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## MEMORANDUM

From: AZ Larsen, Planning and Zoning Administrator

To: Bristol Planning Commission

Date: February 17, 2026

RE: Proposed Planning Commission Focus Groups

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### Proposed Focus Groups

At the January 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, I proposed to the Planning Commission creating three focus groups as a method for approaching the Town Plan update. It was proposed that the groups be broken into People, Land, Infrastructure, that would then discuss the more specific Town Plan elements. Each group would have a designated leader who would also be a point contact for the public to reach out too. Along with the focus groups I proposed that the PC add a secondary meeting day that would be used for focus group work sessions.

During the meeting, the PC raised concerns with compliance with open meeting law. It was also a concern that decisions would be made at these work sessions without full board approval. Overall PC members wanted a more detailed overview of how the groups would function.

### Open Meeting Law

To get clarification on how and when the PC would need to comply with open meeting law I reached out to Vermont League of Cities and Towns to get feedback on the proposed focus groups. PC meetings must follow open meeting law whenever there is a quorum of members, which for this nine-member board is four members. The Planning Commission is a non-advisory body and has more requirements under Open Meeting Law.

Copied below are the requirements of Open Meeting Law taken from the VLCT website:

- Provide advance notice of meetings. [1 V.S.A. §§ 312\(c\), 310\(5\)](#)
- Create and post an agenda for all regular and special meetings. [1 V.S.A. § 312\(d\)](#)
- Conduct all business in an open meeting (unless an exemption applies). [1 V.S.A. §§ 312\(a\); 313\(a\)](#)
- Vote by roll call when there is electronic participation. [1 V.S.A. § 312\(a\)\(2\)\(B\)](#)
- Allow public comment at meetings. [1 V.S.A. § 312\(h\)](#)

- Take and post minutes. [1 V.S.A. § 312\(b\)](#)
- Record, in audio or video form, all meetings of non-advisory bodies.
- Post copies of recordings of non-advisory body meetings in a designated electronic location for a minimum of 30 days following the posting of the meeting minutes.
- Respond to complaints of violation. [1 V.S.A. § 314\(b\)\(2\)](#).
- Provide electronic/telephonic or in-person meeting access to a local resident, member of the public body, or member of the press to a regularly scheduled meeting, upon request, unless:
  - there is an all-hazards event or state of emergency;
  - there is a “local incident;” and
  - compliance would impose an “undue hardship.”

The feedback from VLCT regarding the focus groups and Open Meeting Law (OML) is that it depends on how the groups are structured. If the groups are informal and less than 3 members are present then compliance with OML would likely not be required. If the PC formally creates three focus groups, then these subgroups would be in a sense subcommittee that would also be required to follow OML.

### **Focus Group Structure**

Given the feedback from VLCT, the question that remains is what structure does the PC wish to have with this focus group, informal or formal?

#### Formal Structure:

- PC votes to create/establish the 3 subgroups
- Members are assigned to groups
- Requires OML compliance

#### Informal Structure:

- Members could switch groups more easily
- More flexibility for when groups meet
- Potential for possible OML violations