

**Town of Vershire Planning Commission Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, November 9, 2022 at 7:00pm at Vershire Town Center building.  
There will be a remote option for this meeting via Zoom or by phone.**

**Attendance:** Gregory Wilson-chair, Justin Will, Bob Perkins, Nate Thames, Gretchen Harvey-secretary, Steve Atwood-HO, and Frank Macht-Chaplin, DHMC.

**Call to Order:** G. Wilson called the meeting to order at 7:05pm

**Agenda Review & Modifications:** None.

**Public & Staff Comments:** None at this time.

**Approval of Last Meeting Draft Minutes:** N. Thames moved to approve the minutes of October 12, 2022 as written. J. Will seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**New Business:** Frank R. Macht, Chaplin from DHMC, provided an overview of “The Nature of Community Chaplin.”

Community Chaplaincy explained: F. Macht offered some background on his own training and experiences as a chaplain, including prior service to a Native community in rural Alaska. Currently, he is in a teaching position at DHMC where he trains and mentors community chaplains. He wanted to make it very clear that the label “chaplain” can be misconstrued by many people who associate chaplains with a particular faith tradition. Although chaplains can locate a faith-based chaplain if requested, the chaplains he teaches are professionally trained to NOT bring a particular faith tradition or values to their meetings with those they hope to serve. Community chaplains consider spiritual health an integral part of a human-centered or holistic approach to community health care. The training program is extensive and is accredited by a national office in Atlanta. Chaplains attempt to address needs such as: grief, loss, pain, isolation, and other kinds of emotional pain that often go unaddressed. The belief is that a “population health” approach serves community needs before emergencies occur.

Community Needs-Rural Vermont: In a community like Vershire addressing these types of human-centered spiritual health needs can be very helpful. For instance, isolation and loneliness are significant drivers of the mental health crisis in Vermont. Other common problems include: opioid abuse, death by despair (suicide), physical and emotional abuse, politically divided families, etc. Chaplains hope to work with other caregivers in the community to assess its particular needs and plan preventive-care strategies. The overall goal is to strengthen the ways community members care for each other.

What is the role of the Planning Commission: N. Thames suggested that as the larger culture has secularized, small communities have worked to fill the community service void once filled by churches (as safe spaces) with their networks of parishioners who would organize to help residents in a crisis. To some extent, that gap has been filled in Vershire by Vershare organization, the Town Center and Recreation Committees, and the local school’s social worker and teachers. Likewise, volunteers help by coming together to accomplish tasks that need doing and meeting openly identifiable needs. A community chaplain, however, addresses those less obvious spiritual needs/hurts that inflict communities. A chaplain would attempt to build a team approach that integrates/coordinates the care that already exists. N. Thames wanted to know exactly how this need should inform the revision of the town plan? G. Wilson noted that public health is another part of a community’s infrastructure as defined by the state of Vermont. Although the literature is non-specific, it does point planners in the direction of creating communities that improve the well-being of their residents. N. Thames agrees with the overall concept but is not sure the PC is the right entity to research and/or plan for a chaplain/community care program for Vershire.

Vershire Health Officer Role: S. Atwood summarized his own background and role in Vershire as the Town Health Officer. His own career includes work as a pediatric physician and educator, and stints of humanitarian work abroad. His vision for community health is informed by *One Health*: an approach that connects animal, human, and environmental health as interrelated; i.e., all three must be healthy in order for each to thrive. The Covid pandemic is a recent example of what happens when one or more of these is unhealthy. He notes also that the manual for town health officers describes the role as primarily a reactive one: someone who steps in after a crisis (often sanitation related, but can include other public health concerns). The HO is then required to suggest steps to mitigate an existing problem. The training for HO is not medical per se and is more akin to a rental property inspector. S. Atwood likes what he is hearing tonight but is concerned that student interns might quickly find themselves in situations that overwhelm their training. Responses to his concern included the fact that chaplain training programs teach boundaries (knowing your scope of practice), knowledge of referral resources, and that creating a team approach (as noted above) provides a wider net of resources and knowledge about referrals.

Town Plan Revision Process: J. Will noted that with respect to revising the town plan, including the writing of appropriate aspirational language that encourages steps to protect a community's population health, the PC will need to write this section from scratch. For this reason, the writing of a section devoted to community health will require research and possibly a health assessment of the needs in Vershire. This work is beyond the core mission of the PC and would perhaps best be accomplished by a subcommittee or a committee of the selectboard. He suggested recommending that the SB create such a committee. Then, once the research is compiled, the PC can use it to inform a new section in the Town Plan.

**Action:** J. Will moved to make a recommendation to the selectboard to create an ad hoc committee or task force with the charge of looking into what defines a healthy community for the purposes of informing the work of the Planning Commission as it revises the Town Plan.

**Old Business:**

**Other:** G. Wilson handed out a printed copy of the training opportunity linked below.

- **Announcement: Forest Block Training 11/17/22 at 6-8pm EST**

[https://www.trorc.org/event/forestblocks/?instance\\_id=1391](https://www.trorc.org/event/forestblocks/?instance_id=1391)

**Adjourn:** G. Wilson moved to adjourn at 8:07 pm. N. Thames seconded. The motion passed unanimously.