

Richmond Selectboard Minutes

8-27-19

Richmond Town Center

Called to Order: 7:15pm

Present: Roger Brown, David Sander, Christy Witters, Katie Mather, Lars Whitman, Josh Arneson, Jessica Draper, Scott Nickerson, Chris Cole, George Gifford, Gabe Firman, Ruth Miller.

Christy moved to open the hearing for the Village Downtown District Zoning Amendment. Roger seconded. All were in favor, so moved.

David turned it over to Jess.

Jess gave a summary of the Village Downtown District location. Indicated that the amendment increases density to 24 dwelling units per acre. Changes lot size to 1/8 of an acre. Changes setbacks to zero to eliminate non-conformity which currently exists. Continues exemption of on-site parking but new residential units must have a plan for parking for tenants in those units, either with public spaces or private space. The compatibility clause asks the DRB to approve building facades. David: Opened meeting for comments.

Gabe: Thank you for having a special meeting.

Roger: Why was the boundary drawn where it was?

Jess: The original boundary included up to Millet St. over to Papa McKee's, the dentist office, the NOFA building and Jolina Ct. Then we broke out Jolina Ct. into its own district and the district was further shrunk because this seemed to be the area most concerned about density.

Roger: If a neighboring building wants to get into the district how do they do it?

Jess: Ask the Planning Commission to work on the district the building is in or amend this zoning district to expand to include additional lots.

Gabe: Neighbors in the outer zone had more questions about if their house was in a commercial zone so the change allows the core to be addressed without expanding commercial.

Jess: We left out the dentist and NOFA because they are not mixed use.

Christy: Would it make sense to include the dentist?

Roger: Does the dentist want to be included?

Jess: We could but I'm not sure if they want to be included.

Christy: How do the uses change?

Jess: It made more of the uses conditional and less in allowed. We did not cut any uses.

Christy: It seems like a lot of the existing uses are in conditional use. But in allowable uses we have equipment rental and supply for ski and bike shops, but that could be interpreted to be a lot of other items so I propose that this be moved to a conditional use.

George: I've been here for 37 years as auto sales and repair. That is not included.

Jess: Assume it is pre-allowed or under generic.

Roger: These uses aren't changed?

Jess: There are added ones but nothing removed.

George: Will this do anything with parking?

Jess: Only with residential parking.

George: Employees are taking up spaces currently.

Gabe: Parking comes up in all these meetings and I think it is on everyone's radar and will be addressed as we go forward.

George: Lack of parking hurts everyone's business.

Katie: Has WSBA done any outreach on parking to the Catholic Church on parking?

Gabe: No, we have not talked to the Catholic Church, but we could. I have been talking with Chief Muldoon and Pete Gosselin on parking. Chief Muldoon is taking a thoughtful approach to enforce parking. Pete said more signage may be needed to show people where parking is.

Roger: I've never had a problem parking, sometimes you have to walk but you can find a space. Volunteers' Green lot usually has spaces.

Gabe: There are underutilized parking areas. There was a time you could just park right in front of a business you wanted to visit. That has changed and it is an adjustment for the public. There is parking but you may have to walk a bit. We may need to look at the lots and time limits on each lot and re-design to what makes sense.

Katie: As someone who wants to add residential units what is your parking plan?

Gabe: Depot St. is open for overnight parking. We have been talking to the Creamery about allocating spaces for us. There is space behind our building and we may be able to add parking there. We talked with Pete about what could become overnight spaces and he is open to some spaces in the lot next to Toscano's becoming overnight parking.

Christy: Can we jump to lot area? I notices there is the density bonus wording here which is being removed from the Jolina Ct. zoning. It seems like we should strike this from this document.

Jess: Yes, I agree we should strike it.

Christy: It seems like a lot of existing parcels are maxing out their lot coverage. We should have a conversation about if the right number is 80% or what is the right number for parcels which are currently non-conforming.

Lars: This was discussed extensively at the Planning Commission meeting and the idea is to fill the high density areas to maximize what is going on in the buildings.

Christy: Is 80% a holdover from existing zoning?

Jess: Kind of. We talked about 100% but that seemed like it would eliminate any greenery. We tried to make landscaping a requirement. But, most of the parcels are maxed out anyway.

Lars: Setbacks came into play where front facing commercial spaces have space in front and back but not space on the sides.

Gabe: Zero setbacks and 80% work against each other, but front and back can offer some space. Buildings are already non-compliant so this adds existing steps for approval. Variances are hard to get due to the clause that it cannot be a burden that the owner causes and in most cases it is caused by the owner.

Jess: Variances are for extreme situations.

Katie: How much lot coverage do you have before you impact runoff?

Christy: It is a graduated scale that shows the more you cover the more impact you have. It is a struggle to balance development with runoff. I don't see any properties in this district reaching the one acre size to require a storm water permit.

Roger: It seems the town as a whole has a lot of pervious surface and looking at individual small lots is not a great way to look at this.

Chris: How many lots currently exceed the 80% coverage in this district? I'm just trying to see which lots still have space left.

Jess: Most exceed 80%.

Chris: I don't think 80% is the right number and you are only talking about a few parcels that can be developed or re-developed. I don't know what the right number is, but is it something to think about regarding what you want the town to look like in the future.

Katie: I don't feel good about going closer to 100% because then any existing green space may go away.

Roger: I think some green space is there because it is nice.

Katie: I agree but someone in the future could decide to make more parking spaces.

Jess: It will not make a big impact on current storm water management because so many are already grandfathered in.

Christy: You could put in pervious pavement and walkways.

