Full Commission Meeting  
November 19, 2013  
The Westminster Institute, Westminster, VT

Commissioners Present: Jodi French (Chair), Maggie Bartenhagen, Nick Bartenhagen, Sam Battaglino, Tom Buchanan, Tom Consolino, Jack Cunningham, Charles Goodwin, Ray Mara, Priscilla Margola, Jane Morano Purdy, Bill Murray, Carolyn Partridge, Steve Skibniowsky, Lew Sorenson, Andy Toepfer, Roger Turner, John Whitman,  
Citizen Interest Commissioners Present: Greg Brown  
Guests Present: Vermont Speaker of the House, Shap Smith; Representative Mike Mrowicki; Pat Moulten-Powden, BDCC; Paul & Jody Normandeau, Gail Sorenson, Liisa Kissel, members of the public, Jim Olivier  
Staff Present: Chris Campany, Ashley Collins, Jim Matteau, Kim Smith  
Introductions: There was a quorum of 14 towns present.  
Convened: 7:04PM  

Vermont Speaker of the House: Shap Smith, Vermont Speaker of the House, was present to discuss issues confronting the State during the upcoming legislative session. The Speaker discussed the challenges the State of Vermont is faced with, including budget shortfalls, an aging population, economic development, and the need to keep and recruit a younger workforce. He felt that investments in our roads and bridges are important to economic vitality. Education costs per pupil were a concern, and he discussed his recent realization of the potential benefits of technology in the classroom such as electronic tablets. Broadband should be made available to all schools, to help teach students to embrace technology, get them excited about learning, and be creative through the use of media. The cost of higher education in Vermont is among the highest in the nation. Vermont needs to figure out a way to leverage the educational assets to build the future of the State and Windham County. Questions were raised by Commissioners on a variety of topics including: school/district consolidation, higher education funding, creating more opportunities to keep the younger generations in Vermont, increased tax assessments and tax burden, the burden placed upon towns by TransCanada valuation appeals, and state energy planning including wind issues and renewable energy.
Administrative Items & Reports:

Secretary’s Report: On a motion by T. Consolino, seconded by J. Cunningham, the minutes from the October meeting were approved.

Financial Report: On a motion by L. Sorenson, seconded by T. Consolino, the October Finance Report was approved.

Executive Director’s Report & Other Business:

1. Chris summarized the West River Valley meeting for business owners. Top issues identified by the attendees included marketing, cell phone service, transportation (especially transit and bicycle), and village wastewater infrastructure (or the lack thereof).
2. There will be no Commission meeting in December. The next Commission meeting will be held in Townshend in January.

Committee Chair Reports:

Energy Committee: The Committee expressed concern over the definition of “rural land” in our current regional plan. Several committees use this term, and they are working towards a more specific definition in the regional plan update.

Natural Resources Committee: M. Bartenhagen announced that the Committee participated in the Rich Earth Institute gathering.

Planning Coordination Committee: The Committee is continuing discussion on the town plan review process; and trying to find something that improves the experience and is more beneficial for both the town and the Commission.

Regional Plan Update: The recent public forum had low attendance, but a solid discussion regarding the Regional Plan Update.

Transportation Committee: L. Sorenson gave a brief update on the park and ride project, and mentioned that the Committee has received a request to look at a bridge in Rockingham.

C. Goodwin moved adjournment.
Meeting adjourned at 8:35PM

Respectfully submitted,
Ashley Collins