

Richmond Planning Commission
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR April 20, 2022

Members Present:	Virginia Clarke, Lisa Miller, Chris Granda, Dan Mullen, Chris Cole, Alison Anand,
Members Absent:	Joy Reap, Mark Fausel,
Others Present:	Ravi Venkataraman (Town Planner/Staff), Erin Wagg (MMCTV), Jay Furr, Rod West, Brandy Saxton

1. Welcome and troubleshooting

Virginia Clarke called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm.

2. Review of the agenda and adjustments to the agenda

Clarke reviewed the meeting agenda.

3. Public Comment for non-agenda items

None

4. Approval of Minutes

No comments from commission members. The minutes were accepted into the record as written.

Clarke noted that during the April 6, 2022 meeting, attendees said that the commercial requirement in the Gateway District is 50 percent. Clarke said that after the meeting she fact-checked this statement and that the commercial requirement per the zoning regulations is actually 40 percent.

5. Discussion on the Gateway District

Clarke noted the scheduled site visit of the Gateway District on Saturday, April 23rd at 3 pm. Venkataraman said that the committee will be meeting at the Reaps' property.

Clarke said that the purpose of the discussion is to overview one possibility for rezoning the Gateway District section-by-section. Clarke said that the intent is to convert the Gateway area from a commercial district to a mixed use district. Clarke reviewed the draft purpose and features sections. Chris Granda said that the reference to "commercial strip development" in the features section is vague and more definition is needed. Clarke said that a definition for "commercial strip development" could be included.

Clarke reviewed the reference to limiting future curb cuts and requiring future development to use the existing curb cuts. Rod West asked if curb cuts are under the purview of the state, and whether the state would permit future curb cuts along Route 2. Clarke said that she was unsure if the state would approve future curb cuts, and that the commission's goal is to limit future curb cuts. Venkataraman said that he is not aware of the state's goal of not allowing future curb cuts on Route 2, that the state has their own

permitting process for new curb cuts in addition to the local permitting process for curb cuts, and that from his understanding the most restrictive rules apply to property owner, regardless of if those rules come from the state or from the town.

Miller said that the commission should spend time defining the details of the features. Clarke suggested placing such definitions in the definitions section. West suggested removing the reference to “Historic settlement pattern of the village” considering the context, and that a better sense of the context will be provided with the upcoming site visit.

Granda asked how the mechanics of limiting future curb cuts would work, and asked if the core concern was the number of curb cuts or the location of curb cuts or both. Clarke said that the goal is that all future development would use the curb cuts that already exist. Cole asked if the town issues a permit for curb cuts concurrently with VTrans. Venkataraman said that the town also issues an access permit with the town’s highway department and zoning administrator signing off on the permit, and that the town’s Public Works Specifications only allows for one curb cut per lot.

Clarke reviewed the feature describing landscaped front setbacks, noting that the historic settlement features of Richmond involve deep front yards. Clarke reviewed the feature describing a shared bike path.

Miller asked if the sewer line could be located in a location that would place an impact on the frontage of the properties. Clarke said that the other possibility could route the sewer line to the schools. Jay Furr confirmed that the two possibilities for locating the sewer line—along Route 2 or to the school—are the only possibilities, and said that Water Quality Superintendent Kendall Chamberlin has a preference for placing the sewer line along Route 2 for engineering reasons. Furr said that issues include the placement of a possible water line due to the needed separation distance between water and sewer lines, and proper sizing for fire hydrants. Furr said that one possibility the Water and Sewer Commission is looking into is building out only to the Reaps. Clarke noted the importance of connecting the mobile home park with municipal water and sewer.

Clarke reviewed the intent of reorganizing the zoning regulations, and streamlining the permitting process by removing site plan review as a permit process and integrating site plan review standards and specifications into the administrative and DRB permitting processes. Alison Anand asked about the history of the site plan review permitting process. Clarke said she was unsure about the basis of the site plan review permitting process, and that historically the zoning was focused on allowing single-family homes and farms and requiring extra permitting for any other use. Anand said that the issue could be about the intent of the regulation or its interpretation in implementation. Clarke noted that the zoning regulations have many sections that are duplicated, such as the performance standards. Venkataraman said that site plan review standards are useful to have, that Richmond’s zoning regulations lack specificity in its site plan review standards in some parts which take away from the practicality of the standards, and that having more robust site plan review standards would be more effective. Venkataraman said that having a two tiers for permitting—one for high impact and high traffic uses, and one for low impact uses—would make a lot more sense for the town. Clarke clarified that the plan is not to remove site plan review itself but to integrate site plan review in all the permitting processes.

Clarke reviewed the possible dimensional requirements. Clarke suggested further investigating possible setbacks by measuring when the commission conducts its site visit. Dan Mullen asked about the larger

setbacks and the placement of parking. Clarke said that parking would not be allowed between Route 2 and the building. Mullen asked about how this would influence house site placements. Clarke said that the goal would be to place multifamily housing. Miller asked about the dimensions of the right-of-way and how it would factor into future development. Cole said that a fence delineates the I-89 right-of-way and private properties.

Clarke suggested that the commission review the possible dimensional standards before the site visit.

6. Presentation and Discussion on the Zoning for Affordable Housing Study

Brandy Saxton reviewed the nine recommendations she has for the town based on her study, highlighting the need for continuing education on housing issues in town, the need to clarify the permitting process to reduce the time of permitting, and the need to reevaluate housing density and allowances for housing types. Saxton presented her recommendations for zoning regulations, zoning districts, and properties with infill potential. Saxton overviewed the methods of regulating density—lot size, lot area, lot coverage. Saxton recommended allowing multiunit dwellings of up to four units as a permitted use within the water/sewer service area, as it lines up with state guidance, the Town Plan, and possible upcoming changes to statute. Saxton reviewed possible PUD regulations that would help create neighborhoods with different types of housing.

Miller asked about the capacity to build housing in the Gateway District. Saxton said that based on her review, the sites at the end of the Gateway District before the Route 2 approach into the village have the capacity for housing due to the setbacks. Saxton said that idealistically one would want 500 to 600 feet of lot depth in order to fully develop the site, and a lot depth of 300 feet would inhibit the full developability of a parcel. Saxton said that within the county are multifamily housing that appear ubiquitous with a set size and shape of 70 feet by 150 feet, of about 12,000 to 15,000 square feet, with 3 or 4 stories because of how many units the building can host, the location of the parking, the building code requirements, among other factors. Saxton said that this dimension could be used to test the capacity of lots and ask whether the community wants these types of buildings. Miller asked if these types of buildings were approved as PUDs. Saxton said she isn't entirely sure.

Miller asked about the possibility of a property owner assuming multiple properties for redevelopment. Saxton said that that is a rarity in Vermont.

Miller asked if a college dormitory counts as affordable housing. Saxton said that it typically does not, as dormitories for institutional use are typically not counted as dwelling units.

Granda asked if Saxton could speak about case studies that have adopted regulations like her suggestions. Saxton spoke about communities choosing to regulate density by lot coverage, in order to keep a low density in the rural areas of town. Clarke noted that the zoning regulations currently doesn't have a density number per se.

Clarke asked about multiple ~~principle~~ principal structures on lots. Saxton said that restricting lots to singular ~~principle~~ principal structures is an artifact from the origins of zoning and is a suburban model. Saxton said that many communities in Vermont are eliminating that limitation, and that it works well in the Vermont context. Saxton said there is a benefit to limit the number of single-family dwellings on a property, and suggested setting that limitation on the number of detached units in order to avoid

unforeseen legal issues when property is transferred.

Clarke asked about the equity issue of placing housing units close to a highway ~~with~~ within the Gateway District. Saxton noted the presence of house sites along I-89 and I-91, adding that the location of house sites ~~are~~ is based on personal preference and the character of the community, and it wouldn't be wholly wrong to consider placing affordable housing in the Gateway area. Saxton added that the Gateway shouldn't be the only location the community that allows for affordable housing. Saxton noted multiple context-based factors in house site placement next to highways that could or could not have an adverse impact. Cole expressed his preference to not place affordable housing next to highways and within floodplains and said he liked Saxton's suggestion to connect with a land trust to create more attractive affordable housing options. Saxton recommended looking into the possibilities at the mobile home parks, specifically possibly allowing alternative building types. Saxton noted that a large contingent of mobile home park residents are empty nesters and seniors, and that based on her conversation with the mobile home park owner, any expansion of the mobile home park would be a continuation of that trend. Saxton and Clarke noted the attractiveness for seniors of a smaller footprint of a mobile home and the less maintenance it needs compared to a single-family home. Granda asked about the capacity of the mobile home park. Saxton said that from her understanding, the land and septic system has the capacity for more units, and that typically mobile home parks at about 3 units per acre do not use land at the same intensity as downtown areas.

Granda noted climate change and shifting trends in transportation should be factored into regulating future development.

Clarke said that the Housing Committee will be discussing this report at their upcoming meeting, that Saxton will be presenting the report at an upcoming Selectboard meeting, and that the commission can start thinking about aspects in the report they want to focus on.

7. Other Business, Correspondence, and Adjournment

Venkataraman said that the public hearing on vehicle fueling station uses, nonconforming uses and structures, and wetlands is on April 25th Selectboard meeting agenda. Venkataraman said that during the last Selectboard meeting, questions were raised about the capacity of the grid to allow for DC fast charging stations. Venkataraman said that he and Selectboard member Jeff Forward are looking into this issue. Clarke and Granda discussed the fallacy of this issue, and ways to circumvent the issue by engaging with Green Mountain Power.

Motion by Granda, seconded by Cole, to adjourn the meeting. Voting: unanimous. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner