

TO: Richmond Selectboard

FROM: Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner

DATE: July 16, 2021

SUBJECT: Zoning For Affordable Housing project update

Currently, the Housing Committee is working with a planning consultant, PlaceSense, to investigate housing needs in town, evaluate the current and proposed zoning regulations, and provide solutions to increase the housing stock in town in character with the town. This project is supported by a \$20,000 Municipal Planning Grant from the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

The project began in mid-April 2021. The scope of work and proposed timeline for the project as provided by the consultant is enclosed

So far, two survey campaigns—one for Richmond residents and one for non-residents—have been conducted and closed. The consultant is currently analyzing the data and creating reports.

The next step is to schedule a public meeting to receive input, conduct interviews with various focus groups, and review the existing and proposed zoning regulations. Both the focus group interviews and technical review of the zoning regulations should be complete in mid-September.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

# SCOPE OF WORK AND PROPOSED SCHEDULE

## TASKS

APRIL

— **Project Administration.** The consultant will work with the Richmond Town Planner to complete project contracting and confirm the project schedule.

— **Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee for a kick-off meeting (HC Meeting #1). This meeting will provide an opportunity for Housing Committee members to share their goals for the project and perspectives on housing issues more generally in Richmond with the consultant.

It is my understanding from the RFP that the Housing Committee has been working to compile demographic and housing data to be shared with the consultant. Key findings from that data will be discussed during the kick-off meeting.

In advance of the meeting, the consultant will provide the Housing Committee with draft questions for a Community Housing Survey. The survey will gauge residents' (1) level of support for additional housing in Richmond, (2) attitude toward and perceptions of affordable housing, and (3) concerns about creation of housing both in their neighborhood and in the town more broadly. The Housing Committee will be able to use the survey results to inform its future approach and strategy and to guide future public education efforts. Survey questions and distribution methods will be discussed during the meeting.

MAY

— **Community Survey.** The consultant will finalize the survey questions for an online survey to be hosted on Survey Monkey. The town will be responsible for advertising the availability of the online survey and encouraging resident participation through regularly used channels such as the town website, listserve/email groups, social media, etc. Based on experience with online surveys in recent years, the consultant recommends leaving the survey up for 4-6 weeks with weekly messaging reminding people they can participate and explaining why their input is being sought. With this approach, online surveys have been significantly out-performing mail-based surveys in Vermont communities.

The consultant recommends the Housing Committee pay particular attention to communicating with renters in Richmond as their perspective will be valuable and renters as a group typically have lower response rates to this type of community survey than homeowners. If there are other groups in Richmond that the Housing Committee is concerned will not participate in an online survey, the consultant can also provide a print version of the survey. It would be the town's responsibility to distribute and collect paper surveys and to enter the results into Survey Monkey manually.

**Deliverables:** Online Community Survey on Survey Monkey with paper version provided upon request

— **Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee (HC Meeting #2). The purpose of this meeting will be for the Housing Committee to finalize and approve public distribution of the survey. It will also provide an opportunity for the Housing Committee to develop invitation lists for interviews and focus groups, and review the proposed discussion questions.

## TASKS

JUNE

— **Interviews.** The consultant will conduct phone interviews with up to six developers, builders and landlords in Richmond to hear their perspective on housing issues in the community with a particular focus on the extent to which the town’s regulations and development review processes are affecting creation of housing units generally and affordable housing in particular. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with a summary of each interview.

The consultant will prepare a list of interview questions to be distributed to interviewees in advance. The consultant will work with the Richmond Town Planner to contact potential interviewees, schedule phone interviews and distribute the questions. The RFP requested that the scope of work include reaching out to local developers. I am also recommending including landlords with multi-unit properties.

**Deliverables:** Written summaries of each interview

— **Focus Groups.** The consultant will facilitate up to three focus groups via Zoom. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with notes from each focus group meeting. The consultant will work with the Housing Committee to select groups to speak with that would broaden the perspective on the community’s housing situation and identify potential participants. Based on experience, my recommendation is to plan for groups of 5-9 people. Potential topics/groups include seniors and other residents with specialized housing needs, parents with young children (hopefully capturing some renters in that group), homeowners who have created an accessory dwelling, mobile home park residents, etc.

**Deliverables:** Written notes from each focus group meeting

— **Infrastructure Assessment.** This task is not included in the RFP, but it would be a valuable step prior to drafting zoning changes that will likely include recommendations for increased densities in some areas of town. Water and sewer infrastructure is essential for creation of higher-density and affordable housing.

The consultant recommends that the Richmond Town Planner and the Housing Committee collect the information necessary to: (1) estimate the available capacity of the water and wastewater systems serving Richmond’s village center, including any constraints imposed by the Lake Champlain TMDL or other state regulations that could trigger upgrades to fully use permitted capacity; and (2) accurately map the area served (based on hook-up addresses) if this information is not currently available and (3) assess the geographic constraints on extending those systems beyond the area currently served (terrain requiring pump stations or additional storage tanks, highway or river crossings, etc.).

JULY

— **Community Survey.** The consultant will compile and analyze the survey results. As appropriate, survey responses will be broken down by demographic groups and geographic areas. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with a written report presenting the survey results and highlighting key findings.

