

Any questions, comments or concerns about the minutes should be addressed to Amy Giroux, Zoning Administrator at (802) 868-3325

**MINUTES
TOWN OF SWANTON
SWANTON PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Town Office Building
1 Academy Street, Swanton, VT 05488
*Wednesday, December 14, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.***

Present: Ed Daniel, Chair; Ross Lavoie, Vice Chair; Andy LaRocque, Oliver Manning, Heather Buczkowski, Members; Amy Giroux, Zoning Administrator; Corey Parent, Forty-Four Seven Strategies, LLC

*All motions carried unanimously unless specified otherwise.

1. Call to Order – Mr. Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. Agenda Review
3. Review of minutes of November 16, 2022

Mr. Lavoie made a motion to approve the draft minutes from the 11/16/22 Planning Commission meeting, seconded by Mr. LaRocque. Motion carried.

4. Review Community Visioning Meeting of November 16, 2022

Mr. Daniel expressed that he would talk with Mr. Savage about earmarking additional funds for the municipal plan rewrite should any unexpected circumstances occur. Mr. Lavoie added that this was a good idea, given Mr. Parent's positive contributions to the process. Continuing, Mr. Lavoie stated the importance of how these funds could be used for bylaw rewrites to feasibly approach projects like the Southern Growth district. Ms. Buczkowski asked about involvement from Ms. Nance, Economic Development Coordinator? Ms. Giroux responded that Ms. Nance now works for the Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation (FCIDC) and her assistance could be used for grant writing to secure additional funding. Mr. Lavoie again stated the resourcefulness of Mr. Parent, and stated the need for earmarking funds, should the Planning Commission choose to utilize Forty-Four Seven Strategies, LLC in the future for consulting on projects like establishing infrastructure in the Southern Growth district.

Shifting topics, Mr. Manning asked about the proposed establishment of a welcome center in Swanton that was reported in the news? Ms. Giroux responded that this is the plan to establish one in Swanton, but the Town doesn't know where yet. Negotiations are currently being carried out by the State of Vermont. Mr. Lavoie then asked about the proposed trucking facility to be established in Swanton? Ms. Giroux responded that it was in the works and would be going before the DRB for review in January 2023. Transitioning, Mr. Parent led into a conversation about the survey results, reporting that it is still open and would continue taking feedback. Mr. Parent will be talking to Ms. Nance

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about the survey and recommends posting it to Facebook to gather more data than the current 72 responses. Ms. Buczkowski recommending distributing the survey to friends to gather more data. Mr. Manning also recommended distributing the survey to local business owners and representatives like Gordon and Debbie Winters. Ms. Buczkowski

Continuing, Mr. Parent said the current municipal plan has six chapters, an introduction, background, and visioning. Mr. Parent recommended condensing some of these chapters to better address the needs of a smaller municipality like Swanton. Using St. Albans Town as an example, Mr. Parent broke down their first chapter as an introduction including data concerning housing and scenic community resources. The St. Johnsbury plan is another community resource which starts with a mission statement that provides a brief overview and jumps immediately into the goals for positioning, maintaining, and visioning. Mr. Parent stated that Swanton doesn't get into this until Chapter Four which lays out the actual plan, and asked whether the Planning Commission would like to revise this? Mr. Lavoie responded that he appreciates that the existing plan is laid out like a road map for the future.

Mr. Parent recommended a brief overview of the goals, with additional information in future sections of the plan for an organizational structure. Mr. Parent also expressed the need for a condensed plan within eight to ten pages, being realistic, no one is going to sit down and read an 80-page plan. Mr. Lavoie echoed these concerns saying the demographics are important for the full plan but can be omitted for the condensed plan. Ms. Giroux also expressed a need for a more user-friendly plan. Mr. Parent raised another point about addressing important community assets in the plan. The Planning Commission held a meeting for the importance of recreation within the community, but the plan itself doesn't speak to vitality of an expanding recreation department. Individual chapters can be devoted to recreation and housing, but the goals for these topics shouldn't be addressed in the overview.

