

Town Plan Advisory Group History and Charge

“The Advisory Group will assist the Planning Commission in identifying major issues and goals for the new Town Plan to address, assist with public outreach, and review draft chapters of the Plan.”

(TPAG recruitment statement)

In 2008, the Brattleboro Planning Commission (PC) agreed to form the Town Plan Advisory Group (TPAG). Over the course of several months, the PC developed a process and criteria for selecting members whose collective experience, and knowledge and affection for Brattleboro could inform the 2011 Town Plan. TPAG members were selected in January 2009.

The TPAG is an advisory body to the Planning Commission (PC). As such, and per VSA §4433, its members are chosen by the Selectboard. While the TPAG can be dissolved by the Selectboard at any time, it is expected that this will not happen until the 2011 Town Plan is close to adoption by the Selectboard. The TPAG is subject to open meeting law (1 VSA §310-314). The PC and TPAG are staffed by the Planning Services Department (PSD).

The PC’s expectations for the 2011 Town Plan are that

- It will fulfill statutory requirements.
- Its goals will support and reinforce one another.
- Its creation will be characterized by inclusive and sensible community engagement. (Source: PC Presentation to Selectboard, August 19, 2008)
- While the vision embodied in the Town Plan can be far-sighted, any goal or recommendation shall be amenable to measurable progress within five years (24 VSA §4387).

The Town Plan Advisory Group Charge:

Identify major issues and goals for the 2011 Town Plan to address

- These must include those required of Town Plans (24 VSA §4302 & §4382), which encompass both content (topics required to be addressed in Town Plans), and process (community engagement).
- The TPAG is encouraged to identify other (non-required) challenges and opportunities for the 2011 Town Plan to address.
- The TPAG is encouraged to identify where goals contradict one another, and provide information helpful to the PC in resolving such conflicts.
- The TPAG is encouraged to evaluate recommended goals in light of the SMART criteria:
 - Specific** - goals should have their expected outcome stated as simply, concisely and explicitly as possible. e.g.: how much, for whom, for what?
 - Measurable** - a measurable goal has an outcome that can be assessed either on a sliding scale (1-10), or as a hit or miss, success or failure.
 - Achievable** - an achievable goal has an outcome that is realistic given your current situation, resources and time available.
 - Relevant** - a relevant goal should help you on your mission or your “bigger” objectives.
 - Time-bound** - a time-bound goal includes realistic timeframes.

Identify and engage with stakeholders

- The TPAG, in conjunction with the PC, will develop sensible and effective means of engaging stakeholders.

Review draft chapters of the plan

- Recommendations for issues and goals to be included in the Town Plan will come from a variety of sources:
 - o The PC.
 - o The TPAG itself, after its discussions and meetings with stakeholders.
 - o Other Town Boards and Committees.

- PSD staff, based on consultation with other Town of Brattleboro staff (e.g. goals that pertain to the ongoing work of other Town Departments such as Public Works, Recreation and Parks, etc.) and/or consultants.
- Per VT statute (24 VSA §4384), the Planning Commission retains ultimate responsibility for preparing the 2011 Town Plan and presenting it to the Selectboard for adoption.

Recommend strategies for the structure of the Town Plan itself

- As noted above, VT statute mandates that certain topic areas be addressed in Town Plans. However, there is flexibility in how the material is organized and presented.
 - The TPAG is asked to consider ways to organize the 2011 Town Plan so that it communicates effectively.
 - The TPAG is encouraged to make recommendations on how the Town Plan can be made accessible.
 - The TPAG is encouraged to consider and recommend to the PC whether the Town should invest in developing a 2011 Town Plan website.
 - The TPAG is encouraged to consider other strategies or techniques to foster community awareness of and engagement with the 2011 Town Plan.

Resources to be provided to the TPAG

- The TPAG will be staffed by the PSD. The TPAG's work represents a high priority for the PSD, and will receive significant attention.
- The FY10 budget allocates no funding to support the work of the TPAG.

Reporting back to the Planning Commission:

- The PC and TPAG will develop a mutually convenient means of sharing progress.

TPAG guidelines and procedures:

The PC encourages the TPAG to develop guidelines or procedures which address the following:

- Leadership, roles, and responsibilities.
The PC encourages the TPAG to appoint a Chair whose role is to run meetings, ensure that discussions lead to decisions, ensure that all members' voices are heard, and liaise with PSD staff. The PC leaves to the TPAG's discretion whether this role rotates across the membership.
- Group norms: how to engage with one another. The PC encourages the TPAG
 - to work in light of acknowledging the many opinions, learning and communication styles, and levels of experience present, and to value respectful dialogue and differences of opinion.
 - to develop expectations around meeting attendance and participation.
 - TPAG shall discuss and determine what its decision making process shall be. The PC encourages the TPAG to address this issue early on. In cases where the TPAG identifies polarization - either within its own membership, or in its conversations with stakeholders - "minority reports" are encouraged.
- Meeting frequency and location.
The PC encourages the TPAG to vary its meeting locations as an opportunity for members to familiarize themselves with the Town's assets/resources/spaces.

*Draft by Sarah Brennan and Rod Francis, April 9, 2009 - for review by PC at April 13, 2009 meeting
Updated July 2009 to reflect Selectboard's authority to create and dissolve TPAG per July 21, 2009 meeting.*