

Hartford Planning Commission/Town Plan Economic Development Steering Committee Meeting
Town Plan Economic Development Chapter Update
Draft Minutes
November 13, 2024

Planning Commission Chair John Reid called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He followed by reading the hybrid meeting script and conducting a roll call.

Attendance: The following individuals attended the meeting which was held at the Hartford Town Hall in Room 2 at 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction on Monday, November 13, 2024. The meeting was also available remotely and several people joined that way.

Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee:

John Reid	Planning Commission
Bruce Riddle	Planning Commission
John Heath	Planning Commission
Toby Dayman	Planning Commission
Colin Butler	Planning Commission
Havah Armstrong Walther	Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce
Kim Souza	Hartford Selectboard
Jesse Pollard	Energy Commission
Meghan Asbury	Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission

Staff:

Lori Hirshfield	Director, Department of Planning and Development
Matt Osborn	Town Planner, Department of Planning and Development

Others Present:

None.

Public Comments: John Reid asked if there were any public comments. There were none.

Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Minutes of 9/30/24: John Reid asked if there are any corrections to the minutes. Being none, Colin Butler made a motion to approve the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Minutes of 9/30/24. The motion was seconded by John Heath and approved unanimously.

Review of the Draft Economic Development Chapter: Matt noted that we will focus on the review of the Revised Draft Economic Development Chapter of the Town Plan since the 9/30 meeting in numerical order.

Chapter 1 Introduction: Colin noted a grammatical correction. There was discussion and agreement with Colin to make the change.

Chapter 2 Economic Profile: Bruce noted that we don't understand poverty in our community and how to measure it. Although the poverty rate for Hartford is 9.2%, the number of school age children that are eligible for free school lunches is 42%. Lori suggested reflecting the reduced lunches data on page 8 in the narrative section as another indicator of lower income that isn't necessarily captured in the traditional poverty rate data..

Kim previously disagreed with the idea that people choose to live here for the quality of life and accept lower wages. Kim noted that there is a large demographic that struggles to make ends meet and doesn't have a choice about leaving the area for better paying jobs. Kim stated that the Better City revisions were an improvement, but she thinks it still needs work. She noted that wages may not be sufficient for many folks to get by especially for one-person households.

Havah noted that she has had several friends move out of the Upper Valley to seek employment elsewhere since there weren't enough job opportunities here.

John Reid noted that there are many out-of-state second homeowners in Hartford who pay taxes. He said it would be helpful to have those numbers.

Jesse suggested a tax stabilization program to encourage accessory dwelling units.

Lori suggested that she meet with Kim to work on edits that better capture the quality of life focus on page 9.

Chapter 3 Strategic Plan: John Reid stated that as we look for an identity, we should develop language about who we are as a community. He suggested the following qualities: strong sense of community, quality of life, educational opportunities, environmental protection. He noted the importance of trying to attract young families to Hartford. Bruce agreed. He suggested creating a text box at the end of Chapter 3 on page 29. Others agreed.

Jesse asked if Hartford has a trails inventory. Matt responded that it was developed about fifteen years ago but noted that it excludes Quechee Lakes trails since they did not want their trails identified on a map available to the public. Havah noted that the Army Corps of Engineers is interested in talking to the Town about trails. Havah suggested that there be some mention of the Appalachian Trail in the Economic Development Chapter and the need for signage identifying it. Others agreed.

Bruce commented on the importance of walkability and noted that it is mentioned in the chapter four times.

Lori noted that she will make some edits on the Hartford Business Revolving Loan Fund section on page 27.

Bruce noted that maker spaces are identified on pages 28 and 31. He asked if there should be more detail. Meghan noted maker spaces in Claremont, Springfield, Randolph and the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center. Bruce suggested creating a text box at the end of page 29.

Kim suggested adding language about the need for higher wages in general and not just creating high tech jobs that pay higher wages.

Jesse suggested tying in housing with the Village Center section.

Bruce suggested creating an identity text box on Page 20 about things we should be striving for such as clean public restrooms downtown, public art, low maintenance pocket parks, more street trees and other landscaping. Colin stated that he likes the text box concept.

Chapter 4 Metrics: There were no comments.

Appendix: Kim noted a misspelling.

Formatting of the Town Plan: Kim noted the formatting of the Economic Development Chapter and asked how it relates to the rest of the Town Plan. Lori responded that the Town Plan is plain and outdated. It needs to be more visually appealing, so we are transitioning to a more colorful and engaging format. Also, since most people read the Town Plan on-line, we will change from a portrait layout to landscape for easier reading.

Lori stated that staff will make the changes since the consultant already has put extra time into the project.

Lori asked the group to submit any additional comments to staff as soon as possible.

Town Plan Update Next Steps: Lori stated that staff will work on revisions to the Draft Economic Development Chapter as well as some revisions to the Draft Housing Chapter. In addition, the Parks and Recreation Department is working on revisions to the Parks and Recreation section of the Community Facilities and Services Chapter. Once the final draft of the Economic Development Chapter is completed, it will be presented to the Selectboard. Following that, the formal adoption process of the Town Plan will begin.

Update of the Regional Plan: Lori noted that for the last several months, the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) has been working on an update of the Regional Plan. She noted that she sent the Planning Commission an email with information on the update. Lori stated that Bruce has been involved in the process and has provided extensive comments to TRORC. She asked Bruce to provide an overview of the update to the Planning Commission and Town Plan Steering Committee.

Bruce stated that State Statute requires the Regional Plan to be regularly updated. In this update, TRORC focused on six of the fourteen chapters including Healthy Communities, Transportation, Economic Development, Natural Resources, History and Culture, and Utilities. He noted that TRORC made a conscious effort to reduce the size of the Plan using links to access additional information. Bruce reported that TRORC held three public hearings on the Draft Plan and is expected to adopt the updated Plan in December or January. Regarding the comments he has submitted to TRORC about the Plan, Bruce stated that TRORC has been very accommodating. Lori suggested that Bruce share his comments on the Draft Regional Plan with the Planning Commission and Town Plan Steering Committee. Bruce agreed. Lori asked the Planning Commission to send any comments on the Draft Regional Plan to Matt and Lori as soon as possible.

Bruce stated that in the spring, TRORC will begin work on the Land Use and Energy chapters which will include reviewing the land use maps. Bruce noted that according to State Statute, Town Plans must be in compliance with the Regional Plan.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Planning Commission Member Terms: Dillon Bianchi, 9/5/25, Colin Butler, 6/24/27, Toby Dayman, 6/24/27, John Heath, 3/11/27, Dylan Kreis, 6/26/26, Bruce Riddle, 2/7/25 and Chair John Reid, 2/5/27.