

**TRORC Board Meeting – Zoom Meeting  
September 23, 2020 – Board Meeting Minutes**

**Attendance:**

Name	Town	2/26/20	3/25/20	4/22/20	5/27/20	6/24/20	9/23/20
Jerry Fredrickson	Barnard	X	X	X	X	X	X
Paul Vallee	Bethel			X		X	X
Nancy Jones	Bradford	X	X	X	X	X	X
Marcey Carver	Bradford (Alt)	X	X		X	X	X
Vacant	Braintree						
Lynne Bertram	Bridgewater						
Norman Martin, II	Bridgewater (Alt.)						
Gwynn Zakov	Brookfield	X		X	X		
Jon Binhammer	Brookfield (Alt.)						
Carl Pepperman	Chelsea			X		X	
Tim O'Dell	Corinth	X	X	X		X	
Peter Berger	Fairlee	X	X	X		X	
Mark Belisle	Granville	X	X				
Monica Collins	Hancock		X			X	
Lori Hirshfield	Hartford		X	X	X	X	X
Bruce Riddle	Hartford (Alt)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Charles Jeffries	Hartland	X	X	X	X		X
David Ormiston	Hartland					X	
Frank Tegethoff	Newbury	X	X	X	X		X
Larry Scott	Newbury (Alt.)						
Rod Francis	Norwich		X	X	X		X
Jeff Lubell	Norwich	X		X		X	X
Sarah Gallagher	Pittsfield		X	X		X	X
Anne Brown	Plymouth	X	X				X
Jim Allen	Plymouth (Alt.)						
Bill Emmons	Pomfret	X	X	X			X
Phil Dechert	Pomfret (Alt)	X			X	X	X
Ramsey Papp	Randolph	X	X	X	X	X	X
Gary Dir	Randolph (Alt)		X	X	X		X
Anni Mackay	Rochester	X	X	X			
Doon Hinderyckx	Rochester (Alt)	X		X			
David Brandau	Royalton			X	X	X	X
Bushrod Powers	Royalton (Alt)		X			X	X
Ira Clark	Sharon						X
Deborah Jones	Sharon (Alt.)						
Bill Edgerton	Stockbridge						
John Echeverria	Strafford		X	X	X		X
Jesse Anderson	Thetford		X		X		X
Jim Masland	Thetford (Alt)						
Jim Clark	Topsham						X
Michael Sacca	Tunbridge		X				
Kevin Rose	Tunbridge (Alt)	X	X	X	X		X
Bill Baylis	Vershire						
Nancy Malmquist	W. Fairlee	X	X	X		X	
Don Bourdon	Woodstock			X			
Steve Schneider	At-Large	X					
Meghan Butts	At-Large			X	X		X
Jennifer Colby	At-Large	X	X			X	
Ken Alton	At-Large		X	X			
Vacant - Conservation	At-Large						

Beth Long	At-Large	X	X	X	X	X	X
Meg Emmons	At-Large		X			X	

**Staff:** Peter Gregory, Kevin Geiger, Pete Fellows, Geoff Martin, Lori Kay

**Guests:** David Brown, ECFiber; Nick Clark, Town of Thetford

**1. Call to Order, Approval of the Agenda, Introductions, and Public Comments:**

The virtual meeting opened at 6:33 p.m. A quorum after roll call was declared. No changes to the agenda were made. There were no comments from the public.

**2. Public Hearing – Thetford Town Plan approval**

No comments were offered during the Public Hearing for the Town Plan Approval. Gregory provided Staff comments, noting that Thetford’s Town Plan expired in 2017 and the town has been working on it for some time. TRORC assisted the town by reviewing draft sections of the Town Plan and supplying the maps. All new statutory requirements have been reflected in the new Town Plan; and approval of the Plan was recommended.

Chair Fredrickson closed the Hearing.

**3. Public Hearing – Confirmation of Thetford’s Planning Process**

No comments were offered during the Public Hearing for the confirmation of Thetford’s Planning Process. Gregory explained that Vermont Statutes requires Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) to confirm the planning process of each municipality twice in an eight-year period. This is typically done after the RPC votes to approve a Town Plan. There are three requirements that must be met to obtain the approval of the RPC – 1) The municipality is moving toward adopting a Town Plan that is consistent with the goals in State Statute; 2) The municipality has an active Planning Commission; 3) The municipality is committing some local resources to the planning process locally. Thetford’s process met those requirements and the Staff has recommended the Board approve Thetford’s Planning Process.

Chair Fredrickson closed the Hearing.

Commissioner Echeverria noted TRORC’s Town Plan review comment - that Thetford’s Town Plan “...does not discuss the citizen participation process used during the development and adoption of the Plan,” and asked if that was a concern. Gregory responded saying that TRORC included a suggestion for improvement on that topic at the end of the Review. The overall assessment was it was not a large enough issue to not approve the Plan because TRORC knows the town did include citizen participation in their planning process.

Commissioner Echeverria inquired on the newer requirements (especially forest blocks) that are now part of Town Plans and asked if these new requirements are making a difference within the towns. Geiger shared that he has seen the requirements making an impact on zoning bylaws.

