

Town of Bristol
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Tuesday, February 18, 2025
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Kevin Hanson, Melissa Hernandez, Chanin Hill, John Moyers, Rob Rooker, Slim Pickens, Bill Sayre

Staff Present: AZ Larsen, Zoning and Planning Administrator

Others Present: Ian Albinson (Selectboard), Carolyn Dash (CC), Max Seltzer, Alex Smith (CC)

I. Call to Order: Kevin called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm. The meeting was held in person and via ZOOM.

II. Review agenda for additions, removal, or adjustment of any items per 1 V.S.A. 18 §312(d)(3)(A) and implicit approval

The order in which topics were to be covered was adjusted.

III. Public Comment

Nobody requested time to comment.

IV. New Business

Discussion: Wildlife Corridors Project Update – Bristol Conservation Commission

Carolyn, Max, and Alex outlined some of the work taken on by the CC with the assistance of Middlebury College students. Their efforts have focused on updating Bristol's wildlife corridor mapping on a broad scale, and at this point they are seeking input from the PC regarding what further information would be helpful as work on the upcoming Town Plan review and update are undertaken.

The maps of wildlife corridors, forest blocks, and habitat connectors which currently exist were presented, and it was noted that these were created in 2002, and should be updated due to changing landscape dynamics, further development which has taken place, and other factors. Student work has focused on mapping as well as camera trapping, GIS work, and community outreach; survey results and educational materials are available.

The group explained that they are interested in providing this and related information to help inform the Town Plan, and provided further details on species found through camera trapping efforts in several locations, mapping that exists regarding conserved land and land cover, data related to iNaturalist mammal sightings, and information that may be gleaned regarding high priority biodiversity areas. They proposed next steps to include continued research to gain a better understanding of what currently exists and what is changing, as well as increased collaboration between the CC and PC to converse about the interplay of development and conservation.

Board members asked several questions, leading to Alex pointing out that the map of conserved land at this point likely only shows publicly held land, and that privately conserved land should be added. He also noted that wildlife does not necessarily need fully conserved land, but that development can also take place that leaves corridors intact, or even relocates/creates areas of tree or hedge cover which wildlife will use to navigate between forested blocks. It was acknowledged by those present that conservation is a complex issue, and that conservation does not necessarily equate with no development allowed on a parcel. Alex also noted that landowners generally are interested in ensuring that there is habitat available for the area wildlife.

Carolyn indicated that the CC is interested in discussing with the PC what research and mapping can be provided that will be useful in drafting the 2028 Town Plan, as well as how to collaborate on other projects going forward. Alex asked whether the PC is interested in wildlife information for any specific areas of Town.

Kevin explained that the PC will likely be focusing on housing in the near future, before taking a deeper dive into the Town Plan revisions for 2028. He noted that the PC works to balance both development needs and wildlife considerations, and that it would be valuable to have a better understanding of what is currently protected through various regulation strategies. Alex proposed shifting efforts to focus on a more micro level and determine ways to facilitate wildlife passage through developed/fragmented areas.

Slim asked about the impact on wildlife of recreational uses; Carolyn indicated that this has been looked into to some degree through camera trapping, and that it appears that dogs do have some impact, although the full consequences of hiking/bike trails and other recreational activities are not fully understood.

AZ spoke of addressing floodplain considerations, and learning how to make best use of parcels that cannot be developed but may be ideal area for wildlife/conservation.

V. Continuing Business

Discussion: Revised Proposal of EV Charger Interim Bylaw Presentation

AZ provided a revised draft of the proposed regulations, based upon the feedback received at the previous meeting, noting that the intent is to ensure alignment with the Town Plan and the character of Bristol. They had focused on concerns raised regarding installations of multiple chargers in a location, as well as discernment between public and private use.

The changes were reviewed; these included exemption of all Level 1 and Level 2 chargers, and requirements to be established for other facilities, including the need for at least one parking space and location in a manner to prevent physical damage from snow plowing and other impacts. AZ explained the proposal to allow chargers as a permitted accessory use if private, as well as provisions for Conditional Use review for chargers available for public use. These uses, as well as the districts proposed for inclusion, had been outlined in a new matrix.

Discussion led to general agreement that regulations should be based upon the level of use, generally a public/private distinction. It was pointed out that anything for public use might require Conditional Use review, through which any parameters deemed to be necessary could be put in place. It was also noted that public use chargers may be located on private property, and that Level 2 infrastructure is generally obsolete for travelers, but still important for homeowners/employers.

AZ will work on another iteration to present to the PC.

VI. Administrative Matters

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of January 21 and 30, 2025 were approved.

Review: PZA February Zoning Report – AZ noted that things are typically fairly quiet this time of year, but that some subdivision applications have been approved or are under review by the DRB. An update on the Masterson appeal was provided.

PC Membership: Ian asked if the members up for reappointment in March are interested in continuing on the PC; all three – John, Melissa, and Rob – indicated that they would like to be reappointed.

Discussion: New Haven and Monkton Town Plan Review – AZ noted that they have reviewed these new iterations, and highlighted that both towns put some focus on senior housing and elderly care, as well as some considerations of youth needs.

Discussion: Miscellaneous Correspondence – AZ received some information from Kevin Brown regarding the deemed approval language in the UDRs, and will be providing Kevin's recommendations for updates for PC discussion.

VII. Public Comment

No member of the public offered comments.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Chamberlin, Recording Secretary