**Deliverables:** Survey results report

## TASKS

AUGUST

**Community Meeting 1.** The consultant will work with the Richmond Town Planner and the Housing Committee to organize and facilitate a Zoom-based community meeting. The meeting agenda would include summarizing the findings of the Housing Committee’s demographic/housing analysis, information learned through the interviews and focus groups, and the results of community survey. The meeting would also provide an opportunity for Richmond residents to share their concerns and preferences related to housing and the town’s regulations/permitting and development review processes.

The town will be responsible for advertising the meeting through regularly used channels such as the town website, listserve/email groups, social media, etc. The consultant and Town Planner will coordinate “hosting” the online meeting to ensure orderly participation. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with a written summary of public comments and questions following the meeting.

**Deliverables:** Written meeting notes

**Zoning Review.** The consultant will prepare a technical memo reviewing Richmond’s adopted Zoning Regulations against the housing goals of the Town Plan, statutory requirements and limitations (including Act 174 provisions that became effective last October), state recommendations as presented in Zoning for Great Neighborhoods, eligibility requirements for the state’s Neighborhood Development Area program, housing needs as documented by the prior work of the Richmond Housing Committee, and information collected through the public engagement process to-date (survey, interviews, focus groups, community meeting).

The technical memo will identify approaches to improve the effectiveness of the Zoning Regulations to further the community’s objectives related to housing supply and affordability.

**Deliverables:** Technical memo

SEPTEMBER

**Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee (HC Meeting #3). At this meeting, the consultant will present the technical memo reviewing Richmond’s adopted Zoning Regulations. The Housing Committee will agree upon a zoning reform framework, selecting elements and approaches described in the technical memo for further development as proposed zoning amendments.

**Draft Zoning Amendments.** The consultant will prepare the proposed zoning amendments as outlined in the zoning reform framework. The first draft will be annotated to provide context for the proposed changes and facilitate Housing Committee discussion. The first draft of the amendments will be distributed to the Housing Committee for review and discussion.

**Deliverables:** Draft zoning amendments for Housing Committee review and comment

## TASKS

OCTOBER

— **Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee (HC Meeting #4) to review and discuss the draft zoning amendments. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to organize and prepare for the second community meeting.

— **Revise Zoning Amendments.** The consultant will revise the draft zoning amendments based on feedback from Housing Committee members. Once revised, the draft zoning amendments will be provided to the Richmond Town Planner for public distribution in advance of the second community meeting.

**Deliverables:** Draft zoning amendments for public review and comment

NOVEMBER

— **Community Meeting 2.** The consultant will work with the Richmond Town Planner and the Housing Committee to organize and facilitate a Zoom-based community meeting. The meeting agenda would include presenting the findings of the zoning review and the draft zoning amendments prepared in response. The town will be responsible for advertising the meeting through regularly used channels such as the town website, listserve/email groups, social media, etc.

The consultant and Richmond Town Planner will jointly facilitate discussion of the proposed zoning amendments, taking comments and answering questions from attendees. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with a written summary of public comments and questions following the meeting.

**Deliverables:** Written meeting notes

— **Recommended Changes.** The consultant will prepare a memo for the Housing Committee outlining any recommended changes to the proposed zoning amendments and discussion points for the next meeting based on public input from the second community meeting.

**Deliverables:** Memo outlining recommended changes

DECEMBER

— **Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee (HC Meeting #5) to review and discuss final changes to the draft zoning amendments. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to organize and prepare for the Planning Commission and Selectboard presentations.

— **Final Report.** The consultant will prepare a final report incorporating the information collected through community outreach (survey, interviews, focus groups, meetings), the technical memo, the zoning reform framework and the final recommended zoning amendments. The consultant will provide the Richmond Town Planner with a PDF of the final report for distribution to the Housing Committee, Planning Commission and Selectboard, as well as for posting on the town website.

**Deliverables:** Final Zoning for Affordable Housing Report in PDF format

## TASKS

JANUARY

— **Planning Commission Presentation.** The consultant will present the final report of the Zoning for Affordable Housing project with a focus on the recommended zoning amendments. The consultant will facilitate a discussion between the Planning Commission, Housing Committee and town residents in attendance regarding the report's findings and recommendations.

Deliverables: Presentation

— **Selectboard Presentation.** The consultant will present the final report of the Zoning for Affordable Housing project with a focus on the recommended zoning amendments. The consultant will facilitate a discussion between the Selectboard, Housing Committee and town residents in attendance regarding the report's findings and recommendations.

Deliverables: Presentation

## PROJECT BUDGET

TASKS	HOURS	FEE
Project Administration	12	\$1,200
Housing Committee Meetings	20	\$2,000
Zoning Review	32	\$3,200
Technical Memo	16	\$1,600
Zoning Amendments	48	\$4,800
Final Report	8	\$800
Community Survey	40	\$4,000
Interviews	12	\$1,200
Focus Groups	12	\$1,200
Community Meetings	8	\$800
Presentations	8	\$800
Consultant Fee:	<i>216 hours @ \$100/hr</i>	\$21,600
Direct Expenses:		\$400
<b>Total Project Cost:</b>		<b>\$22,000</b>