

2025 Planning Commission Report

The Thetford Planning Commission is composed of volunteers whose job is to review and revise (when necessary) the Town (Master) Plan, Zoning bylaws and Subdivision regulations. Our work is advisory, and shaped by two central goals. The first is to make sure the existing Zoning bylaws adhere to the Goals, Policies and Recommendations outlined in the current Town Plan. The second is to simplify and streamline the language we use in both documents and the policies and processes contained therein.

During the course of its ongoing Zoning Bylaw review and revision process, the Thetford Planning Commission addressed a variety of specific (inter)related issues congruent with proposals and actions arising from group discussions:

1) Building upon and integrating numerous recent planning efforts – in particular the recent Thetford Water Study, the 2020 Town Plan, the 2022 Local Emergency Management Plan, and recently updated Town maps and ordinances – the Commission (in consultation with the Thetford Selectboard) assisted in the creation of a Capacity for Growth Study Committee composed of local volunteer members, whose task was/is to understand the duality of maintaining and strengthening the existing fabric of the community while offering an informed vision for change. The goal of this group is to support Thetford's goals and ongoing efforts to foster a vibrant community where growth is realistically anticipated and shaped in accordance with the Town Plan, community feedback, and expert systems analysis – the last supplied by the consulting/engineering firm Dubois & King (<https://www.dubois-king.com/>), who provide planning, permitting, and design services for municipalities like Thetford.

2) A renewed focus on the future of the Timothy Frost Building (TFB). This effort has been driven primarily by two (2) Planning Commission members (Helen Carter and Karen Brown), who have performed yeoman service in the pursuit of determining current cost figures and architectural options for a variety of potential courses of action regarding renovation of the existing space. PC member Didi Pershouse moderated a series of TFB-related community discussions during the past year, with emphasis upon the Town-wide implications for all Thetford Villages arising from this renewal effort. Long time Thetford resident, Bob Walker, joined the working group in the fall, bringing expertise in terms of energy conservation, construction and potential utilization of skilled volunteers to the project. The working group seeks to complement existing and anticipated town businesses, green spaces and services in developing proposals for the Frost building. The group is building on the work of the First Frost Committee, led by Shari Gouwens from 2019 to 2020, to honor the history and iconic structure of the Frost building, while addressing the community's desire for a multi-function, multi-generational community gathering place.

3) An examination of adding a 'Transfer of Subdivision Rights' (TSR)* provision to the existing Thetford Zoning Bylaw. The purpose of a TSR allowance is to redirect development from areas that need protection (like farmland or open space) to areas suitable for growth. The 'Sending Areas' are locations where development is restricted to preserve their environmental or cultural value. 'Receiving Areas' are locales designated for increased development, often with existing infrastructure to support growth. The benefits of a TSR provision are three-fold: a) environmental protection (preserving sensitive lands and natural resources); b) controlled growth (directing development to areas equipped to handle it, reducing rural sprawl); and c) economic incentives (providing financial benefits to landowners who choose not to develop their land).

*TSR programs are governed by local zoning laws and require careful planning to align with community goals. Note: a TSR is not necessarily the same as a TDR (Transfer of Development Rights).

The Planning Commission will, in the near future, discuss the relative merits of defining these as discrete provisions.

4) The Thetford Conservation Commission recently completed a multi-year Natural Resources Inventory which catalogs important natural resources including wildlife crossings and vernal pools, among others. With that data, they are now developing a “tiered conservation map” which will show the higher and lower priority areas for conservation efforts in town. When that map is finalized, it will, in the near future, assist the Planning Commission through comparison with the Capacity for Growth Study map(s) to reveal potential locations for future housing.

5) Lastly, Act 181 (<https://act250.vermont.gov/new-land-use-review-framework-act-181>), enacted in mid-2024, changes Act 250 from project-based jurisdiction to location-based jurisdiction, overhauling Vermont’s planning framework for coordinating state, regional, and municipal land use. It establishes three tiers (1A, 1B, 2 & 3) for location-based Act 250 jurisdiction, and defines 11 new land use categories to guide development by designating future land use areas (FLUA) for growth and conservation based on environmental, infrastructure, and community factors. The Planning Commission is closely monitoring the Tier 3 rulemaking timeline (through December 31, 2026), as it applies to Thetford. More detailed information is available here:

<https://act250.vermont.gov/sites/acttwofifty/files/documents/tier3-october-public-mtgs-website-102925.pdf>

https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/Resources-and-Rules/CPR-DHCD-LegislativeSummary_2024.pdf

In 2026, the Planning Commission will continue to work with Development Review Board Chair Tim Taylor and Zoning Administrator Kelly Gardner to review Zoning Bylaw Articles VI and VII (Development Review & Administration and Enforcement). Article VIII (Definitions) will continue to evolve with our Zoning Bylaw overview, after which point the PC will reexamine the Subdivision regulations to assure alignment with proposed Zoning Bylaw recommendations.

The Commission was fortunate to welcome a new member, Karen Brown, to the PC in 2025 – and regrettably accepted the resignation of PC member and Recording Clerk Jeff Jamele due to an overabundance of competing civic, employment and familial obligations. We also wish to express our appreciation to the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC), Town Manager Brian Story, Zoning Administrator Kelly Gardner, DRB Chair Tim Taylor, Thetford Selectboard, Thetford Conservation Commission and Thetford Housing Committee for their collective assistance with our work.

Finally, we actively encourage public comment/input to fully implement the command of Chapter 1, Article 6 of the Vermont Constitution that officers of government are “trustees and servants” of the people and are “at all times, in a legal way, accountable to them.”

Respectfully submitted,

David C. Forbes, Chair

Mike Snow, Vice Chair

Helen Carter, Recording Clerk

Karen Brown, Liz Ryan Cole, and Didi Pershouse

Li Shen, Selectboard Liaison