

Town of Voluntown

Planning & Zoning Commission

Voluntown Town Hall

Thursday December 19, 2019

Special Meeting

APPROVED MINUTES

(Approved 4/8/2020)

1. **Call to Order:** Chairman Scott Davidson called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM

- Members Present: Scott Davidson, Bob Panko, David Nieminen, and Alternate Members John Savage, Max Hollowell and Judith Allik.
- Members Absent: Tom Sweet and Paul Hartman

2. **Seating of Alternates:** Alternate Members Max Hollowell and John Savage were seated as voting members.

3. **Public Hearing:** Draft of Voluntown 2020-2030 Plan of Conservation and Development revised 9/11/2019 as proposed by the Voluntown Planning and Zoning Commission

Chairman S. Davidson reviewed the order of the Public Hearing. Order will be 1) Presentation of Draft POCD by Jim Larkin, NECOG; 2) Presentation by Staff; 3) Questions from the Commission; 4) Citizens' comments; 5) Questions from the Commission.

Chairman Davidson noted that this meetings notice was published on December 3, 2019 and December 10, 2019.

Jim Larkin from NECCOG presented the POCD and offered some suggested edits to improve certain sections.

Explained the statutory requirements for the content and adoption of the POCD, and consistency with State POCD. He stated that certain components of a POCD like the future land use map were omitted because Voluntown is such a small town and there are few options for development.

He stated that new Commission members' names be added to the acknowledgment page of plan.

Chairman Davidson requested that Exhibits A-F be added to the record. Exhibits A-C were from Juliet Hodge including comments on the Plan and a draft revision of the document.

Exhibits D-F were from the 1st Selectman and included the letter to the State requesting the extension for adoption.

Citizens Comments:

The following people offered general comments:

Jack Wesa, EDC Chairman (844 Pendleton Hill Road) spoke thanking the Commission members for all their hard work. He expressed some concerns about the POCD not addressing the issue of how to bring more businesses to town – particularly tourism related businesses and activities. He stated that Voluntown needed to partner with the State and look into the possibility of having small Hydro-electric units on our various dams to be used to power our municipal buildings and other buildings in town. With respect to health and safety, Mr. Wesa suggested that we need a goal about advocating for a higher State reimbursement amount for PA490 Farm

and Forest land, and factor in the cost associated with having to provide emergency services on State Forest land.

Jim McBride (150 Bennett Road) spoke thanking the Commission on their hard work and for including more language about the town's water resources. He discussed the need for more public education about the potential harm to water resources from the use of chemicals on lawns, along the roads and on farms, and for the need for radon testing for wells. He discussed other potential threats to our water resources. He questioned the lack of discussion on diversity in the POCD, and suggested some changes to the wording about the Native American history.

Juliet Hodge, (622 Pendleton Hill Road) expressed "huge concerns" about the draft plan she was sent a few weeks ago to review as the Town planner in the neighboring municipality of North Stonington. She strongly disagreed that the POCD didn't need a future land use map. She stated that areas of infill, or areas needing preservation etc. could be shown on the future land use map. She stated that the plan was negative and generic and did not emphasize the positive aspects of town. She questioned why NECOG used old data. She stated that she had actually edited the Plan for the Commission, fixing the numerous typos and awkward wording and format. She also updated the demographic data and charts, among other things. A copy of the edited POCD was emailed to the Chairman prior the meeting to be included in the record of the Public Hearing along with the Comments she submitted at the prior meeting in November. The Chairman stated that everything J. Hodge had submitted was in the record. She stated that she knew the Town was late getting the POCD approved, but that the Commission could request an extension from the State.

Tracy Hanson, 1st Selectman, stated that this had been taken care of already, so no applications for funding would be affected if the Commission did not approve the POCD tonight.

