Westmore Planning Commission Date: June 24, 2025 6 PM

Minutes

Attending: Greg Gallagher, Bob Kennedy, Randy Knaggs, Ethan Swift, Andrew Zebrowski, Alison Lowe, Liam Abbate, Carol Davis, Peggy Zimmer, Deborah Baskin, Miriam Simonds, Donna Dzugas (ZOOM),

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| Topic | Discussion | Outcomes |
| Call to Order | Bob called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. He read the rules of conduct. He noted that the agenda today would consist of information from Alison Lowe and Liam Abbate from the NVDA. He noted that this information as well as other changes in state law may necessitate a revision of the Westmore Town By-Laws |  |
| NVDA discussion | Alison began by noting that she had planned to print copies of VT Act 181 but did not and will send it in email to distribute. Act 181 primarily encourages new housing development by reducing permitting requirements under [Vermont's land use law, Act 250](https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=b3f6a4e4ace9f962&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS728US728&q=Vermont%27s+land+use+law%2C+Act+250&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=2ahUKEwiUxbTK1MaOAxVlAHkGHfodKR4QxccNegQIEBAB&mstk=AUtExfCH67W0k8gHhVkaiizokT1xnBlgeZrF47KRtrcaE543A9Bvo-HKYHHWxsaiHu27L5LPp8PTlLGXpmXcqtlQi8nFBpsXJGDT5vRv-kIKpcKBgJjTF8KXPvgqzFnBiWKvIl8Mm7kck4SCItM0m7nN82aJHmVJwz0pcnd_BuYf-IZsuB0igKpiaDn1xkpXSjATzunp&csui=3). It may relax restrictions currently in place for some areas. The changes in land use may affect the current town plan, which is due to be rewritten by summer 2026.  Alison explained the how the new legislation permits a designation as a Village Center that was previously not allowed. A Village Center designation is used for smart growth, not necessarily for dense development. It is a low barrier way for towns like Westmore to participate in Village Center benefits. It also effects historical buildings and makes the town more competitive for grants.  Westmore’s town plan expires in 2026 and she feels the process should begin as soon as possible. She is there to help point out areas that should be addressed. They are currently creating a new land use map of the Northeast Kingdom. The map was presented and Liam explained that it does not include land currently in conservation. The proposed area for a Village Center was shown in dark pink. Light green designated resources for recreation.  Alison noted there is some discretion to expand the Village Center area to the recreation area (North Beach), which would include the recreation area for eligibility for the benefits. One program that can help Westmore is the Better Connections Program, which supports accessibility, including transportation, in designated Village Centers. The master planning can go beyond the designated area.  Another resource is the Community Investment Board (Agency of Commerce and Community Development - ACCD), which provides support for local development projects. This is another way that a Village Center designation would support the revision of the town plan and provide access to grants and services.  Alison noted that the new flood plain maps are not public yet and are only to be used by the towns for review and planning. She reminded us that any development must include a 250 foot vegetative buffer.  There was discussion about how the Village Center designation may make it possible to lower speed limits in that area. Currently there is an application for level I (Step One)designation but not level II (Step Two).  Step One was established to create an accessible path for all villages and will be an automatic approval when the region’s future regional land use map is approved. Step two will include additional benefits.  Alison explained that there will be training for Step 2 and that there may be support for “traffic calming” actions. She suggested that we reach out to Kelly Poor at AARP to schedule a walkout. She also said the VTRANS and ACCD may be able to help with planning.  Ethan asked about municipal planning grants and Alison responded that the application period is usually August- September with awards in December. She noted that the ACCD grants are very competitive.  Bob asked if, with the need to develop a new town plan, would it be necessary to change the by-laws? There are other changes at the state level that could necessitate other changes as well.  Alison discussed the development of a new town plan. The current plan identifies areas for special protection such as the Willoughby cliff area. There are established priority areas such as the scenic view sheds. The new land use maps will influence designations like these in the new plan. She suggest that we review land that has special value and make sure they are adequately protected. NVDA is updating the regional transportation plan and that should be considered. She suggested going deeper in forest protection.  She noted that the energy plan can be updated to reflect standards for substantial deference based on compliance with VT Act 174 (2014). She said that the 15th planning goal, equitably distributing economic benefits and burdens related to energy, should be considered. One example is municipalities that have accessed weatherization resources for residents.  There was a discussion of the issue of available and affordable housing, especially in Westmore where much of the current and proposed housing may be for short-term use. Alison felt a short-term housing registry could be helpful. She noted that towns can regulate short-term rentals. Legislative initiatives are supporting development of increased long-term housing.  Greg asked if the river corridor rules would be subject to VT State regulations and Alison responded that it would be basically the same, build away from any brook. Rules regarding vegetative buffers will remain in force.  Miriam asked if the NVDA land use and development plan would be presented to each town. She asked who has the authority to approve the district plan. Alison responded that there would be two public hearings for the region and that, following those and any revisions, the plan would be presented to the VT Land Use Review Board for final approval. Because development of the town plan will be influenced by the regional plan it will be important to stay in close communication with the NVDA, The regional plan will be completed in August 2025 and will be reviewed prior to submitting for approval.  Peggy asked if there is anything to prevent the development of a pedestrian walkway and Alison responded that there is nothing preventing this.  Donna asked about the issue of telecommunications.  Alison said that outreach and communication should be used to get feedback on the new town plan. She suggested that having robust ways for community engagement would be very useful in developing the plan. | The link to the NVDA website is here:  <https://www.nvda.net/>  The link to Act 181 is here:  <https://act250.vermont.gov/new-land-use-review-framework-act-181>  The link to the Village Center designation is here:  <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/designation-programs/village-centers>  A summary of Step 1 and Step 2 Village designation is here:  <https://law.justia.com/codes/vermont/title-24/chapter-139/section-5803/>  Link to ACCD Municipal Planning Grant here:  <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant>  link to VECAN’s guide to local energy plans here:  <https://vecan.net/act-174-and-municipal-energy-planning/> |
| Approval of minutes 6/24/25 | The minutes of June 24, 2025 were approved with Greg so moving and Randy seconding |  |
| Adjourn | The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 with Randy moving and Bob seconding.  The next meeting of the Westmore Planning Commission will be on Tuesday, July 22, 2025 at 6:00PM |  |

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Kennedy, Clerk, Westmore Planning Commission