Jess: We have talked about using pervious surfaces as density bonuses but the details are tricky.

Roger: Is a green roof considered pervious?

Christy: No, there is still runoff from a green roof.

Gabe: This conversation is about creating density and vibrancy in the downtown core. I think it is important to look at the downtown block to have vibrancy and we may not achieve green space in the core downtown.

Katie: I don't mean parks, just not a concrete slab.

Lars: But this is the place to do density.

Katie: It is not ideal to have a whole area with no green space at all.

Lars: The lots are so small that the square footage related to a few percentage points is very small.

Gabe: As business owners we like to have plants and flowers. Maybe we look at keeping green plants in downtown.

Christy: I think the compatibility section is new and a great addition. But I want to make sure that there is an allowance for creativity such as adding a mural.

Jess: We could add a clause about this is not to preclude creative freedom. The intention is to allow DRB to sign off of the facade and not have a facade change after DRB approval.

Gabe: This is a slippery slope. The Hatchet building had failing brick and the building owner had a different plan for siding due to cost. Also, having mis-matched siding between buildings in other villages in Vermont is common and different styles keep it interesting.

Katie: But the point of this is to have a process for the DRB to look at a design, approve it and ensure that is what is actually built.

Christy: We need to give DRB parameters.

Chris: We talked about that and the language we included is what we came up with. We think it is flexible and spurs a dialogue between the DRB and the developers.

Roger: This also helps us avoid what happened with Jolina Ct. as they showed one style and built something different.

Katie: It is important to have the parameters up front and to avoid a box store. Having the DRB having some oversight it helps to avoid the box stores because they would not match.

Katie: Design is subjective and strict rules would be a failure.

Gabe: Subjectivity is not a good thing to have in the regulations.

Chris: Your building is compatible with other buildings.

Gabe: We were really thoughtful in that process. We deliberately wanted a prominent building in a thriving town.

Chris: Our thinking was to ensure that compatibility was required and had to go before the DRB.

Gabe: It is hard to give it a lot of teeth but this at least allows for the conversation to be had.

Roger: Could Buttermilk make a case that this is still compatible?

Katie: They would have had to bring it to the DRB before they changed it from the original picture.

Roger: So the DRB is the judge of this?

Jess: It is a public hearing so neighbors will have a chance to have a say in the DRB process.

Gabe: I thought that the brick was a deliberate attempt on their part to look like the town.

Chris: It's all subjective and I like the Buttermilk building because it combines old and new.

Roger: The point is you should be able to do what you want to do but also to ensure that developers build what they say they are going to build.

Gabe: We will learn from these things and these decisions.

Roger: I think that the Jolina Ct. discussion has more at stake because whatever we decide they will build within the coming years. Where this district we can still change.

Katie: What is the process for changing zoning?

Jess: It is the same process as we are going through now. But interim zoning could be used as well, though most towns use it to slow down development.

Katie: How easy is it to trigger Interim Zoning.

Jess: It is not ideal.

Chris: It is important to get it right now for what you want it to look like.

Roger: I just mean if we say 80% lot coverage we can always change it in the future if a new development idea comes to the table.

Chris: Yes, but you want to stay away from spot zoning.

Jess: You can do a build out analysis to show maximum case of development. The density table in the packet shows maximum units.

Roger: Should parking include outside of normally permitted uses?

Jess: This is more to make it specific to tenant parking, by changing spaces to be used for just tenants. It is supposed to designate some spaces for tenants to free up spaces for businesses.

Gabe: We can achieve greenspace in other ways such as planters.

Katie: I'm leery because in larger cities developers take advantage of zoning. I don't want that to happen here. I want us to write zoning to be specific to limit developers.

Gabe: We should keep an eye on what makes Richmond unique and keep that here. Katie, you asked about how difficult it is to change zoning and I can tell you it is long and difficult. We have a project that meets so many points of the Town Plan, it makes me question the length of the process.

Roger: What share of the property owners have definitely expressed interest in expanding?

Jess: Only three have expressed that they want more residential than they have. Five are maxed out already. Commercial can be anywhere. Residential can only be on the upper floors.

Chris: The market should dictate what goes in the buildings.

Jess: Some parcels need to have onsite parking and are not exempt.

Roger moved to close the hearing. Christy seconded. All were in favor, so moved. Hearing was closed at 8:22pm.

Christy: There are some changes I suggested about conational uses. Remove the density bonus language. Change the 80% lot coverage.

Jess: And some clarification on the compatibility clause.

Katie: There are two pieces. The initial design and then any changes after approval.

Jess: Once it is in and approved they have to come back for any changes.

Discussion on definition on uses.

Gabe: People are becoming used to having to park a little farther away from where they are going. Maybe we should have better signage to direct people to park in the Town Center lot.

Jess: There are some changes proposed by Virginia Clarke to this and to Jolina Ct. I can make the changes that were suggested here tonight, but Virginia has more that I don't have. We can make these changes and adopt at the next meeting, but if Virginia has more substantial changes then you would need to warn a new meeting.

Chris: One change may be lot area and also water and sewer.

Jess: I think she thinks residential density should be its own section which is not a substantial change.

Christy: Let's discuss at the next meeting.

Josh: Jess will update the draft and you can consider adoption at the next meeting.

Katie: Add in Jolina Ct. for discussion to Sept. 3 meeting.

Roger: Can we call and mail owners in the district to update them on the Sept. 3. meeting?

Josh: We'll work on that this week.

Roger moved to adjourn. Christy seconded. All were in favor, so moved. Meeting adjourned at 8:40pm.