

**Town of Vershire Planning Commission Meeting Minutes  
Special Topics Forum on Transportation  
Wednesday 6/28/23 at 7pm at the Town Center.**

**There will be a remote option for this meeting via Zoom or by phone.**

**Swearing in newly elected Planning Commissioners:** Gene Craft is here to swear in Gregory Wilson and Seann Cran. Justin Will needs to be sworn in over Zoom at a mutually arranged time. Authorization of the newly elected planning commissioners will be retroactive to 6/14/23.

**Attendance:** Gregory Wilson-chair, Eleanor Zue, Seann Cram, Gretchen Harvey-secretary, Alan Lyford-highway superintendent, and David Hooke-Energy Committee.

**Call to order:** G. Wilson called the meeting to order at 7:01pm: A. Lyford began by summarizing some of the main challenges the highway crew faces now and in the future.

**Rising Costs:** The cost of road maintenance trucks and other equipment/supplies are rising to the point where small towns are struggling to be able to afford to maintain their roads to the standards they adhered to in the past. Some are beginning to discuss ways two or more towns might pool their resources, but this only works when highway crews can be flexible. During storms, mud season, or other high pressure periods, each town will need all its resources to meet its own needs. Multiple towns using shared equipment would likely shorten its lifespan making replacement more frequent. An exploratory conversation of the pros and cons of sharing resources with W. Fairlee might be a good place to begin. Vershire already shares some equipment with Chelsea but this town currently does not have a planning commission.

**Requests to Improve Roads to Class 3 Status:** As more people move to areas in Vershire only served by class 4 roads, the pressure to raise their status to Class 3 will grow. This would lead to an increase in the numbers of road miles needing to be maintained and would contribute to rising maintenance costs noted above. State law requires that Class 4 roads be made passable 1x/year by a 4-wheel drive vehicle, although our road crew currently tries to be helpful to those who live on class 4 roads now. A landowner might decide to bear the cost of the road improvements required to raise a road classification from 4 to 3, however, the town need not maintain it as such. Nevertheless, the highway crew does make an effort to try to assist landowners, to treat all residents fairly, and would likely maintain the road once it has been improved. A good candidate for an upgrade might be Rowell Road because it is well used as a connector between Vershire and Corinth. It also has the most residents living on it of any Class 4 road in Vershire. There was a time when it was a Class 3 road and kept open year round. But making it so now would require taking down a lot of old maple trees, which would not be popular with the residents.

**Benefits of Reclassifying some Class 4 roads as Trails:** The points above led to a discussion of whether or not re-classifying roads (from Class 4 to Trail) might keep Vershire's maintenance costs in check, as well as provide a disincentive to prospective land owners who want to live on Class 4 roads. For example, the class 4 section of Durgin Hill could be designated a trail. Or, the section between North Road and Tullar Road, which is already

designated as a trail, is effectively unusable except as a trail. What are the rules for ATVs using old roads as trails and what role do they play keeping them relatively open. Re-classifying road sections near borders with neighboring towns might also help with managing road maintenance expenses if it means the highway crew need not travel so far to access/maintain these sections that are still open. One additional cost mentioned is when the road crew is asked to create new culverts because a particular landowner has diverted water (to a pond) or otherwise and altered the flow of water, which creates a problem on the roadway. Another consideration might be landowners who may want to buy or sell property with the expectation that the road remains a class 4 category.

**Reclassification:** There are at least two ways to look at reclassifying roads–

- Reclassification of low use road segments from Class 4 to Trail (while maintaining the Town's ROW) as a means of reducing road maintenance costs.
- Reclassification of selective, high use/residential Class 4 roads to Class 3 status as a strategy for economic development: Requests for better access to Taylor Valley and McIver roads are growing.

**“Great Expectations” dilemma:** It's possible that Vershire residents will have to become used to a different reality as far as road maintenance is concerned. Historically, people worked on farms and travel for work or other was less necessary, especially during those times when road travel was difficult (mud season, winter storms, etc.). It also may be that well-off climate migrants are not discouraged from purchasing land and building homes on Class 4 roads without the electric grid–because they intend to set up off-grid energy systems. How would an increase in the number of remote, off-grid residences add to the pressure on the road crew and emergency services to improve class 4 roads.

**Energy Committee Initiatives:** David Hooke summarized some of the EC's efforts to introduce less-carbon intensive means of travel, thereby reducing the number of gas-powered cars on the roadways. One proposal is to develop a vanpool, which could be a precursor to a bus route. This led to a discussion of whether or not Vershire would benefit from a park & ride lot. There are a lot of questions with how this would work, who would maintain the lot, how would snow removal work with new guard rails in place, and would the parking lot be day-use only except during mud season, etc. The EC will apply for a grant to explore the concept. The Town Plan needs to consider addressing both the infrastructure and educational challenges of transitioning to more energy efficient modes of transportation.

**Future Modes of Transportation/Safety Issues:** The question of EVs and public charging stations were explored; Most residents with EVs would charge their cars at home because, under current conditions, this makes the most economic sense. Businesses that can afford to install charging stations might do so. Foot travel, E-bikes, and regular bicycles need safer lanes/paths along VT113 but the guardrails make their placement difficult. Is it possible to place the lanes inside the guard rails at least in the newly designated Village District? Maintenance in winter months would not be possible. J. Will is looking into grant funding for a footbridge connecting Vershare/ Church-Orr House and Town Offices with the Town Center

Building/grounds. G. Harvey has done some initial search on Radar Signs designed to slow traffic in the Village District area (30-35MPH) and will follow up with new grant options to fund them. The most challenging area is when cars are traveling downhill from the west towards the Village but do not slow down to the 40 MPH posted near the entrance to Durgin Hill Road. Instead, many cars maintain high speeds down through the Village District. A topic not discussed tonight was the effort by a Vermont nonprofit concerned about the creation of private airstrips in rural communities and the noise and lights this might bring to rural communities.  
<https://www.savevtairspace.org/>

**Adjourn:** G. Wilson moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:30pm. E. Zue seconded. The motion passed unanimously.