

APPROVED  
AS WRITTEN  
4/10/18

*Pownal Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting*

February 13, 2018

6:30 – 8:00pm ~ Dewitt Room / Mallett Hall

Present: Kathy Hogue, Matt Schmidt, Heidi Curry, Susan Peters, Joan Mueller, Coren Wheeler, Marcia Bowen, Will Johnston, Jon Morris

Excused: Adam Haynes, Christine Watson

## MINUTES

1. Marcia volunteered to be the secretary for the meeting.
2. The minutes of January 9, 2018 were unanimously approved. Heidi asked if we could rename the “to do” list to “action items” and put it at the end of the minutes. They can then be copied and added to the next agenda. All agreed this was a great idea.
  - a. Guest Speaker, Will Johnston gave a presentation on updating your Comprehensive Plan. He has been working on comprehensive plans since the early 80’s prior to the enactment of the State Growth Management Act. Once the State adopted the Act, there was a lot of energy around planning plus funding was available. Since then, there has been less emphasis (and funding- the State Planning Office was disbanded and there currently are only two staff planners) on Comprehensive Planning. Will recommends looking at how other municipalities are creating their plans. Will wrote the handbook that describes on what was working, what is not working in Comprehensive Planning. (He admits it was too long). In it he included 50 recommendations for improved effectiveness. Joan volunteered that when she was on the planning board, they relied on our Plan, particularly for ordinance review, Back Lot and Single Lot ordinances in particular. The committee agreed that school consolidation and the RSU should be addressed in survey. Will said that the biggest criticism of Comprehensive Plans is that they “never see the light of day”. Pownal may be an exception since we do use it. He likes that we are starting with the existing plan. Also recommends developing a small list of achievable items and avoiding vague words like “explore”. He recommended that we look at what has been implemented, what hasn’t been and more importantly why. He thought a matrix composed of “task, date, who, result” might be a simple way to easily and visually what has been accomplished and also can be used for future assessment. He cautioned that we need to be careful on the amount of work that is assigned to each group, and if new committees are recommended, be sure it be feasible to find willing volunteers. The Ordinance review committee was given as example of one that grew out of Comprehensive Plan and will be instituted again. Some towns create an Implementation Committee to ensure follow up on the Plan’s recommendations. Most Comprehensive Plan committees do not have the stamina to continue with implementation. This might work for us. Our Capital Improvement Committee is a good example of integration of the Plan and implementation. Will also recommends tapping the various Town committee’s for data.

Looming issues: Education and taxes and how sustainable are they given the lack of industry/commercial.

3. State approval? Pros and cons: The State evaluates for consistency with Growth Management Act. He doesn't think our 2006 Plan was submitted to the State. There used to be a strong benefit for State evaluation, but incentives are not as strong as they used to be given the decimation of the State Planning Office. Currently the State has a Municipal Planning Assistance Program (Phil Carey). The benefit of State approval is it can protect the Town against lawsuits that claim Town ordinances are arbitrary. The downside is that the State may say that the Plan is not consistent with the Act. Will recommends that we have a conversation with the State in advance of submittal to get a sense of whether it would be accepted. The State seems to have become more lenient. Will said the Town's focus has been on protecting resources/lands/rural character, which is good. However, Town has never embraced designated growth areas with smaller lot size, smaller setbacks, etc. This could be a benefit in terms of grants, developing growth ordinances with fees, etc. If we don't submit, we don't have to adhere to the review criteria established by the State. The benefit of this approach is that you can be more creative in terms of things like streamlining, focusing on key issues, or formatting for social media. Will said that outreach is now easier because there are more resources today but that people's attention span is shorter Other recommendations:
  - a. Needs Assessment: determine what was implemented, what was not, and why it wasn't. Perhaps use a divide and conquer approach.
  - b. Inventory: don't get bogged down with too much information in terms of inventory- he called it "inventory overload". Save some time and energy for the rest of the process.
  - c. Public outreach- Facebook, social media are all good but sometimes you need to meet people in person.
  - d. Upfront Visioning Process: Where do we want to be in 2038?
  - e. Maps and graphics: These needs to be updated-people are visual. Color is essential. He provided us with copies of those provided by "Beginning with Habitat", Bill Hancock. They are available as 11 X 17" pdf format files on their website. Bill is willing to be a resource for us.
  - f. Matrix approach to recommendations: include accountability and time frame.
  - g. Open Space: Bradbury Mountain Park, the Pineland Corridor, and RRCT put Pownal in a great position in terms of open space. But what about future growth and commercial development vis a vis high property taxes? The rural nature of our town also does not address affordable housing and poverty. Even in 2006, there was concern about high property taxes and people not being able to stay in their houses.
  - h. Other resources: The State Municipal Planning Assistance program will have a packet of information available to us in May. Russ has been in touch with them as well.
  - i. Be careful of population estimates. Generally GPCOG and State are overly optimistic. Our population has decreased. The number of housing starts is a better estimate for population growth since the number of people in each household is getting smaller. Pownal's population has decreased. The reason is not known- could be due to the downturn in the economy or high taxes? Will said

that RSU5 issues have been largely resolved and the high school renovation and new track will all attract young families.

