

# Plan Commission & Task Force Minutes

## Town of Washburn

Town Hall

Monday, August 5, 2024

**Commission members present:** Kim Bro (chair), Cyndi Belanger (secretary), Jim Park (town board representative), Tim Schwenzfeier (vice chair), Caroline Twombly.

**Commission members absent:** none.

**Planning Task Force members present:** Terri Bahe, Tom Cogger, Phil Kraus, Caroline Twombly, Dennis Weibel.

**Planning Task Force members absent:** Charmaine Swan, Marieke Van Donkersgoed.

**Others present:** none.

1. Chairman Bro called the meeting of the commission to order at 7:05 P.M. and verified its legal notification (posted at town hall and Tetzner Dairy) and on town website on July 31.
2. The minutes of the July 8, 2024 meeting were approved (Tim moves, Cyndi seconds).
3. Phil Kraus is a new member of the Plan Update Task Force, and he and the group introduced themselves.
4. The members of the commission and Plan Update Task Force discussed steps to encourage public awareness and participation in the process of updating the comprehensive plan. Jim Park will lead the development of a “Plan Update” tab on the town’s plan commission webpage that, in addition to meeting minutes, will provide background information that the group is reviewing to update the plan. Phil Kraus will design a 1/3-page insert to be included with a September mailing to all town residents. Our plan is to have these efforts ready for approval by the next meeting on September 9.
5. The group reviewed the “Agricultural and Natural Resources” elements of the current (2007) plan. The plan asserts that a significant amount of existing agricultural lands classified as “prime,” “statewide importance,” “locally unique,” and “locally important” needs to be preserved to insure the existence of viable farms in the town. Even so, none of the town’s agricultural lands are enrolled in the county’s farmland preservation program, and there are no disincentives to converting agricultural lands to rural residential lots. The number of parcels 20 acres or less in Range 5 West of the town have increase from 5% of the land area to 12% from 1985 to present. While the plan calls for concentrating rural residential development on the east side of the town (closer to transportation corridors), there is no such pattern in the fragmentation of parcels that has occurred.

The group agreed that specific measures to assure preservation of larger parcels ( $\geq 20$  acres) are needed in the updated plan. These measures may include voluntary easements or zoning for larger minimum lot sizes.

6. The group also reviewed lands identified in the “Future Land Use Map” as “Sensitive Areas.” The “General Soils Map” in the plan shows these steep ravines, floodplains, and wetlands that are critical to the health of trout streams in the town. The plan says “these areas are subject to erosion problems and are generally unsuited for development.” However, except for state land acquisition largely prior to 2007, no steps have been implemented to prevent the fragmentation and development of these lands. The county no longer seeks town board input regarding the granting of residential building permits on agricultural and forested lands. In general, the county grants building permits for structures more than 75 feet from the edge of a stream, and the only notice provided to towns is after a permit is granted. At best the town can provide guidance on the construction of a driveway. In the town driveway permitting process, the town informs land owners of the sensitive characteristics of the land they wish to develop. No measures are in place to inform owners in advance of their acquiring land in sensitive areas about the uses for which the property is best suited.

The group agreed that the plan should identify specific steps to retain large, forested parcels in “Sensitive Areas” and to prevent fragmentation and rural residential development.

The amount of industrial forestland at the headwaters of the Sioux River has decreased from 15% of Range 5 West in 1985 to 12% currently. Each time a new company takes ownership to total industrial forest area decreases. If more individual 40-acre parcels were put up for sale, large, contiguous blocks of forest habitat at the headwaters of the Sioux River and Thompson Creek would be lost. The group recommended that the town ask to county Forest & Parks Department to work with the forest owner to assure that the remaining blocks of forest remain whole, either through continued enrollment in the state Managed Forest Law or through county acquisition.

7. The group reviewed the “Transportation” chapter. Terri noted that the Bay Area Rural Transportation (BART) system now is available for requested pickups of “shut-in” residents who need transportation to places on the bus routes (hospital, clinics, and shops). However, transportation is dominated by residents using personal cars and trucks. The current plan says little about future town investment in road development. Jim noted that the town’s five-year road plan calls only for maintaining existing paved roads and not for increasing the amount of paved roads. Because of the increasingly high cost of road maintenance, the group proposed making such a policy explicit. Because expansion of paved roads is expensive. New rural residential development is best located near existing paved roads.

The group discussed the increase in bicycling as a positive development. Engoe, Nevers, Wannebo, Ondossagon, Wannebo, Church Corner, and Paulson roads are all marked as bicycle routes on the Ashland-Bayfield County Bicycle Map (2014). Part of the attraction of these roads for bicyclists is the “scenic, rural road” experience as opposed to the experience on state and county highways. There is a hazard posed by increasing both motor vehicle use and bicycle use in a single lane with no paved shoulder. The group encouraged taking steps to make paved town roads safer for bicycles without having to make major investments in expanding the width of the roads. Rather the group encouraged reducing the speed limit on these roads to 45 mph and posting “Share the Road” with bikes and pedestrians signs. The group recommends promoting non-motorized use of town roads in the future at the same time as it recognizes the financial and aesthetic limits to expanding the amount of pavement.

The group also encouraged a policy to discourage increasing the mileage of town roads. If multiple residences are built on a shared driveway, the town should be clear that the driveway will remain a private expense, and the town road network will not be expanded. The town driveway ordinance should be enforced to assure adequate access for emergency vehicles.

8. Kim mentioned that the City of Washburn tested clay being excavated from the Bayfield Street project and determined that an adequate amount of suitable material is available to repair the clay cap of the closed landfill. The group said that the importance of perpetual protection of groundwater recharge areas should be made more prominent in the updated plan.
9. The meeting adjourned at 8:43 P.M. (Cyndi moves, Tim seconds).

Draft submitted by: Kenneth Bro, Chair, Town of Washburn Plan Commission (August 6, 2024).

## **Plan Commission Report**

The commission recommends including a 1/3-page insert in the town’s September mailing to make residents aware of the process to update the plan and to encourage community engagement in updating the plan.