



Town of Dummerston

1523 Middle Road East Dummerston, Vermont 05346

November 9, 2009

Steve Mindel
Chair
Dummerston Planning Commission
1523 Middle Rd.
Dummerston, VT 05346

Dear Steve:

Enclosed is the draft Dummerston Town Plan with comments and proposed changes in a "track changes" format for easy review. As you know, we have had the benefit of substantial public comment since you sent us your draft. Much of the public participation at our hearing and subsequent meetings was from a different community of residents than those recorded by the Planning Commission in its comment gathering phase. I think everyone would agree that a broader public participation earlier in the process would have been helpful and might well have resulted in a different document being sent to us. Some of our comments or changes are general and meant to reflect positions. Others are specific and represent our concerns about perceived ambiguities, contradictions or action steps committing the Town without adequate flexibility. In an attempt to make editing as useful as possible we want to provide you with a number of basic tenets that we hope will guide your discussions in the coming months.

1. Where we have deleted language, substituted specific language or added language, our intent has been to clarify our point of view and, often, to reflect the concerns of residents. We welcome Planning Commission challenge and change if there are legitimate reasons. We recognize that you have more expertise, have access to numerous points of view different than ours and worked longer and in more detail that we have.
2. We cannot support, and do not believe Dummerston residents will accept, a 27 acre minimum lot size in the Conservation District. We support the goal of encouraging maintaining large tracts of undeveloped land and encourage language and efforts to work with residents to voluntarily conserve land. In addition, we welcome ideas that encourage flexible approaches to density.
3. Many of the changes made softened verbs to give flexibility to the plan. Numerous "maintain", "allow" or "adopt" were changed to "encourage". We believe it's important that the plan be flexible and not be perceived as rigid. Much of the public dissatisfaction with the plan seemed to center around perceptions that landowner choices would be reduced or eliminated. We hope that these changes will reflect a more collaborative tone.

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4. Village residents value the concept and semantic specificity of "village". Although the "mixed density" category maintained the same characteristics as village, residents felt a loss.
5. Finally, we want to comment on the process. There is an inevitable tension between the inherent "planning" goals, which are necessarily devoid of individual resident's, and groups of resident's, concerns, and "political" goals, which must take into account the personal, interpersonal, social and emotional responses to the plan. We believe that any sound town plan must have the strong support of a majority of residents. It must be based on a solid foundation of research and data but must also address the specific concerns of Dummerston individuals and interest groups.

Our hope is that our comments and changes, which attempt to reflect some of the public's concerns, will be helpful to you as you make changes. In addition, we hope you'll have comprehensive public involvement during the writing phase and will do all that we can to encourage it. We have appointed Greg Brown as liaison between the Planning Commission and Selectboard during this process to insure that communication between our respective groups will be clear.

Thank you for your extensive work on the draft plan, your patience as we worked our way through the draft plan and your gracious willingness to listen to critical comments. I hope that our comments will be taken as constructive.

Sincerely,

Andrew MacFarland
for
Dummerston Selectboard