J. Hodge noted that the draft POCD that NECOG provided lacked a Vision statement and Future Land Use Plan as required by Statute and that it was impossible to write goals without a vision. She asked that the changes she presented be accepted, and that the Commission spend a little more time fixing the goals and articulating an actual vision. She stated that she hoped they would not rush to adopt and that they would take the time to make some of the suggested modifications and offered to help with this work. She acknowledged how much work goes into writing a POCD, and commended them for completing the Plan despite limited public input.

Tracy Hanson, 1st First Selectman, spoke thanking the Commission for their hours of work on the POCD over the past few years, and commended them for their dedication to the project and efforts to get the public involved in the process. She also commented that she was disappointed about the lack of public involvement during the process.

Mark Simmons, (84 Hightop Hill Rd.) thanked the Commission for their hard work. He spoke about the lack of details in the goals and objectives section relating to Economic Development, noting that there was no mention of what kind of businesses the town was trying to attract – no vision etc. He also noted that it did not address issues regarding recreation, specifically facilities maintenance and improvements, which in his opinion are in poor condition. He suggested creating a renovation plan and expand the facilities in a way that will benefit the Town as a whole.

Commission remarks:

J. Allik raised a concern that the issue of declining population was not addressed, and wanted to know what the Town's vision was on how to attract more people/families to Town. She suggested the Plan should promote the Town as a great place for young families to come live and raise their children. J. Hodge suggested that the Town needs to decide who they were planning for: new families or the existing aging population.

Chairman Davidson thanked all for their patience and input and asked for a motion to close the Public Hearing,

**A motion was made and seconded (D. Neiminen / M. Hollowell) to close the Public Hearing at 8:15PM.
MOTION PASSED**

4. New Business: Discussion and possible action on the 2020/2030 POCD:

Chairman Davidson acknowledged the points that were brought up during the Public Hearing and wished that they had been brought up 3 years prior. He spoke of a few grammatical errors that needed addressing and asked that the newly elected Commission members be added to the Acknowledgments page.

Mr. Nieminen asked whether the waivers were in place so that it would be OK to postpone approval. 1st Selectman Hanson stated that the waivers were in place. Mr. Larkin stated that he read the comments and the revised draft that J. Hodge had submitted, and stated that the Commission could adopt any technical changes suggested, such as grammar and sentence structure, but if the changes rose above structure and were considered to be substantive, then a new public hearing would be necessary. He stated that the Commission could give him direction to make the technical corrections.

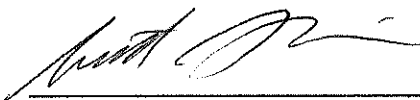
Members continued to discuss different options with respect to waiting to adopt so that changes could be made, or adopting the current draft now and amending later. Chairman Davidson felt that there were many valid points raised, but that they should adopt what they have and let J. Hodge work on amendments over the next year. He also stated that the Regulations needed work.

Bob Panko commented that the plan could be amended at any time in the future, and he thought we should get a committee together of involved people who want to do so. He stated that the Board of Selectman reviewed and endorsed the draft as written.

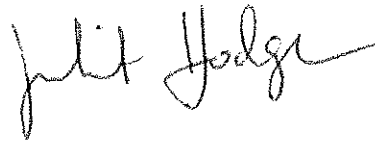
J. Allik noted her concerns with the grammatical errors and encouraged the Commission to get them fixed before submitting to the State. Planner J. Larkin asked for further guidance on what to fix based on J. Hodge's comments. Mr. Larkin was instructed to fix obvious grammar errors. Mr. Nieminen stated that the POCD really has no teeth, and that the Zoning Regulations were more important. He felt that they should just adopt what they have and fix the errors later.

Chairman Davidson asked for Motion to adopt the Plan with the clerical corrections made. **Motion was made and seconded (M. Hollowell / D. Nieminen) to adopt the 2020/2030 Plan of Conservation Development.
MOTION PASSED**

Motion was made and seconded (M. Hollowell / B. Panko) to adjourn the Special Meeting at 8:45pm.
MOTION PASSED.



Scott Davidson, Chairman



Juliet Hodge, Recording Secretary