

Minutes Rochester Planning Commission
June 3, 2025
Rochester Town Office and via Zoom

Present: Sandy Haas; Mary Fratini; Julie Martin; Dan McKinley; Pat Harvey (Zoning Administrator)

Guests: Rob Gardner, Barb DeHart, Carolyn Cruikshank, Lesley and Larry Strauss, Nancy Woolley, Deb Moore, Deb Matthews, Sarah Danley, Dean Mendell, Greg Stefurak, Asia Labesja-Kennett, Beth Kennett (zoom), Marc Preston (zoom), Lori Church (zoom), Sharon Solomon (zoom)

Call to Order: Dan McKinley called the meeting to order at 6:34pm.

Public Hearing re Brian Shebairo application for a Minor Subdivision of property at 162 Campbell Road

Letters were submitted by Marc Preston and Catherine Haas, Robert and Elizabeth Kennett, and David and Joanna Kennett. Marc and Catherine raised questions about: road frontage for each lot; siting for a new driveway; compliance with ordinances for wells and septic systems; increased traffic on Liberty Hill Road; compliance of existing structures with height restrictions, setbacks, water supply, and sewage; whether the application was complete. The Kennetts (collectively) raised questions about: increased traffic on Liberty Hill Road and whether existing or proposed activity precludes possibility of receiving designation as an historic district.

Neither Brian Shebairo nor a representative for him appeared for the hearing. Given that absence, Dan McKinley did not open the hearing. Dan made a motion to postpone the hearing one month to July 1, 2025 at 6:30pm and have Sandy Haas write a letter to the applicant indicating that the commission was prepared for the hearing (including a room full of interested parties), the commission was disappointed we could not move forward with the application, and reiterating the requirement for the applicant to be present at that hearing to answer questions from the commission. The motion was seconded by Julie Martin and unanimously approved by the commission.

Permit inquiries:

Barb DeHart asked for feedback on the subdivision of property at 146 Colonel DeHart Stand into two parcels. Lot 1 will be ~60 acres for sale; Lot 2 will be ~110 acres. Lot 1 does not have road frontage, so will have a ROW across Lot 2. The commission noted that the proposed subdivision seemed likely to meet the necessary conditions, but that they could not warn the hearing until a new survey was completed.

Housing Committee report on status of housing in Rochester

Deb Matthews, from the Rochester Housing Committee, and Sarah Danley, from the White River Consortium, presented a summary of the committee's work since 2020 and the current state of housing in Rochester. Sarah noted that the information on housing in the current town plan is out of date (from 2010 and 2016); she and the housing committee have worked with more recent

data from the American Communities Survey (2020) and the state of Vermont property transfer database (2019-present).

Based on that data, Sarah said that:

- There are currently 821 housing units in Rochester, 33% of which were built before 1939
- The current vacancy rate for rental housing in Rochester is 0.6% (compared with the industry standard of 5% as necessary for tenant mobility)
- Since 2019 the total number of primary homes vs. secondary homes in Rochester have remained largely the same and most open land is staying that one.
- However, there were 86 sales in Rochester of properties that were already secondary homes, or became secondary homes after sale. She said this indicates that sales of primary homes becoming secondary homes may not be the primary driving of a housing shortage in Rochester, but that there was an opportunity in those 86 property transfers to recapture or add primary residences.
- According to HUD (Housing and Urban Development), the current market rate for a studio in Windsor County is \$1124/month; for a 2BR it is \$1301. Randolph conducted a labor market survey in 2022 that included Rochester, which indicated the actual rate for 2BRs in our area is \$1215/month.
- Affordable housing is generally defined as spending 30% or less of total household income on housing (which includes rent or mortgage, but also taxes, utilities, etc). In Rochester:
 - Of homeowners with no mortgage → 22% are cost burdened; 11% spend more than half their total income on housing
 - Of homeowners with a mortgage → 23% are cost burdened; 18% spend more than half their total income on housing
 - Of Renters → 58% are cost burdened; 26% spend more than half their total income on housing

Deb Matthews summarized activities hosted by the Housing Committee in the last few years, including:

- Producing a DIY Home Creators brochure listing resources for people who want to make more housing on their property;
- Organizing a DIY home creators panel, which is available on the ORCA media website
- Organizing a resource fair at the high school
- Organizing an intergenerational conversation, with the topic of “What has been your experience making a home here?”

