

Town of Hinesburg
Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
March 27, 2024

APPROVED April 10, 2024

Members Present: Barbara Forauer, Lenore Budd, John Kiedaisch, Alison Lesure, John Little, Denver Wilson

Members Absent: Becky Alford, Nick Chlumecky, James Donegan

Staff: Alex Weinhagen (Director of Planning & Zoning)

Public Present via Zoom: Margaret McNurlan, Jennifer Decker

Denver W. **called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 PM**

1. Agenda Changes: None.

2. Public Comments for non-agenda Items: Jennifer D. asked about the Act 250 decision issued for Hinesburg Center 2. Alex W. explained that Act 250 denied the project based on one criterion related to floodplain. Alex explained how the developer or other interested parties are able to appeal the decision at Environmental Court.

3. Minutes from March 13, 2024 meeting:

Denver W. **made a motion, seconded by Lenore B., to approve the minutes from 3/13/24 as written. The motion passed 6-0.**

4. Community Vision Survey Results:

a. Take-aways from questions 1-30:

Alex W. asked the Commissioners if they had any take-aways from the quantitative questions (#1-30) that haven't already been discussed at previous Planning Commission (PC) meetings.

Lenore B. said that she was alarmed that so few respondents (5.77%) felt that Hinesburg is prepared to face the top challenges over the next 5-10 years (question #5). Lenore wondered who the respondents thought should be addressing these challenges (i.e., town staff, volunteers, or a combination) and whether this could be an appropriate topic for one of the focus groups. John K. asked if there were specific comments about not being prepared to address the top challenges (controlling property taxes, managing growth & development, traffic congestion and affordable housing).

Jennifer Decker said it would be interesting to explore some of the issues that polarize people. Jennifer said she saw a lot of criticism in the survey responses, but felt that the results validated the fact that people in town broadly care about conservation. Jennifer also said that her personal experience has been mixed levels of support from town leadership about issues that are important to people in town.

John L. said the wording and placement of questions #4 and #5 could have impacted the survey results. He thought that by providing respondents with a list of 12 potential challenges to choose from could have been viewed as an acknowledgement that those are issues the town will face, which in turn led respondents to answer question #5 in the negative. Alex W. said that he took

the results to indicate that people generally do not have confidence in our ability as a community to manage those issues. Lenore B. said it bothers her to hear “we” and “they” aren’t doing this or that, and suggested that someone shouldn’t complain if they don’t come help solve the problems.

Alison L. said that one of her takeaways was there is a huge disconnect between what the town is responsible for (or what role the town has) in terms of the issues discussed, and the amount of misinformation in the community about those issues. Alison L. and Lenore B. agreed there is a need for better communication to the community to help ensure factual information is shared.

John K. said in his experience, he didn’t think people generally understood how our taxes are determined by the school and town, and what level of control the town has on those issues. He thought that disseminating information about more complicated issues in a clearer way could better help people understand specific issues.

Jennifer D. said that she noticed in the survey responses that a lot of people are really involved in town politics and it seemed that people were disagreeing with some of the town’s decisions. She added she was surprised to see a number of comments about the creation of a town common not being a real priority for people in the town. She also spoke about the comments regarding the approval of development (Hinesburg Center 2) and the concern of flooding, and perhaps the impression is that the “town” is not listening to the residents. She said the goal should be to make space for everyone here, and for people to feel like they can share their values without being criticized or shut down.

John L. noticed that water quality received the most responses to question #15 (what natural/cultural resources should the Town focus on over the next 5-10 years), and that the responses ranged from addressing water availability, drinking water, floodplains, stormwater management. He added that this might be a question to focus some follow-up on (possible forum or survey questions).

John K. brought up the issue of traffic and congestion and wondered what ways the Town could affect change, and whether the Town could take ownership of Rt. 116 from the State and if that would make a difference. Alex W. shared that the last scoping study done made several recommendations on how to improve traffic flow – one was to improve the intersection at 116 and CVU Road which was completed and another was to work on the intersection at Lantman’s (planned for this summer). He noted that even with those two suggestions, the improvement to congestion is only improved by about 20%.

b. Open-ended comments (questions 31-33) and survey follow-up topics:

Alex W. said he has been working to organize the survey responses, so it’s easier to take in the information. He shared some of the responses to question #13 (what new business/type of business would you like to see in Town) which included: new restaurants; bakery & coffee shop; larger grocery store; auto parts store; bookstore; community recreation center, etc. Lenore B. asked if he could share some of the relevant responses to the various committees that are working to update Town Plan sections.

