

Shaftsbury Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 9, 2017

- 1) The meeting came to order at 7 pm. Present were commissioners Chris Williams (chair), Michael Foley, and Michael Cichanowski. Tim Scoggins, select board chair, was present, as was Jim Sullivan, executive director, Bennington Regional Commission. Zoning administrator Shelly Stiles was also present.
- 2) Minutes, 4/11/17. Mr. Cichanowski moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Foley seconded the motion, which passed 3-0-0.
Minutes, 4/25/17. Mr. Foley moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Williams seconded the motion, which passed 3-0-0.

- 3) Country stores

Mr. Williams explained to Mr. Sullivan that the effort to promote a country store is actually an effort to provide a place for the community to get together, share stories, and build togetherness and solidarity (not necessarily to provide a mercantile opportunity).

Mr. Sullivan noted that the JJ Hapgood and Bromley Market operations shared with other more or less successful country stores (e.g. in W. Rupert and Stamford) the following: they offer prepared foods, not so much groceries; and they are isolated, largely free of competition. The latter isn't true of S. Shaftsbury, where Paulins, the Market Wagon, and the N. Bennington Variety are popular. He suggested we need to find out niche – pizza? Baked goods? Wine? A restaurant-like set-up similar to the Rochester Café?

Mr. Sullivan recommended contacting Paul Bruhn at the Preservation Trust of Vermont. They offer grants and advice.

Perhaps Shaftsbury needs a market analysis, a retail gap analysis to identify that service that Shaftsbury residents now leave the town boundaries to secure. Waterbury did such a study. Dough Kennedy Advisors did such a study for Shelburne Village, which in some ways resembles Shaftsbury (in its proximity to the “big city”). Such studies aren't too expensive. It should also identify and explore possible sites. Maybe the study could be funded by a Municipal Planning Grant. Once in hand, the town should contact Jonathan Cooper at BCRC, the regional marketing specialist. And publicize the results. Efficiency VT has a program for general stores. In fact, it will probably take a combination of lots of things to make the idea happen.

Michael C said he would be exploring several sites in the Village center.

Michael F wondered if we should amend the bylaws by adopting a “broken windows” policy.

- 4) Workforce housing

Mr. Williams said he'd interviewed Trevor Mance at TAM, which employs about 51 people and adds 6-8 employees annually. Mr. Mance said there is a lack of rental housing in the area, and more importantly, starter homes.

Mr. Williams said he'd interviewed Brian Lent at W. E. Dailey's, who said they employ about 200 people, most of them low- or medium-skilled. Restrictions on immigration and lack of a work ethic are issues for them. (Mr. Sullivan noted that the work force in Bennington County had fallen by about 2000 in the last several years, although the unemployment rate hadn't changed.)

As regards the Iron Kettle, Mr. Williams said his take was that it is not a motel serving the traveling public, but a multi-family facility. Mr. Lent expressed concern that the state should adopt that point of view: it could require them to install expensive improvements, including sprinklers. Mr. Lent asked that the Town “work with them.” Mr. Lent said the facility was

purchased not by Peckham Industries but by John Peckham personally. Mr. Lent offered a field trip. Mr. Williams will try to set that up.

5) Trails

Ms. Stiles shared a map of trails on the west side of town, exclusive of the Shaftsbury Hollow area, created by Dave Mance. Mr. Mance told her none of the old roads are public rights of way, but instead belong by deed to those through whose properties they pass. Mr. Mance expressed deep misgivings about permitting public access to Stanley Road. He would be concerned that ATVs and mountain bikes would tear up his logging road improvements (such as water bars).

Mr. Williams said there is a large network of trails elsewhere in town, and urged commissioners to produce maps of their “own” trails. Ms. Stiles will provide base maps for that task. Mr. Sullivan said he often wondered whether it was a good idea to pursue public use of private trails for economic development reasons – and to open a Pandora’s box of complaint and controversy, or for locals to simply continue to use them, quietly.

6) The meeting adjourned by acclamation at 9:10 p.m.