- j. Joan remembers that we didn't submit the last Plan to the State because we were unique in that we didn't have a single lot subdivision ordinance. Ultimately we did adopt one. There is also a possible exemption given we don't have a lot of public services. Russ mentioned that there isn't a lot of property available so the likelihood of a creating development center is small even if it is in the Plan. Will said that some Towns have created a floating zone for commercial/industrial use with certain criteria. This allows an openness to development. An important question is whether the Town want to be purely residential. Coren has a vision of a cooperative market (produce, basics, art) with profits going to benefit the Town. This would create a hub with public participating. The Village Store in New Gloucester is an example. New Gloucester is also trying to create an Upper Village (smaller lots, smaller setbacks, moving salt shed, public water). North Pownal is also a community of its own and has a fire station. Maybe Pownal can't support two village centers. Sue mentioned that Kevin Nadeau has been working on Durham's plan for a year. Their previous plan was rejected by the state and the planning committee had disbanded by the time they received comments. Durham has already spent \$30-50K on its plan. In terms of education, Durham's Planning Committee is not doing anything with respect to RSU5 with the exception of Durham facilities.
4. What has been completed from 2006 plan? Jon thanked Will for giving us his insights. Jon provided some insights into the history of our land use documents. Originally there was the sense that Pownal would be a rural outlier, that the Town was already linked by a few (8) large families, the Grange, Red Men, and Fire Department. So there wasn't really a need to be more than a rural community. Those original people wrote the early documents including valuing land at low rate so that people could keep their land. It's only the most recent assessment that made our Plan more in line with the State's guidelines. The 2006 Plan was a "tug into modern times". From the Selectmen's point of view, the Plan is the Bible, guiding decision making such as that for the new Cider House. Sometimes the ordinances and codes are not completely specific, so reference is made to the Plan for guidance. Jon said that even if all tasks given to Selectmen have not been completed, they have been examined. Joan said the ambiguity in ordinances has helped keep Pownal the way it is. Heidi felt that the ambiguity does not help us to be prepared for inevitable change. How do the new folks feel and what about the original families? We need to be open to all sides. Will said there is a difference between guidance for policy vs. being even-handed in ordinance interpretation. Russ felt more could be done to have the Plan's results trickle down to ordinances. Jon said that was the intention but instead committees preferred ambiguity. As a result, the ordinances have been legally challenged, which is a cost to the Town. Jon's feeling is that we could quickly review the results but it is more important to be visionary. He hopes that Ordinance Review Committee will work closely with this committee.
5. Computer and Wi-Fi access for meetings? Yes, Scott has the information on name and password.

6. Google docs, review and training – Jon felt that perhaps we are more of a paper and pencil and paper group. Google docs allow real time editing with access for all. Google docs also enables linkage to other documents. According to the Maine Municipal Association, since we are a municipal committee, the documents would need to be accessible to the public for viewing but not editing. The alternative would be to bring in new work to the meeting. Heidi felt that using Google docs would streamline the process so that we can be working simultaneously in between meetings; it will be important to streamline the process in order to avoid burnout. Marcia said that it will be important to have an alternative method for anyone who does not feel comfortable with Google docs. Those who have computers could bring them in to next meeting. Will recommended that we “frontload” the Plan’s format. He recommended organization along the lines of vision, policy, steps, and recommendations. If we stick with original format, he recommends that we add an executive summary at the beginning. We need to decide the format that will be most accessible for the Town population. Sue also suggested a glossary. Our 2006 plan tried to define “rural character” but did not have a glossary.
7. Recommended for next time: review original survey questions. Evaluate what worked last time, what should be eliminated, and what new questions should be added. Heidi suggested we conduct two surveys: the first survey would help define the vision for the Town and the second survey could be used to refine goals/recommendations. The Planning Manual suggests two surveys: preference (proposals and recommendations) and attitude (values of Town). Heidi also suggested having formal conversations with neighbors to solicit input. Jon said from selectmen’s perspective, the Plan should be based on a democratic process that elicits as many ideas as possible. Will suggested using Survey Monkey is a possibility, but requires yes no answers. Public input is critical using a variety of methods-forums, meetings, surveys, etc. We need to get the younger generation involved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20

**Action items;**

Review the original survey questions and come to the meeting with ideas for the new survey.

Come with suggestions for Plan Format

Review Needs Assessment- what items have not been accomplished.

Jon: prepare presentation on Google docs. Bring computers if you have one.

Respectively submitted,



Marcia Bowen

*Committee Members:*

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