

SOUTH HERO PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

April 2, 2025

Members Present: Don Bedard (Vice-Chair); Michele Gammal; Joan Falcao

Members Absent: David Roy (Chair); Brooke Scott

Others Present: Catherine Dimitruk (NRPC); Ron Phelps; Tim Maxham; Mike Gulla; Peter Zamore (via Zoom); Bob Fireovid; Bridget Kerr (via Zoom); Kelly Ireland.

6:00PM – **D. Bedard** called the meeting to order.

Changes to the Agenda

No changes.

Public Comment

There was none.

Public Meeting – Act 181 Discussion [Note – the Planning Commission’s computer froze during the presentation and screen share was not able to adequately show the maps to the Zoom attendees. Catherine Dimitruk said that she would be happy to make herself available to anyone on Zoom who was unable to follow along with the maps. Catherine’s email is – cdimitruk@nrpcvt.com]

Catherine Dimitruk, Executive Director of Northwest Regional Planning Commission, had presented Act 181 to the Planning Commission and the Selectboard at meetings in February. She was available to answer questions from the Commission members and the public at this meeting. [Information and the Power Point presentation presented by Catherine to the two Boards is attached with the minutes on the Town website].

J. Falcao asked about tax credits. Catherine explained that some tax credits were available for renovations of older structures and for affordable housing. There are limited tax credits available state-wide, with priority given to affordable housing and mixed-use development of historical structures, within a quarter of a mile of the designated village centers of South Hero and Keeler Bay villages.

Act 181 set short and long-term new home housing targets for South Hero: 86 to 137 homes by 2030 (an annual growth of 1.6 to 2.6%), and 158 to 311 homes by 2050 (0.6 to 1.2%). Catherine acknowledged that the actual rate will probably be a little lower. The housing market is ‘broken’ and she doesn’t expect to meet the 2030 numbers. This may be true if the housing market was healthy. The 2050 numbers may be more realistic. **M.**

Gammal stated that, because South Hero does not have the water or sewer infrastructure

needed for this, that these numbers are unrealistic. Catherine said that communities with better infrastructure and public transportation will have higher numbers.

Act 181 changes the importance of the Regional Plan for different types of development. In South Hero is designated Tier 1B. This allows up to 50 housing units on 10-acres or less, on properties located within ¼ mile of the designated village centers of the two villages, to have interim exemptions from Act 250 jurisdiction. These interim exemptions are good for 2 years, during which time the new Regional Plan must be adopted. To qualify for the interim exemptions, South Hero will need to have municipal water or septic, or septic soils within the general area. Mike Gulla commented that this amount of development will be hard to do without septic and water infrastructure. **D. Bedard** stated that South Hero does not have the room or the infrastructure now to do this. Catherine said that before the Regional Plan is adopted (Fall 2026/January 2027?), they will need to know which Towns choose to opt in. If Towns decide after this time, the Regional Plan will need to be amended. **J. Falcao** asked if agriculture or conserved acres are included in the equation? Catherine – all lands within the ¼-mile area were included on the proposed maps. It does not mean they can all be developed. Bob Fireovid asked if there is a major recession, will the targets be revised? The numbers would be revised. A recession would impact that. **M. Gammal** asked if we would be obligated to build if the Town opts in? No. **J. Falcao** asked if there is no Act 250 review, will applicants have to rely on DRB review for environmental concerns? They will rely on local boards for thorough reviews, per their local regulations, but there may still be a need for State permits that are not under local jurisdiction. NRPC will be available to help with local reviews if they are difficult. ‘Undue Adverse Effect’ will be considered if appropriate. Mike Gulla asked if there is an incentive to opt in, as it doesn’t appear to help the Town? **D. Bedard** said that it helps the Town to provide more housing, and benefits landowners by reducing the barrier to developing their land. Catherine said that it could provide some incremental help. She said that NRPC’s goal is to work with Towns to determine the size of the village area maps. Future Land Use maps provided by NRPC show the existing village designations in maroon, with a pink section surrounding that, representing areas that the Town can make permanent parts of each village. The red line shows the ¼-mile distance from the existing village centers. See the attached NRPC Draft Land Use map attached to the minutes on the Town website.

Old Business

Average Natural Grade – **M. Gammal** gave the Commission members a handout of the definition used by local communities in Grand Isle and Chittenden Counties. PC Chair **D. Roy** was also working on updating the definition but could not attend tonight. The Commission members decided to wait to continue the discussion at the next meeting.

Multi-Modal Path – D. Bedard repeated his preference for sidewalks on South St. from RT 2 to the school. It is too soon to start any discussion about where paths could be on the Lavin property until after the Town owns it. The PC needs to wait to see what the property will look like.

Housing Report – ZA Martha Taylor-Varney calculated the number of housing units that have been created in South Hero since January 2020, for future reference –

2020

New Homes 5

ADU's 1

2021

New Homes 4

ADU's 0

Multi-Unit 30 units (Bayview Crossing)

2022

New Homes 5

ADU's 0

2023

New Homes 3

ADU's 1

2024

New Homes 1

ADU's 1

2025 (so far)

New Homes 2

Total

New Homes 20

ADU's 3

Multi-Units 30

Approve Minutes of March 19, 2025

M. Gammal moved to approve the minutes of March 19, 2025; **J. Falcao** second. All in favor.

Administrator’s Report

1. Martha will be attending NRPC’s Zoning Roundtable on Thursday, April 3, 2025 in St. Albans. Discussion items include recent cannabis legislation, a VT Supreme Court decision on subdivisions, and upcoming Residential Building Energy Standards training.
2. New draft FEMA maps are being made available on Tuesday, April 8th via a Microsoft Teams presentation. Those interested can attend at 9AM in the Boardroom at the Town Office.

Announcements

- A. Meeting House – no report.
- B. New Town Office – no report.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be April 16, 2025 at the Town Office at 6PM.

Adjournment

7:54PM -- **M. Gammal** moved to adjourn; **J. Falcao** second. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Martha Taylor-Varney, ZA

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

For the Planning Commission

These minutes are unofficial until approved at the next regularly scheduled meeting. All motions were unanimous unless otherwise indicated.