According to Mr. Parent, controlling the rise in taxes, affordable housing opportunities, and economic development and job growth are the top three priorities gathered in the survey results. Trailing behind these, Mr. Parent mentioned that 15% placed priority on the Southern Growth district and explained from a Town perspective why this is important. This highlights an important point on what residents of Swanton perceive the Southern Growth district to be, and how it can address the top three priorities listed in the survey data. Another point of interest from the survey is 57% of respondents feel Swanton is not adequately prepared for the challenges that the Town may face over the next five to ten years. Mr. Lavoie asked about tweaking the municipal plan with the same frequency as upcoming bylaw changes? Mr. Parent responded saying that Northwest Regional Planning sets this process as every eight years to keep the plan consistent with the period of time in which it is drafted. Bylaw changes are more of an annual process to improve goals within the municipal plan. Ms. Giroux added that the municipal plan is a goal and vision for the future, but the bylaw rewrites are the action steps to achieve the goals set forth. Continuing, Mr. Parent said from the State's perspective in regard to housing, the State is allocating money for downtown development projects that increases density which creates exemptions for the ACT 250 process. Ms. Giroux added that

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Swanton has illuminated the units per acre requirement in the bylaws to encourage development as long as the proposed structure, green spaces and parking meets the remaining form-based code.

Other areas of focus that arose in the survey results are traffic congestion, speed monitoring and enforcement, and safety for pedestrian accesses. Other survey results suggested that the municipality does good as balancing road condition, taxes, and staff resourcefulness, but the gap within the data suggests a greater need for more economic development to balance the scale. Ms. Buczkowski mentioned the growth of the police department with the force doubling since the survey was first published. Mr. Parent mentioned the response to the 1% local options tax with 45% supporting it, 25% being unsure, and 30% saying no. Mr. Parent expanded, saying that when people see the word tax, they freak, but reminded the board that the money gained from a local options tax is generated from people passing through. Mr. Parent also remarked on the even split between residents of the Town and the Village who have taken the survey. This is good for gathering equal results without placing more emphasis on the needs of the Village versus the Town. To conclude the survey, Mr. Parent read through the comments and feedback that was given at the end of the survey. Some of these comments described Swanton as a great place to live and raise a family. Other comments were more targeted at local government like the Selectboard cherry picking what they already want to put in place. Other comments included the idea of One Swanton, rerouting traffic away from the Village, and expanding police activities to 24/7 operations. Other feedback opportunities highlighted the discrepancy in utility districts and improving the websites between the Town and Village.

Looking back over previous Planning Commission meetings, Mr. Parent asked if the members of the Planning Commission had any insight into what they thought emerged as one of the most important topics of discussion? Mr. LaRocque specified the Southern Growth district seemed to have the largest amount of community feedback and input. Mr. Manning confirmed that this seems to be an important issue to community residents based upon the attendance at that meeting. Mr. Parent expressed that it is difficult to take all community input for the municipal plan citing ideas like One Swanton. This idea is good, but the level of planning, organization, and implementation would require a plan of its own, which is why it will be omitted from the municipal plan. Mr. Manning agreed adding that such a merger is outside the Planning Commission's jurisdiction and would require extended conversations with the State and Northwest Regional Planning. Ms. Buczkowski added that there is no perfect solution to address everyone's concerns. As a reminder, Mr. Parent said he would check in with Mr. Savage to discuss budgetary items while drafting a revised municipal plan for review in January 2023.

5. Set Next Planning Commission Meeting Date

Wednesday, January 18, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

6. Public Comment - None

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7. Any Other Necessary Business

Ms. Giroux gave an administrative report on the issuances for the months of October through December including 21 building/sign permits, 7 certificates of occupancy, and 24 certificates of compliance.

8. Adjournment

Mr. Lavoie made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:41 p.m., seconded by Ms. Buczkowski. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph Cava
Administrative Assistant

Ed Daniel, Chair

Ross Lavoie, Vice Chair

Andy LaRocque

Oliver Manning

Heather Buczkowski