On a motion made by Commissioner Jones, and seconded by Commissioner Papp, the Thetford Town Plan and the Confirmation of Thetford’s Planning Process were unanimously approved.

**4. Approval of Minutes from June 24, 2020**

On a motion made by Commissioner Emmons and seconded by Commissioner Jones, the June Meeting Minutes were accepted unanimously.

#### **5. Acceptance of the July/August 2020 TRORC Financial Reports**

On a motion made by Commissioner Emmons, and seconded by Commissioner Brandau, the July and August Financial Reports were approved unanimously.

Gregory offered a few comments on the status of the FY21 budget: A good portion of our income is received during the first few months of the fiscal year, including Town Dues, payments for work completed during the previous fiscal year, and a quarterly payment from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD).

TRORC incurred an unanticipated expense during the first quarter. Replacement traffic equipment was purchased to continue transportation-related work. The cost of the equipment was fully covered by TRORC's transportation contract.

On the income side, TRORC received a grant to support Sole Proprietors in Vermont which also was not included in the FY21 budget. ACCD awarded the \$1.5 million grant to TRORC to make two rounds of subgrants to Sole Proprietors. Approximately \$130,000 will come to TRORC to cover staff time. The remainder of the funds will go directly to the subgrantees. This new income and expense will be added into the financial reports in September.

The annual audit is nearly complete. Fieldwork related to the Federally required Single Audit will take place September 30 – October 2. Gregory is still waiting for the final numbers regarding TRORC's year-end fund balance. The final audit documents should be ready for the Board to review and accept at the October meeting.

#### **6. Presentation by David Brown from ECFiber**

David Brown, one of the founders of ECFiber, provided an overview of the history, development, infrastructure and mission of the company. The idea for the company began in 2007 and now provides services to 5,000 customers within the Eastern Central District of Vermont. There is growing consumer demand to receive access to ECFiber services and ECFiber is adding staff to address that increased demand. A recent grant from the VT Department of Public Service will allow ECFiber to bring wifi service to 251 locations within the District by 12/31/20, focusing primarily on creating wifi access to schools and health providers. Questions and answers followed.

#### **7. Keys to the Valley Housing Study**

Kevin Geiger provided an overview of the Housing Study that is being conducted by three area Regional Planning Commissions – TRORC, Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission and the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission. The goal of the study is to gain an understanding of the lack of affordable homes, identify solutions that are available to address the lack of affordable homes, and overcome obstacles to putting the best solutions into action in the region.

So far, the study has completed a community-wide survey of area residents on housing issues. That combined with data from outside research shows that building is not keeping up with demand for affordable housing. The data collected will be included in the final report. The final report will

also include a high-level zoning review and a resource on the elements of building houses – who builds them, how are they built based on type of housing, and financing. The report will be completed by the end of September and will be available online.

Geiger responded to a follow-up question noting that the report will include information on the impact of Covid-19 on the housing market in the Northeast – increased interest from out-of-state prospective home owners driving up demand as well as the eventual ending of the stop-gap protections from foreclosures and evictions.

#### **8. New Staff Member - Geoff Martin**

Gregory introduced Geoff Martin to the Board. Martin is the Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator working on energy issues with six of the Region's towns.

Martin addressed the Board, sharing an overview of his work so far as the Energy Coordinator and included a brief overview of a few upcoming funding opportunities. Green Mountain Power will be launching a pilot program for vehicle-charging station infrastructure. The State of Vermont will be offering grants to fund vehicle electrification.

He also announced the next round of the Button Up Vermont campaign. In November, Martin will be hosting an online presentation on the Button Up weatherization program. Residents from the full 30-town region are all invited to attend.

#### **9. Staff/Commissioner Updates**

Gregory offered a brief forecast of TRORC's funding picture. TRORC's main funding streams appear to be untouched – no reduction in funding as occurred for FY21. Municipal Planning Grant funding for FY21 will remain level funded. There is less certainty about funding for FY22.

Local Government Expense Reimbursement program – Towns who have not already expressed an interest in seeking reimbursement for their Covid-19 related expenses have until October 1 to sign up to participate. Contact Kimberly Gilbert at TRORC with any questions.

Economic Development Administration grant application – Still waiting on word on this possible grant award to assist the Creative Economy within the region. If funded, TRORC will need additional staff capacity.

Act 250 – Last year, House passed lots of changes to Act 250 resulting in a stripped-down version of the Act. It was handed to the Senate for their review. The Senate sent back very few changes to Act 250. The House is expected to vote as early as Thursday, September 24. Gregory also confirmed that Forestry management and fragmentation issues were addressed in the Senate-passed version of the Act. The House will need to vote to concur in order to pass the changes to the Act.

Monique Priestley, TRORC's Volunteer of the Year for 2000, has accepted a new job as Project Manager for the Center for Women & Enterprise in Burlington, VT.

Chair Fredrickson shared that he is hearing there will be a strong need among graduating high school seniors for scholarship funds. TRORC's scholarship fund will be appreciated.

Meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m. with a motion by Commissioner Tegethoff.

Meeting Minutes prepared by:

Lori Kay, Finance Manager, September 25, 2020