Alex W. reviewed the responses to Question 31 (What does Hinesburg do well), and noted some general themes included: sense of community; small town identity; walkability; trails & outdoor areas; community input/engagement; schools; road maintenance; recreation department

opportunities; and general municipal services. Alex also shared the results from question #32 (What is one thing you would change about Hinesburg), which included: less growth & development; more growth & development; management of traffic congestion; better governance or less regulation; improvement of sidewalks & bike lanes; more community facilities/spaces; controlling taxes; improve village streetscape/bldgs. Alex W. reiterated that the themes he shared didn't capture all of the comments received.

There was general discussion about survey responses that referenced what Hinesburg should and shouldn't look like, and comparing Hinesburg to Bristol, South Burlington, and Williston. The Commissioners talked about the differences and similarities between Hinesburg and the comparison towns, specifically municipal revenues. There was discussion about the perception that if there more business is added in Hinesburg, taxes could be lowered, and whether that's accurate or not. Alex W. said that a community can talk about what type of commercial, mixed-use or residential use they want to see in their town, but ultimately the economy and developers determine what is built. He added that when a developer shows up it would be ideal if they had a vision similar to what the town wanted and would be willing to work within the framework, but that's not necessarily the case. Alison L. said that it would be interesting to compare some other towns to see what they have done to prioritize specific types of zoning and increase municipal revenue.

Jennifer D. wondered what role the Planning Commission might have in developing a school site (middle school), as the community school is close to capacity. Alex W. said that direction would have to come from the school district first.

Alex W. asked the Commissioners if there were other responses to the open-ended questions that jumped out to them, and said that he wants to share the results with community, and use the Town Plan as an opportunity to recalibrate what priorities are. Alex W. asked the Commissioners if they wanted to do a follow-up survey to get more clarification on some topics, and there was discussion about what techniques could be used to reach the folks who didn't complete the survey. There was also discussion about working with Hinesburg Community School (HCS) and CVU to engage the students and get feedback.

Alison L. suggested by working with Hinesburg Community Resource Center (HCRC) and the food shelf, the PC could reach a wider audience. Denver W. said the idea of having a single page survey or a survey in series, where you reach people over time instead of asking them to sit down a fill out a 15-minute survey, has a lot of merit. He added it could work at a variety of places in town, and the PC might reach folks who didn't complete the survey initially.

Jennifer D. brought up some additional topics that she felt weren't discussed by the PC, which included: the level of service from the police (majority of respondents said services were adequate); the possible expansions of the Town Hall and fire station; and the building of a Town Common.

5. Town Plan Update:

a. Community Forums – finalize schedule and topics:

Lenore B. said she would love to hear someone talk about the perception that adding new commercial and industrial businesses in Hinesburg could help the Town budget, and mentioned

several people could present about the topic. John L. suggested that the forum could address the issue of property taxes, and roll the development piece into the discussion. There was additional discussion about who might be a speaker at the forum. Alex W. suggested the presenters not be Town employees, to ensure the perception of being impartial.

Margaret M. suggested a topic could be what is the overall cost of development and offer specific information, not just generalities. Alex W. said he thought it would be difficult to have any presenter, in a volunteer capacity, provide specific details and added that would be a job the Town would hire a consultant for.

Jennifer D. suggested a forum could look at both controlling property taxes and also managing growth and development because they are linked. Jennifer said there are ways to address intersecting issues, as well as doing things that help Hinesburg adapt to climate change (i.e., address traffic issues by ensuring there is more bus service). She shared about a trip she took to New Mexico and suggested Hinesburg might need to consider more unconventional approaches to solving problems, and make Hinesburg a model community for adapting to climate change.

John L. said that he would like to have some actionable information to help with the Town Plan after these forums.

The Commissioners agreed that climate resiliency would be another good topic to host a forum.

b. Town committee meeting updates:

Alison L. said that she met with the Town Forest Committee. Alex W. said he and Barbara F. met with the Affordable Housing Committee (AHC) which will provide feedback, particularly on action items for the Town Plan update.

6. Other Business:

a. Planning news and announcements:

Alex W. spoke about the Act 250 decision issued for Hinesburg Center 2, and whether that project has a future either through a change to the project or through an appeal to the VT Environmental court.

John L. asked about S. 213 and Alex W. explained that the bill (passed the Senate and will be taken up by the House in the next few weeks) does three things: creates a new state permit for development in a river corridor; has tighter minimum standards that the state would require all municipal flood hazard regs meet; and an increase state wetland protections.

Denver W. thanked Barbara F. and John K. for their service on the Planning Commission, as this meeting will be their last.

b. Preparation for April 3rd Selectboard meeting on RR1 zoning proposal:

Alex W. said it would be helpful if a few Commissioners could attend the Selectboard's hearing on

April 3rd to provide additional perspective and intent behind the proposal.

c. Agenda items for the April 10, 2024 meeting:

- Public hearing on the zoning modernization regulation revisions

Denver W. **adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:13 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,
Danielle Peterson
Planning and Zoning Administrative Assistant