Members Present: Gabby Ciuffreda, Chair; Bill Dunkel, Lise Fortin, Liisa Kissel, Kevin Stine, John Whitman, Andrew Toepfer, Susan Hammond, Linda Hecker.

Absent: Steve Lembke, Everett Wilson.

Staff present: Emily Davis.

Public: Eunice Crowell, Readsboro Planning Commission.

Presenter: None.

Meeting called to order at 5:08 p.m.

1. Meeting Minutes:
   - Action: Minutes from the July 26, 2018 meeting were approved on a motion by John Whitman, seconded by Liisa Kissel, and with a unanimous vote.

2. Review Regional Plan Update Schedule:
   Gabby Ciuffreda talked about the general schedule among the entire Windham Regional Commission for updating the Regional Plan. She discussed how each of the committees are reviewing what needs to be addressed or updated in their respective planning areas. WRC staff will then collect these committee notes, and organize internally by October 17 2018 to develop a plan for writing the update.

3. Review 2014 Windham Regional Plan Land Use Policies:

The Natural Resources Committee Commissioners provided comment on the follow elements of the Natural Resources summary section, on pages 7-14 of the 2014 Regional Plan:

Liisa Kissel commented that the NRC should review the Land Use (LU) policies in light of Act 171, and what we need to change or add to come into conformance with that legislation. There was discussion as what Act 171 requirements were for both regional and municipal plans.
Bill Dunkel: On pg. 8, Rural/Commercial areas are concentrated along the main highways... What are the areas that are considered Rural/Commercial (R/C)? How are these areas developed so that they don’t look like strip development? As a goal or objective, the idea would be to prevent sprawl and to concentrate development, and the Plan ought to be explicit in that objective.

Areas were identified verbally that could be R/C, but they did not appear on the existing LU map. This was identified as something to be addressed in the Plan update.

John Whitman: Identified that there is a conundrum or conflict in the policies. On one hand, the policies want to keep development where it already is, but we can’t easily solve the septic problem in our communities and so it results in development along the highways.

Lise Fortin: Wondered if there is a way to address working from home or telecommuting in the LU policies, and providing space for people to do so. This is becoming increasingly relevant. Emily Davis did mention that there was a section of the existing Plan where telecommunications policies exist, but it is not explicitly connect to LU.

Liisa Kissel: Brought up how this ties into telecommunications overall, and the development of high-speed internet in rural communities.

Bill Dunkel: There are many organizations and policies that preserve forest land and habitat blocks. Is there an organization that cares for dilapidated buildings in village centers? This connects to the issue of wanting to concentrate development in our village centers (but often private capital doesn’t want to touch it). Kevin Stine added that attaining Village Center designation may be helpful in acquiring some of these grant funds.

Gabby Ciuffreda: Clarified that it makes no business sense to pour funds into these old buildings, since the return on investment is so poor. Communities may organize and fundraise, in the Putnam Block redevelopment project is a group of developers that are working together. Having designation gives you access to certain tax credits towards upgrades.

We could see if there is some support or resources that the WRC can provide to inhabit old and derelict buildings.

Andy Topefer: Commented that policies #3,6,9 all discuss maintaining rural character by concentrating development in village centers. But, we may not be able to actually accomplish these policies due to infrastructure limitations of existing wastewater facilities, so should those policies be removed or changed all together? John Whitman added that one purpose of having those policies is to meet and comport with the State’s planning goals, which is required of regional plans.

Susan Hammond: Identified that policy #11 discusses trails, the recreational use of trails, and finding ways for communities to work together on that common resource. We might want to examine whether or not recreation should be included in the Land Use section.

Similarly, Andy Topefer that in the case of the WH/PA, those trails are considered “development,” and liable to Act 250. Therefore, policy #14 should be examined.

There was some discussion about the meaning of “mitigation” in the LU policies; we should be sure that the word means what we want it to mean, and that it becomes more clear. The update may want to
include the mitigation of forest lands that are cleared. Liisa Kissel commented that these mitigations scenarios are relevant under Act 250 and Act 248, and so those should be referred in the policies. The WRC cannot control that process, but we can have some say in the Plan policies.

There is also reference to an Open Space Plan creation on pg.12. Is there any movement on that? Can this be part of our Act 171 process?

John Whitman displayed a BioFinder screenshot map of the Region, and made the case for doing mapping at the town-level to incorporate the special and fragile natural communities (that are referenced in the current LU policies). This would mean referencing vernal pools, etc. He mentioned that Searsburg is labeled as entirely “Resource,” and the designation does not make sense for that Town. The policy names, descriptions, and the current map do not line up.

Bill Dunkel added that what Windham Town may want to include as a “resource protection” area would be ridgelines, which may not be the same case in all of the other Towns. How do these become harmonized within the Regional Plan?

John Whitman: The critical resource areas ought to be defined as the Town. BioFinder does not take into account other issues to municipalities (such as economics).

Gabby Ciuffreda suggested a collaborative partnership process with the WRC staff regarding the mapping process to identify: what we want to look at, the types and nature of the data, and then the definitions. She also offered that there ought to be enough flexibility in the WRC plan for municipalities to have their own say in the different weighting of the policies, rather than one-sized-fits-all policies.

LK: In the end, we want to preserve our water, environment, habitat, ridgelines, wildlife, etc, and in the end, those are our economic assets. In Grafton, one of the big reasons that the wind project was voted down was the natural and historic character of the town, which once destroyed, would hurt the Grafton economic assets. So, conservation and economics aren’t mutually exclusive in all of the communities.

Lise Fortin: Added that there could be more discussion about waste management, composting, and municipal decisions regarding available materials (i.e. plastic bag ban).

Gabby Ciuffreda: Would the emerald ash borer impact land use policies? John Whitman added that cutting down all of the ash trees would negative impact the landscape, given that cutting all the ash now is tempting in terms of profit.

Andy Toepfer: What about Shoreland protection; does this occur on the map as another land use area? Ought we include this in the map?

There was discussion about how inaccurate the data on the state maps are, and there must be an effort to get it fixed. These things are done at a broad-brush level and should be corrected. Gabby Ciuffreda closed the discussion by adding that this is why it is all the more important for towns to be part of the process of mapping, so that local data can be incorporated more effectively into regional data. This will be important work for the Commissioners to work with their respective towns in this way.
4. Next Meeting:

- The Natural Resources Committee will cancel their October meeting, due to the October 30th Full Commission meeting, where VT ANR Secretary Julie Moore will be the guest presenter.

- The Natural Resources Committee has also scheduled a field trip with the Energy Committee on Thursday, November 15th, to the Rich Earth Institute’s facilities, along with the Solid Waste District’s anaerobic digester and the commercial solar field. The field trip will run from 3:00-5:00pm in Brattleboro.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 6:25 pm, with a motion by Lise Fortin and seconded by Liisa Kissel.