

Open to the Public Statement by Ed Paré at 01/21/2020 Board of Selectmen Meeting

The “Comprehensive Plan Updates” ordinance created a permanent standing “Comprehensive Plan Update Committee” (CPUC), tasking the Board of Selectmen with appointing eleven registered voters as members. The Board interviewed twenty-seven applicants and appointed eleven of them to the committee.

Applicants who were rejected received a letter from Jon Carter stating, “The Board made an attempt to **balance** the Committee and wanted to make sure that the members appointed to this committee **geographically** represent the Town.”

However, when one plots the appointed members’ residences on the Town of Wells Zoning Map, it’s obvious that three pairs of members live very close to each other in the same zone. When one then plots the residences of the rejected applicants, it’s obvious that the Board failed to achieve a geographic balance.¹

Furthermore, when we closely look at the list of members appointed, it’s obvious that at least seven of the eleven are real estate sales, development and/or construction industry professionals, representing only 6.9% of Wells’ population by occupation.

And, when we look at the list of rejected applicants, it appears that a more diverse set of members, who would more widely represent our population, could have easily been chosen.

This Board is doing the exact same thing that precipitated this ordinance. You are neglecting the issues most important to voters, one primarily being uncontrolled growth, in favor of the interests of a mostly select group of people who make at least part of their living in real estate sales, development and/or construction related endeavors.

The ordinance was passed with a vote of 1078 “Yes” vs 450 “No”. That’s 70% of voters voting for a change in direction to the town’s management of growth.

Recently, Jon Carter told me he wants the process of updating the 2005 Plan to be driven by an outside consultant. This is the same exact path taken for the rejected 2016 Plan.

How many more tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars and how many more hours of committee member and staff time are going to be wasted again, if, for example, the decision is made to try to fit the rejected 2016 Plan into the 2005 Plan’s format, and voters then reject that update at Town Meeting?

¹ Geographic balance may be an acceptable method for choosing members of a parking committee, but not for choosing members for a comprehensive plan committee.

The recommended method is to choose a membership with a diverse set of backgrounds and expertise. A diverse set is necessary to address the eight most important issues facing Wells identified by townspeople in the March, 2016, Public Survey (see below). Those issues are diverse.

Background Information

In 1989, the State of Maine Legislature enacted a “Growth Management Program”. The first State goal of this Program is

§4312.3

.A. To encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of each community and region while protecting the State's rural character, making efficient use of public services and preventing development sprawl; [PL 2001, c. 578, §9 (AMD).]

Under this Program, every Maine town that implements a zoning ordinance must have what’s called a “Comprehensive Plan”, and any zoning changes must first be fully described in the Comprehensive Plan and approved by voters.

The Town of Wells’ current Comprehensive Plan was enacted in 2005 and is our most important Town document, after the Town’s Charter.

In May of 2015, the Board of Selectmen (hereinafter: BOS) appointed a Comprehensive Plan Update Review Committee (CPURC). This committee met twice a month from September of 2015 through September of 2016.

Rather than being tasked with reviewing an update to the 2005 Plan, the committee was handed a brand new plan devised by Town staff and an outside consultant, presumably with input from one or more selectmen.

From the first meeting on, a few of us on the committee found certain aspects of the new plan which greatly concerned us, but were told to hold off, as our questions would be addressed later during the review process.

At the request of one of our members for additional public input into the new Plan, a March, 2016, Public Survey was mailed to Wells townspeople.

The last question on the March, 2016, Public Survey was, “What do you think are the three most important issues facing Wells?” An in-depth analysis of the responses to this question by Ed Paré revealed that the most important issues to townspeople, in descending order of importance, are:

- Character and Appearance (design standards, loss of rural areas, etc.)
- Beaches and Harbor (cleanliness, accessibility, cost, etc.)
- Roads (traffic, maintenance, signals, sidewalks, bike lanes, walking paths)
- Growth Management/Overdevelopment
- Property Tax Assessments
- Business and Employment
- Environmental Protection
- Social Issues (seniors, affordable housing, alternate transportation, recreation and entertainment, etc.)

When three of us members requested that the committee address these issues within the new Plan, we were told there was not time to do so.

During this same time, the three of us dug out the 2005 Plan to compare with the new Plan, and finding that the 2005 Plan did, at least, begin to address most of these issues, we took our request to the BOS, asking for the new Plan to be tabled and the 2005 Plan to be updated instead. We were told in no uncertain terms, “That will never happen.”

Consequently, the three of us voted against sending the new Plan to the BOS, resulting in a 3 – 3 tie vote, which should have should have killed the new Plan. However, the BOS decided to go ahead with the new “2016 Plan”, regardless.

At this point, we engaged a municipal attorney, and, finally in January of 2018, the Town suggested a public review period when residents could submit comments on the 2016 Plan versus the 2005 Plan. Around this same time, the BOS gave the 2016 Plan to the Planning Board for review, and we provided the Planning Board with copies of the 2005 Plan for comparison.

Ninety-five percent of the public reviewers strongly urged the BOS to shelve the 2016 Plan in favor of updating the 2005 Plan, as did the Planning Board. The BOS accepted the Planning Board’s recommendation. This was now August of 2018.

At this point, those of us who had voted against the 2016 Plan had already begun working with our attorney on a citizens’ petition for enactment of an ordinance, as provided by our town Charter. This is the “Comprehensive Plan Updates” ordinance which was approved by voters this past November, 2019.

Town of Wells Board of Selectmen: Comprehensive Plan Update Committee Selection Results

Red and blue dots indicate geographical locations of applicant residences

Members Selected

- 1 – Condo Rental Owner
- 2 – Building Mover Owner
- 3 – General Contractor
- 4 – Real Estate Managing Broker
- 5 – Real Estate Agent/Broker
- 6 – General Contractor
- 7 – Wells Conservation Commission Member
- 8 – Building Supplies Business Owner
- 9 – Real Estate Broker
- 10 – Wells Planning Board, Vice Chair
- 11 – Truck Rental w/ Drivers Owner

Applicants Rejected

- 1 – Organic Farmer
- 2 – Transportation Coach Manufacturer
- 3 – Information Tech. Services Owner
- 4 – Wells Geography Expert; (retired Builder)
- 5 – Social Worker
- 6 – Retired CPA – Public Accounting; Strategic planning: profession and non-profit.
- 7 – Handyman; (retired IT Pro; Acct & Taxation; Zoologist; Health Sciences Ph.D. Professor)
- 8 – Gov't Contractor; (Retired Gov't employee)
- 9 – Retired Clergy; Community Boards Member
- 10 – Aviation; Lead Helicopter Pilot
- 11 – Excavation Construction Business Owner
- 12 - Retired Industrial and Operations executive; United Way Board Member
- 13 – Agricultural Produce Farmer
- 14 – Landscaping Business Owner

