcia thought there was no reason not to focus development in the village center without designating it as a growth area. Coren expressed worry that a super-convenience store could move into the Center. Christine said the Planning Board is in the process of developing architectural standards and is working on subdivision plans. Would that prevent a big box from moving in? It's a work in progress.

6. It was decided by those present (Heidi had left the meeting at this point) to submit the Plan to the State and NOT to designate a growth district but to seek an exemption from the State.
7. Formatting: Coren Russ Christine Susan Marcia all agreed that they would prefer to see the goals and strategies and executive summary at the beginning of the document.
8. Meetings will be held through zoom, 6:30pm as follows:

September 29  
October 13  
October 27

November 10  
November 24  
December 8

Respectively submitted,

*Marcia Bowen*

*Committee Members:*

*Marcia Bowen, Heidi Curry (Select Board), Adam Haynes, Kathy Hogue (Chair), Jon Morris (Select Board), Joan Mueller, Susan Peters, Russ Schmidt, Christine Watson, Coren Wheeler*