
Richmond Planning Commission
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR November 4, 2020

Members Present: Chris Cole, Virginia Clarke, Chris Granda, Alison Anand, Brian Tellstone, Jake Kornfeld, Joy Reap

Members Absent: Mark Fausel

Others Present: Ravi Venkataraman (Town Planner/Staff), Caitlin Littlefield, Gretchen Paulsen, Mark Damico, David Schnakenberg, Fran Thomas, Tara O'Reilly, Allen Knowles, Christy Witters, Huseyin Sevincgil, Gary Bressor, Jed Rankin, Josi Kytte, Justin Graham, Karen Yaggy, Katie Nelson, Kyle Silliman-Smith, Debbie Krug Mangipudi, Sean Fitzsimmons, Tim Monty, Paul Dawson

1. Welcome and troubleshooting

Chris Cole called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm. The Planning Commission members introduced themselves to the public.

2. Adjustments to the Agenda

None

3. Public Comment for non-agenda items

Paul Dawson commented that under Section 6.9, he could not get a zoning permit to develop his property because it has wetlands, but he could get a permit from the state to develop his property. Dawson said that the enactment of Section 6.9 could have been an oversight, and could be amended to match the state's regulations for development within wetlands. Dawson said that the Planning Commission may be familiar with recent similar cases regarding development within wetlands. Cole said he was not familiar with recent cases, and asked Virginia Clarke if this issue has come up before. Clarke said she does not recall facing issues regarding Section 6.9. Chris Granda said that this instance is the first time he became aware that the wetlands rules in the zoning regulations do not align with the state Wetland Rules, and suggested looking into this matter further. Joy Reap asked Ravi Venkataraman if the similar instances arose at DRB meetings. Venkataraman said this issue has come up with the DRB a handful of times in the last six months, and is aware of this issue for applicants looking to develop in the near future.

Tom Frawley discussed the issues he is facing redeveloping the Mobil Gas Station at 1436 West Main Street. Frawley said he is working with Agency of Natural Resources to identify and delineate wetlands on the property. Frawley overviewed the location of wetlands on his property. Frawley discussed the location of the leach field on the Green Mountain Power property—on the other side of I-89 of his property—core-drilling under the freeway, and receiving all the necessary permits for the new septic system and for the connection between the property and the septic system under I-89. Frawley said that due to Section 6.9 he wouldn't be able to develop to the extent as planned, even though the state would likely approve their plans. Frawley said he had filed a wetlands permit application with the state, anticipating a change in the zoning regulations. Frawley said that his proposed development would encroach within the wetlands buffer. Frawley discussed the change in the nature of the "gas station use" and that the current regulations do not match with how gas stations are used. Frawley said that he will be upgrading the storage tanks and have received approval from Agency of Natural Resources for the proposed upgrades. Frawley said he plans to have three to four EV charging stations on site. Frawley said that Zoning Administrator Suzanne Mantegna informed him that approval for his proposal would require a variance, and that based on the current regulations, he could not receive a special use permit

from Agency of Natural Resources. Cole asked clarification on the aspects of the zoning regulations Frawley would like amended, and with the service station use, if Frawley was asking for an amendment to the lot coverage allowance. Huseyin Sevincgil said that the maximum lot coverage for the district is 40 percent, it excludes the wetlands area, and that their proposal would have less than 40 percent lot coverage. Frawley clarified that their request is to amend the automobile service station use to include retail uses. Frawley said considering all the aspects that would need to be permitted for this project, they have invested time and resources to move the project forward. Cole thanked Frawley and his team for bringing the issue to the Planning Commission, and said he will work with Venkataraman to bring this item to a future Planning Commission meeting agenda. Alison Anand asked for additional information about the core-drilling under the interstate. Frawley said he received permission from the state Agency of Transportation, Agency of Natural Resources, and Green Mountain Power for the septic system project. Clarke asked for clarification on the degree of encroachment into the wetlands. Frawley said that development would occur in the buffer, and the core-drilling would go underneath wetlands.

4. Approval of Minutes

Motion by Granda to approve the October 21st Planning Commission meeting minutes, seconded by Anand. Voting: 6-0 (Reap abstained). Motion carried

