



TOWN OF WARREN
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the Warren Planning Board Meeting

September 16, 2013

The meeting of the Warren Planning Board began at 7:00 PM. Present were F. Massie, J. Piepowski, C. Thibaudeau, R. Mello, B. Heckert, S. Thompson, D. Kallfelz and R. Silva. Absent was Martha Heald. Also present were Town Planner Caroline Wells and Town Attorney Peter Skwirz.

There was a quorum of Board members for this meeting.

Approval of Minutes:

On a motion by R. Silva, seconded by R. Mello, the minutes for the August 26, 2013 meeting were approved unanimously.

Old Business:

1. Continuation of discussion of the Comprehensive Plan, Economic Development Section. Notes from the discussion have been compiled in the attachment.
2. Administrative Officer Report
3. Administrative Matters. Town Planner Caroline Wells explained new legislation that required the establishment of an email registry for notification of any changes to subdivision rules or zoning ordinances. So far, only the RI Homebuilders Association has indicated a desire to be on this notification list. Chair Fred Massie suggested, and members agreed, that Planning Board members also be added to the notification list.

A motion to adjourn was made by R. Silva and seconded by J. Piepowski. The Board unanimously approved the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Comprehensive Plan – Economic Development (2)

September 16, 2013

Talking Point #3: “Stimulate diverse agricultural production on available arable land, providing links to outside expertise and advice, encouraging and facilitating connections to Town and other local restaurants, grocery stores and kitchen incubators”

- Agricultural land is a substantial part of geography
- We need to assess how “farmer” is defined by federal, state and local government
 - Farms are smaller than they used to be (less than the 5 acre threshold)
 - Many residents may be able to lease larger lots for smaller farmers. How could we accommodate this? What would be the restrictions? We should look at the tax guidelines for farms.
 - If we are giving tax incentives, we would want to look at zoning for conservation of that land
 - How would we enforce this? Farmers grow strawberries one year other crops next [CW: certification through the tax assessor’s office annually]
- The Comprehensive Plan can outline issues for us to study and how they should be accomplished
 - Zoning could be a factor and permitted uses should be looked at
 - What is now known about farming in Warren?
 - How many? What type? What do they need? What indicators exist and should be developed?
 - What resources do we have?
 - Are we looking guidelines or rules?
 - We need to look at farming in terms of both crops and livestock—each has different needs and different impacts
 - We should develop a stand-alone agricultural plan for Warren
- We should focus on conservation of farmlands—are existing policies sufficient? We are slowly protecting farmland. Is “development rights” acquisition the best tool?
- Emphasize Warren as a market town for agriculture (see Westport model). We should:
 - invite people to become part of the Warren community, which invites both large and small agricultural efforts

- further the efforts of Farm Fresh RI, etc. to connect farmers with customers
- look broadly at other farming organizations (Farm Bureau, USDA, etc.)-farmers may not go to DEM
- build our networks to promote Warren’s agricultural land availability
- build on Hope & Main being in Warren
- We should all understand the effect of the weather on farmers—they can lose a whole year’s effort in one storm

Touched on Talking Point #4: Protect and, where possible, enhance the environmental integrity of all salt and fresh surface waters, as these serve as powerful attractions for visitors and residents alike, supporting the area’s vibrant marine fisheries and boating industry.

Aquaculture/Fisheries

- Aquaculture? We have natural fisheries (which are smaller businesses). We need waterfront processing/selling capability. The Town has a “natural” waterfront for a fish market.
 - Look at additional small scale production facilities to support local farmers (maybe revise zoning)
 - What are the possibilities for aquaculture at Tourister, Parker Mill, Blount, etc?
- Large scale fishermen do not want to bring their catch in this far inland. Aquaculture may be an alternative for smaller businesses. Efforts like Roger Williams hatchery may help.
 - Mt. Hope Bay was once a prolific groundfishery and could be again.
- We should promote waterfront seafood—an event to invite fishermen here.
 - The working waterfront is a prime area for a seafood market.
- [Ralph, VHB, consultant]: many towns are using their comprehensive plans to focus on local food production.
- Goals of Comprehensive Plan must have zoning rules that are compliant
 - Fishing was in Warren’s Comprehensive Plan many years ago
- We need a statement for the waterfront
- We should set timeframes for all actions in the Comp Plan [Ralph, VHB, Consultant: we want to set realistic timeframes for Comp Plan actions, looking at all sections]
- A method for accountability to the Comprehensive Plan should be set as part of the implementation (reporting to Council, etc)

Reversion to Talking Point #2: “Establish consistent zoning regulations and well-defined design guidelines for proposed business expansion and new development in all commercial, manufacturing and industrial areas, ensuring predictable expectations, enforcement and aesthetics”

- We need to break down barriers to fill up existing spaces
- Bring in innovative thinking
- We need a way to discuss a vision for a property before going to a board (Planning or Zoning)
- Permitting process takes too long
 - The 90 day turnaround for Zoning and Town Council meetings take too long for businesses
 - Better internal communications/coordination
 - Development/permitting guidebook
 - We need to outline our regulations and their process
 - We should look at some of categories like “light industrial” and define what we mean (scale, etc.) more clearly
 - Partner with RWU or other institutions to help implement plan action items
 - Write a clear business process
 - We need to ensure a predictable review
- State turnaround is part of this, but they are working on this.
- Facilitate business expansion while protection environment and neighborhood character.
- Rural Business District (North Market Street)— no retail business allowed by right
 - Needs a vision
- Issue of design guidelines/signage, even if they are advisory
- Review by right/special use/variance issues
 - Simplify zoning code
- How is town marketed?
- How can we understand what businesses are in Warren?
- Identify specific barriers to business permitting and expansion
 - Signage codes were brought up two years ago. What happened? Processes we start do not go anywhere. Should we have guidelines and a required review of signage and lose the square footage requirement?

- Can we put some of these functions online? Can we create a website that replaces some functions?
 - The Town's website is part of how it portrays itself as "ready for business"
- Are there types of businesses that we would want to encourage? If we look at our existing businesses, maybe we should cultivate complementary uses
- Business owners need to participate in the process as a stakeholder group.
 - The Chamber of Commerce can be a facilitator
 - Many people do not like to sign their names for fear of retaliation
 - We should all view dialogue as an opportunity

Suggested Mission Comments:

- Sounds fine
- Should be short and succinct