

Minutes of Belvidere Planning Commission Meeting

July 8, 2021

Meeting convened at 6:00 PM and adjourned at 8:26 PM. This was an in-person meeting held at the Belvidere Central School and included the public hearing for the revised Belvidere Town Plan.

Members present were Deb Baker, Ken Adams Jr., Fran Leavitt, Mary Hysick, Earl Domina, Jr. and Kathy Marchant. Also present was Alec Jones from LCPC, to aid and advise the Belvidere Planning Commission during the public hearing. Residents attending the public hearing portion of meeting were Jack and Susan Schill, and David Muir.

Motion by Deb to adjust agenda by moving the annual reorganization of the Belvidere Planning Commission to its next regular meeting; 2nd by Mary; motion carried.

Public Hearing of 2020 Town Plan revision (duration 6:10 PM – 8:01 PM)

- Overview of LCPC's role presented by Alec Jones: to advise on what is required in a town plan; to assist in statistical content (graphs, maps, census data, etc.) of the town plan, to publish physical document, to help facilitate required notices and meetings.
- Questions / comments by Jack Schill:
 - What is the town plan revision process to date?
 - How does the Town Plan ensure a "seat at the table" in any public regulatory forum, such as an Act 250 hearing?
 - Accuracy of population projections questioned; why discrepancy between 2010 Census graph and 2018 ACS projections?
 - The Belvidere Town Plan "chases" State regulations and contains many unnecessary objectives; the BPC should rethink long-term purpose of any town plan and target 3 or 4 timely and vital needs of Belvidere's future development, such as job creation, infrastructure development, or childcare.
- Answers to Jack's questions:
 - Belvidere Planning Commission has rewritten plan completely, drafts were sent to neighboring towns and various State agencies for comment, comments from tonight's hearing to be considered, and final draft of plan submitted to Belvidere Select board is next step.
 - Census data is from 2010 National Census and projections are from a 2018 population survey, which seems to indicate projected trends from 2010 census have changed. Alec will review the data.
 - Answer to ensuring "seat at the table" uncertain – Alec and BPC will research.
- Questions / comments by Susan Schill:
 - What determines "undue tax burden" on local property owners if growth and development result in a larger tax base for town?
 - What is the meaning of "long term view of costs to taxpayers" in Facilities & Services Policies?
 - Why does the plan contain reference to the fact that Belvidere could implement zoning regulations when general knowledge is that most of Belvidere's residents are opposed to zoning in town?

- Should the Road Commissioner, rather the Selectboard, work with regional and state experts on overall road conditions, and seek available grant sourced funding?
- “Part of the charm” of Belvidere is that the town functions without regulating its growth using zoning. Susan also pointed out several typographical errors.
- Answers to Susan’s questions:
 - This is a “catch 22” situation in that allowing growth to increase the town’s tax base, and therefore lower the overall tax rate, could potentially increase the need for municipal services and consequently drive expenses up.
 - Example given as answer was that, should the town be offered repurchase of the local school for \$1.00, the town should first consider the long-term costs of owning and maintaining such a facility, and avoid a rush to judgement to buy based on low price.
 - The town plan lists many possible implementation tools, including zoning, that the Town might one day use to moderate uncontrolled growth and development, should the need arise. The plan does not necessarily promote zoning, but rather recognizes that it could be considered at some future date.
 - Overall road conditions and future infrastructure improvements, as well as seeking alternative funding sources, are within the Selectboard’s responsibilities.
- Questions / comments by Dave Muir:
 - What is the status of the historic “Junction School” building, and does the plan specifically address this building?
 - What power does the town plan possess?
 - Who enforces the guidelines set forth in the town plan?
 - Some situations in town may be better handled by zoning regulations; allowing unfettered freedoms to one individual may be detrimental to their adjoining neighbors.
- Answers to Dave’s questions:
 - A feasibility / engineering study was performed by the BPC using a Municipal Planning Grant; several years ago, residents offered to furnish plywood to cover windows and work with school students to paint murals on plywood, but progress on this endeavor has stalled; the building needs some immediate temporary weatherization; further pursuit of a long-term function for the building is not addressed specifically in the plan.
 - This plan is non-regulatory but provides a “vision” document that presents the Town’s future aspirations regarding growth and development.
 - Since the plan is not regulatory in nature its guidelines rely on voluntary acceptance, and are not enforceable per se.
- BPC members presented overviews of specific plan sections at the public hearing: Ken – Transportation & Facilities, Kathy – Education, Energy, & Implementation, Deb – Historic & Natural Resources, Mary – Housing & Economic Development, Fran – Land Use, Earl – Population & Growth
- Other general topics of conversation included the need for high-speed internet service and Belvidere’s membership to the CUD, the need for cell phone service in town, town ordinances such as ATV use on town highways, and speed limit ordinances and signage on town highways.

Questions and comments from public hearing were discussed by the planning commission and Alec, resulting with a motion by Deb to send current draft of plan with typo’s corrected, and subject to amendments as needed later, to the Selectboard for final review; 2nd by Kathy; motion carried.

Question by Mary on deadline for responses from neighboring towns; answer per Alec – today (July 8th) was the deadline.

Motion by Deb to accept the minutes of the June 3, 2021, meeting as written; 2nd by Kathy; discussion initiated by Mary resulted in striking the word “Belvidere” from the last bullet in the CUD updates: “...possible highspeed service available to Belvidere homes...” motion carried with strike change accepted.

Next regular meeting scheduled **August 12, 2021, at 6:00PM**, at the Belvidere Town Clerk’s Office.