Morristown/Morrisville Planning Council
PO Box 748 / Morrisville, VT 05661
Phone (802) 888-6373

Meeting Minutes of March 20, 2018

Planning Council Members Present: Linda Greaves, Paul Griswold (Chair), Max Paine, Tom Snipp, and Laura Streets
Planning Council Members Absent: Etienne Hancock, and Mark Struhsacker
Guests: Ron Bomer, Stan Biasini & Community Development Coordinator Tricia Follert
Staff: Planning Director Todd Thomas
Call to Order: The meeting was called to order in the Community Meeting Room of the Town Offices at 43 Portland Street at approximately 7:00 P.M.

Discuss: Reorganization – The Council decided to change the start-time of its meetings to 6 P.M. instead of 7 P.M. No changes were made to the officers of the Council. Member Griswold remained as Chair and Member Paine remained as Vice Chair.

Discuss: Letter regarding Equipment Tax vs. 1% Rooms & Meals Tax – The Council discussed the merits of advising the Selectboard to discontinue the Town's existing personal property machinery and equipment tax versus recommending adopting the 1% rooms and meals tax. Mr. Thomas said that the 1% rooms and meals tax would take Legislative effort. Mr. Thomas said that the existing machinery and equipment tax raises approximately $103,000 per year towards municipal taxes. He said that a 1% rooms and meals tax would, based on his calculations, raise about the same or a small amount of additional. He added that he was still waiting on final projection numbers from the State tax department. Stan Biasini of Mt. Mansfield Creamery asked the Council to vote to repeal the machinery and equipment tax. He said that Morristown was the only town in the county utilizing this tax and that he could easily move his business to Hyde Park if this tax became more significant. He added that the existence of this tax could potentially curb new equipment purchases and his resultant business growth while he remained in Morrisville. Mr. Biasini added that he was opposed to this tax on principle as he had already paid sales tax when he purchased his cheese-making equipment and now he has to pay a local tax on this equipment every year. Mr. Thomas alerted the Council to an email received from Lost Nation Brewing echoing Mr. Biasini's comments. Member Streets agreed with Mr. Biasini and said that it is hard to run a small business in Vermont and that nickel-and-diming these local businesses was bad policy. Member Snipp suggested that the Selectboard adopt a floor personal property value for the equipment and machinery tax so that small local businesses like Mr. Biasini's would be exempt from this tax while larger businesses would still be contributing much needed municipal tax revenue to the town. Mr. Thomas said that he was unsure if the Selectboard could establish this floor amount, but such a policy could save a lot of staff time regarding the administration of this local tax. Mr. Thomas related how he recently met a Selectboard member from Randolph who blamed the machinery and equipment tax for devastating Randolph's industrial job sector, forcing companies like Ethan Allen to move away. Mr. Thomas added that Randolph administers this tax differently than Morristown currently does, as it requires IRS depreciation schedules to establish machinery and equipment values as the basis for the tax. Mr. Thomas added that he was not concerned with what happened in Randolph happening in Morrisville while Charles McArthur was the Listing Coordinator. He said that once Mr. McArthur retires, this tax could become more problematic. Council Members discussed the 1% rooms and meals tax further. Member Streets said that Lost Nation had 60,000 unique visits last year and the brewery would be more supportive of a rooms and meals tax than the current machinery and equipment tax. Chair Griswold moved to ask the Selectboard to eliminate the machinery and equipment tax in next year's budget. The motion was affirmed by a vote of 5-0. Chair Griswold moved to ask the Selectboard to evaluate instituting the 1% rooms and meals tax in place of the machinery and equipment tax in next year's budget. The motion was affirmed by a vote of 5-0. Mr. Thomas said that he would draft a letter to the Selectboard from the Council that captured these two motions and the preceding conversation. Chair Griswold asked Mr. Thomas to have the draft of this letter approved before it was sent out.

Discuss: Tax Stabilization for seniors (Paul) – Mr. Thomas said that existing Vermont Statute was very limiting in terms of how a Town might be able to give senior citizens a tax break. Chair Griswold said that if the Town could lock-in the amount of property tax a senior was paying for a few years, it would help that senior citizen stay in his or her home longer and resultantly push-up local property values. Mr. Thomas suggested that the Council look at 32 VSA §3836 again, which allows a town to exempt $75,000 of Grand-List value for new homes and farm buildings. The Council decided to add a discussion of §32 VSA §3836 on the next Council agenda.

Discuss: SSMA changes for Sunset Dr. & Langdell Road – The Council evaluated the previous meeting's proposal to add 21.4 acres, centered on Sunset Drive and Langdell Road, into the Sewer Service Management Area. Neither Mr. Thomas nor the Council liked how the revised SSMA district description had to call out each and every lot in this Sunset and Langdell area. As such, the Council decided that land inside the SSMA should have a non-RRA Zone designation, like everyone else in town. So as not to create an exception for this neighborhood, it was decided to add this 21.4 acre area into the Low Density Residential Zone. My Thomas said he would prepare this change for the coming summer zoning change.

Discuss: Zone splits in the Business Enterprise & Commercial Zones – Mr. Thomas explained how different uses having varying density requirements in the Business Enterprise & Commercial Zones was causing confusion. He explained that realtors and attorneys were calling his office asking if a Home Business was considered residential or commercial and what the resultant zoning densities were. Chair Griswold thought it would be good policy only have one set of rules. Mr. Thomas said he would revise the Bylaws accordingly for the next zoning change. He added that he may try to merge the two aforementioned zones with the Mixed Office Residential Zone as part of that process.

Approve prior meeting minutes – Member Snipp moved to approve the February 20th meeting minutes. The motion was affirmed by a vote of 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 PM.
– submitted by Todd Thomas, Planning Director