On behalf of the Housing Committee, Deb Matthews asked for the town to:

- Make a statement reaffirming that housing is a priority for this community.
- Appoint an individual from the planning commission and/or selectboard as a work with the housing committee.
- Get some kind of formal recognition for the Housing Committee beyond its current description.

Greg Stefurak asked about the cause/effect relationships between population increase/decrease, demographics such as age and size of household, and employment. Dean Mendell said that in his

experience as a business owner, his workers can't find housing. Deb Moore noted that it was difficult to get accurate information about short-term rentals. Lesley Strauss suggested that a successful demonstration project might be helpful. Rob Gardner said it would be valuable to have information about housing coalesced in a single place.

Dan McKinley asked if there was data on the amount of income necessary for housing at different price points—for example, what would the household income need to be for a \$250,000 property, in order to be considered affordable. Sandy Haas noted that the regional planning commission had a target for new units in town, as described in a previous planning commission meeting. Pat Harvey noted that changes to Act 250, especially the exemptions to septic requirements for lots over 10 acres through 2007, might affect development for housing. She also suggested that including properties from Great Hawk might be affecting the analysis of housing in Rochester overall.

Dan suggested that the Housing Committee make their request for more formal recognition to the Selectboard.

Administrative Officer Report: Building and Zoning Applications

- *Otto Thein, 542 Town Line Road*, permit for deck and renovation was approved.
- *Deb Turnbull, 934 Middle Hollow Road*, permit for new deck construction was approved.
- *Scott Flaherty, 115 Kennedy Drive*, permit for constructing a “sugarhouse” (inoperative) was approved.
- *Jim Chambers, 1200 Marsh Brook Road*, permit for constructing a sports court was approved.
- *Ian Treadway, 572 Clay Hill*, permit for construction of a new house to replace the former Bob Harvey house was conditionally approved pending additional documentation on the septic system.
- *Wright and Rogue, 366 Access Road*, permit conditionally approved for construction of a new house pending a wastewater permit.

Lights at Singh's shop – Pat said she spoke with Justin, the manager, about the lights being on at the gas station after 10pm. He said it was employee errors; she suggested installing a timer and will follow up with Singh if it continues to be an issue.

Floodlights at 162 Campbell Road – Based on the letters submitted as part of Brian Shebairo's application for a minor subdivision, Pat will follow-up on the existing floodlights at the property to ensure they are in compliance with the zoning bylaws.

Continue review of Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission draft Regional Future Land Use map

The board agreed to move this agenda item to next month's meeting.

Approval of minutes

The meetings were approved as submitted.

Public Comment -- limited to 3 minutes

Deb Moore, Lori Church, and Sharon Solomon all followed up on a new filing by Vertex for the cell phone tower. This is a new 60-day notice of their intent to file an application for construction of a cell phone tower, now at 140ft rather than the previous project of 175ft. Deb Moore asked the planning commission to hold another public informational meeting, without the representative from Vertex. Deb and Lori asked the board to invite Annette Smith of Vermonters for Clean Environment (VCE) to speak at the next planning commission meeting, the public informational meeting, or both, on the Section 248a permitting process.

After a brief discussion, the planning commission agreed to add the new application as its own agenda item for the July meeting, including inviting the Public Utility Commission to send a representative and planning a public informational meeting. The commission declined to invite Annette Smith, but noted that the meeting is open to the public

The meeting was adjourned at 8:43pm

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 1, 2025 at 6:30pm.