5. Review of Planning Commission applicants

Cole identified the three applicants: Caitlin Littlefield, Mark Damico, and David Schnakenberg. Schnakenberg introduced himself, and expressed interest for both the DRB position and the Planning Commission position. Cole asked Schnakenberg his preference. Schnakenberg said he had no preference and would be happy to serve in whichever capacity. Granda asked about the open DRB position. Venkataraman clarified that the open position is for an alternate member. Cole overviewed Littlefield's application and asked her if she sees anything lacking in the Town Plan based on her background. Littlefield said that specific methods on resilience to climate change impacts could have been identified, such as riparian restoration, flooding, and forestation. Anand suggested creating alternate positions for the Planning Commission since all the applicants are qualified. Cole said that creating alternate members are not standard practice for Planning Commissions. Cole overviewed Damico's background and asked what aspects about the Planning Commission's work interested him. Damico said he was interested in providing expertise based on his background and being a part of the planning process. Clarke asked about Damico's interest in the Transportation Committee. Damico said he is interested in serving on the Transportation Committee and was appointed by the Selectboard during its meeting on Monday. Clarke asked about the open DRB alternate position. Venkataraman clarified that the opening is only for an alternate position, and that Schnakenberg was the only person who expressed interest in that vacancy. Anand asked for clarification on the composition of the DRB. Venkataraman said the DRB is a five-person board with two alternates, and that Anand was one of the two alternates. Clarke suggested having Littlefield serve on the Planning Commission and Schnakenberg serve on the DRB. Cole agreed with Clarke's suggestion. Littlefield asked about anticipated openings on town boards and committees. Venkataraman said that the Conservation Commission currently has one opening and that the town will be posting openings for boards and committees around Town Meeting Day. Littlefield asked if there will be anticipated openings on the Planning Commission. Venkataraman said that he was not sure because he does not know about the members' interests in continuing to serve and when most of the terms end. Anand asked if Littlefield was on the Conservation Commission. Littlefield affirmed, adding that she would step down from the Conservation Commission if she was appointed for the Planning Commission. Anand said having a person on both boards serving as a liaison for both committees would be useful. Clarke asked if the DRB alternate must attend all the meetings. Venkataraman said no, that the DRB alternate position would be called upon on a need-be basis to fill in for an absent member, and that he can't predict how frequently the alternate member would be called upon in the coming months. Reap said the

applicants should be recommended based on their expertise, and if the commission could deliberate in private. Cole asked how this process was typically carried out in the past. Reap said that this situation is unique, and asked if recommendations were necessary. Venkataraman said that each town has a different process, that the process is informal, that he was surprised that Richmond town boards makes recommendations on applicants. Cole said that the commission will discuss the matter further later.

6. Discussion with E. Main St. and Bridge St. Property Owners

Clarke provided an overview of the district, the district location, the Planning Commission's goals and the discussion. Gretchen Paulsen said that the back portion of long lots within the village are being used by respective residents, that she had concerns about overcongestion by expanding allowances, and that she had concerns about traffic impacts at the four corners traffic signal. Cole said the Selectboard is working with the Agency of Transportation regarding the four corners traffic signal, that Richmond will need to address the county-wide housing shortage in a manner that best fits the community. Katie Nelson had concerns the walkability and the safety of the village, especially for families looking to live in the village. Clarke asked for additional information about the Route 2 project. Cole said that the Selectboard is looking into the matter with the Agency of Transportation to make sure sidewalks are installed on East Main Street, and added additional information on the Route 2 project and the bridge replacement project. Karen Yaggy said she appreciated the interest garnered to serve on the commission, that generally homeowners are more likely to engage on town boards and committees, asked about the placement of parking on properties with infill development, and was concerned about future traffic impacts. Clarke commented that owning a house is a barrier, and that the town should expand rental opportunities. Granda said that the commission should make sure that expanding housing opportunities would expand home ownership and rental opportunities, and that the commission can negotiate methods to increase housing while limiting impacts on traffic and retaining the character of the community. Gary Bressor recommended expanding home ownership opportunities in the village, and explained issues with property transfers with accessory dwelling units. Clarke said the commission is looking into revising the PUD regulations, and parking standards. Josi Kyle overviewed her project on the Creamery parcels, the diverse demographic of renters in the Buttermilk project, the need for diverse housing in town, and her attempts to support the commercial tenants in the project due to COVID. Tim Monty said the commission may want to look into updating and diversifying the housing stock to appeal to younger residents. Katie Nelson said that she owns a duplex which helped make housing affordable, and that zoning regulations have stymied her neighbors from adding additional residential units to their properties. Cole discussed allowances for accessory dwelling units. Venkataraman reviewed allowances for accessory dwelling units, adding that the zoning barriers for constructing accessory dwelling units is supposed to be minimal but that amending water and wastewater permits would be necessary which could take time and resources. Reap added that financing for accessory dwelling units is a barrier. Venkataraman affirmed, and said that the state will have to address these issues if accessory dwelling units aren't as popular as expected. Venkataraman overviewed different housing and streetscape forms. Justin Graham said RiseVT supports mixed use development and he has concerns about pedestrian safety within the village. Graham added that as a first-time homebuyer, he would like expanded opportunities to buy multifamily dwellings. Cole said that Route 2 is owned by the state. Nelson said that her neighbor is working with the town to conduct a speed study and to install a speed monitor on Route 2. Venkataraman said that speed studies have been discussed internally, and that he is working with town officials to make progress on this safety issue. Cole overviewed the process of conducting a speed study in coordination with VTrans to change the speed limit. Monty said he could reach out to business owners in town to provide insight on housing affordability for their employees. Allen Knowles said he would like to work with Nelson to bring their concerns to the Transportation Committee. Cole reviewed the Transportation Committee's current projects. Cole shared Sean Fitzsimmons's comments on improving the walkability within town. Kyle Silliman-Smith commented on the lack of safety on village streets, supported expanding ownership opportunities for multifamily dwellings, and supported rental housing on owner-occupied properties to bolster a sense of community. Cole summarized the public

comments, noting the public safety issues, and expanding housing opportunities. Silliman-Smith recommended reaching out to renters into the process. Kyle supported this recommendation.

9. Adjournment

Motion by Anand, seconded by Tellstone to adjourn the meeting. Voting: unanimous. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:21 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner