

Richmond Planning Commission
REGULAR Meeting
UNAPPROVED MINUTES FOR June 17, 2020 MEETING

Members Present: Chris Cole, Virginia Clarke, Scott Nickerson, Alison Anand, Jake Kornfeld, Brian Tellstone, Chris Granda
Members Absent: Joy Reap, Mark Fausel,
Others Present: Ravi Venkataraman (Town Planner/Staff)

Chris Cole opened the meeting at 7:03 pm.

2. Adjustments to the Agenda

Ravi Venkataraman notified the Planning Commission that the next scheduled meeting is on July 1st and asked commission members if they will be available. Venkataraman said that the Selectboard public meetings for the Village Downtown Zoning District and uses amendments will be on July 20th. He also apologized for not including the June 3rd meeting minutes in the packet, the meeting minutes are available online, and will be available for the commission to review.

3. Approval of Minutes

Chris Cole said that review and approval of the June 3rd Planning Commission meeting minutes will occur during the next scheduled meeting, when the minutes are included in the packet.

4. Public Comment for non-agenda items

None

5. Reorganization and Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Brian Tellstone asked the Planning Commission, especially the current Chair and Vice Chair, if the current status is fine. Cole thanked Clarke for her service, and her assistance as Vice Chair. Cole said that he would accept the chair position again, so long as Clarke serves as vice chair and the Planning Commission wants to see them as Chair and Vice Chair

Motion by Tellstone, seconded by Scott Nickerson to nominate Chris Cole as Chair, Voting: unanimous. Motion passed. Chris Cole is elected Chair of the Planning Commission.

Motion by Tellstone, seconded by Nickerson to nominate Virginia Clarke as Vice Chair. Voting: unanimous, Motion passed. Virginia Clarke is elected Vice Chair of the Planning Commission.

6. Discussion on creation of Housing Advisory Committee

Venkataraman overviewed the changes to the document and the process going forward. Clarke said she found the draft charge as presented to be great. Cole concurred with Clarke.

Motion by Clarke, seconded by Anand to forward to the Selectboard the charge as a recommendation to the creation of the housing committee. Cole asked the committee if it had any points for further discussion. Clarke identified a minor typo. Jake Kornfeld said that the intent to create a housing committee is to create more affordable housing, and yet affordable housing is referred to only once in the charge. Kornfeld said that the commission may want to consider highlighting affordable housing more in the charge. Cole said that the charge is a combination of short-term and long-term goals, and that the mission needs to be broad in order to address housing in general for the long term. Cole added that although affordable housing spurred the creation of the housing committee, the charge needs to be broad for long-term impacts. Clarke said that the first bullet of long-term goals on affordable housing speaks directly to the first bullet of short-term goals. Nickerson said that revising the draft affordable housing regulations will be the first and foremost task of the housing committee. Cole said that the creation of the housing committee is in response to the Selectboard's and Planning Commission's task of creating affordable housing regulations--which happens to coincide with one of the goals of the Town Plan. Clarke said that racial disparity should be addressed in the charge. Alison Anand concurred with Clarke. Venkataraman suggested adding a statement in the statement of purpose similar to one in Essex's housing committee charge, which identifies all protected classes. Cole said that the core issue is equity in housing. Clarke recommended the addition of a statement addressing racial and gender-related or any other bias. Cole said that the charge should not insinuate exclusionary practices against particular protected classes, Kornfeld said that such a statement should be included in the purpose statement and focused on creating equity in Richmond housing. Cole agreed that the statement should belong in purpose statement. Clarke asked if the statement belongs in the purpose statement or under long-term goals. Cole said such broad language belongs in the purpose statement and should be along the lines of "equity among protected classes". Clarke requested to Venkataraman that such a statement be added to the purpose statement. Cole decided to table approval of the draft charge until the next meeting. Clarke asked if the "interest in or expertise" statement at the end of the charge was off-putting and how members read "Two members may be from other town boards and commissions". Cole suggested inserting "Richmond" before "town" to indicate that other board members means other Richmond town board members, instead of board members of any town. Cole asked if a DRB member served also as a housing committee member, would that person have a conflict of interest in administering the regulations. Venkataraman said not necessarily, adding that conflict of interest generally applies to monetary interest. Clarke added that such a problem could occur presently, as many board members serve on multiple town boards.

7. Discussion of goals of zoning regulations and the Richmond Village

Venkataraman said that after the packets were distributed, he received statements from Kornfeld and Joy Reap, and recommended that time should be given to them to speak on their statements. Kornfeld said his statement called for a more robust, densely populated village. He added that respect should be given to prime agricultural soils. Kornfeld said he reiterates other points made in conversation from the previous meeting, regarding focusing commercial traffic on higher trafficked streets, and the influence of COVID-19 on commercial uses. Anand said that COVID could deeply influence the village, but she cannot foresee the degree of the impacts. Anand added that anecdotally, people are happy working from home and working from home is working for certain businesses. Anand said she was concerned about people within the village, that maybe they do not want additional development. Chris Granda said in order to maintain open space, the focus of development should be towards the town center. Granda said that the nature and look of businesses are going to continually change, and he now foresees access to a retail center as necessary. Cole overviewed the goals on Clarke's document. Cole said in response to Clarke's document that the Planning Commission should emphasize protecting

existing neighborhood enclaves. Clarke recommended protecting neighborhood enclaves by classifying them as high-density residential districts or another district. Anand said she likes Virginia's document, and likes the statement on sensitivity to outdoor gathering spaces because that aspect is what makes a rural town charming. Cole said further discussion per bullet point is necessary, starting with the first bullet point. Nickerson and Anand concur with the first bullet point. Cole asked about the bullet point calling for a mixture of different districts to protect neighborhood enclaves. Clarke asked the commission for clarification on what is moderate and high density, as different densities already exist in the village. Clarke suggested that maybe six to eight units per acre as moderate for the Village Commercial District. Cole asked if E. Main Street would be suitable for mixed use development, or mixed use development with a ground-floor commercial requirement. Clarke said that developments now may not be able to market ground-floor commercial spaces and that adaptation of existing buildings could mean any kind of mixed use. Cole asked clarification on the long term, twenty-year outlook. Clarke said that we don't know what commercial is going to look like in the future and that flexibility to redevelop is necessary. Cole concurs that flexibility for developments to be all residential, or to be mixed-use should be provided. Granda said that the commission needs to differentiate between retail establishments, as coffee shops, markets, and personal service are necessary physical establishments compared to semi-durable retails, of which a lot of business is going online. Anand said that the 100-year old buildings in town are still there, but owners are adapting the properties to the uses the town needs, and there needs to be flexibility to enable these buildings to serve the town. Granda said that in other parts of the country, developers tearing down structures and building new in other parts of the country, and that, although Vermont is not experiencing that, if the state does, there will be extreme impacts as seen in other parts of the country. Anand said that her own house from 1861 changed function over the years but still remains, as people may find buildings to have sentimental or aesthetic value. Clarke said many old houses on E. Main Street have not been converted into businesses, some of the buildings are not viable on the market, and the opportunity to do different things is needed. Cole cited a house on Cochran Road as an example which maintains historic integrity on the street level and still provides an opportunity for additional density. Anand cited the Pavilion Building in Montpelier as an example of tasteful rehabilitation of a historic structure. Clarke called for design and compatibility standards to maintain the character of Richmond Village. Venkataraman said that the best route for administering and enforcing design standards would be through a historic preservation committee, and the DRB would not be able to enforce design standards effectively. Clarke said design standards are in the Jolina Court District regulations. Cole said that the standards in the Jolina Court District regulations are more like form-based code. Nickerson asked for clarification about form-based code. Venkataraman said that form-based code is a method to bring buildings and uses closer to transportation corridors, making a streetscape more approachable to all transportation users, with specific dimensions for buildings, unlike aesthetic standards that would maintain the existing quality of the district. Cole cited a form-based code project he reviewed as a Planning Commissioner in South Burlington. Clarke said that design standards are already included in Jolina Court District regulations and the DRB will need to address it. Cole asked the commission about the Smart growth goals statement in Clarke's document. Cole asked about clustering density in already-trafficked corridors and how to negotiate density with sprawl. Clarke said that the town had few, easily identifiable density clusters. Cole asked the commission about the statement regarding maximum flexibility for residential conversions and live/work spaces. Granda said that the zoning regulations could call for buildings built to code to allow for easy conversions. Clarke asked about the statement calling for a variety of housing types. Cole said that going forward, the commission must provide methods to retain existing architectural features in the village while offering property owners the flexibility to build out as people would support such methodical ways if done in the right way. Clarke suggested investigating various ways to retain design standards, such as via form-based zoning or a design review district. Cole concurred, stating that the commission

needs to find the sweet spot to allow change over time that is agreeable and respects the historic nature of town. Cole overviewed the goal statements regarding pedestrian facilities, bus stops, green space and street trees. Cole suggested the idea of a town map. Cole said that South Burlington has a town map and within the town map, future bike paths identified in order to force the development of bike paths when a property with an identified future bike path is developed. Cole asked Venkataraman if a town map could be a tool used for purchasing rights-of-way or green spaces. Venkataraman affirmed that an official map can be used for this purpose, as it has in South Burlington and Williston. Cole clarified that official maps can be used as a tool for implementation. Cole said that official maps take time to develop, but could protect the town's infrastructure interests. Clarke said that such a project would need to be done carefully. Cole asked if any other commission members have goals they would like to incorporate into the document. Nickerson asked about the minimum size for a residential unit and if a 500-750 square-foot accessory apartment allowance would be possible to incorporate more density while keeping the historic nature of the village. Clarke said that such an allowance would be worth including and considering. Cole said that the commission should work on bullet points incrementally, and doubling the density allowance for parts of the village is a good approach for now. Other commissioners agreed. Cole recommended developing methods to retain the historic features and aesthetic qualities of particular iconic buildings in town while allowing the flexibility to increase density for these buildings. Granda asked about inserting goals about resilience and energy efficiency. Cole said that the commission should recognize the difference between building codes and zoning regulations, and focus on crafting zoning regulations. Granda suggested that the goals take into account resiliency planning for neighborhood energy infrastructure, which would include solar access. Clarke cited the climate change goal in the document. Cole discussed further allowances for offsite development of solar panels, citing Vermont Energy Coop's community energy project. Cole asked Venkataraman what the next step would be. Venkataraman recommended clarifying the zoning map based on the recommendations put forth. Cole requested one map depicting the current zoning designations in the village, and studying the area further. Clarke recommended combining the Village Commercial and Residential Commercial Districts first. Nickerson said that the High Density Residential District is not as dense as it could be, and supports combining the Village Commercial and Residential Commercial Districts. Clarke said this was worth consideration. Nickerson also asked if areas south of Winooski River would be included in the review of the zoning districts. Cole said consideration should be included to these areas due to the commercial nature, with the possibility of expanding the existing commercial enclave. Clarke said that that property would be to accommodate increased commercial and residential development allowances. Cole requested from Venkataraman a larger zoning map that includes the Round Church and the Farr property. Nickerson requested clarification on the location of the water and sewer lines. Clarke asked Venkataraman for additional information about town water and sewer service to the Farr property. Granda said that the Farr property is served by town water but not sewer and the brewery is on town water and sewer.

8. Adjournment

Motion by Granda, seconded by Tellstone to adjourn the meeting. Voting: unanimous. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 8:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner