Town of Richmond Housing Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: March 27, 2024 Time Started: 5:31p Time Ended: 7:00p

Keith Oborne, Host, Town Planner

Present: Virginia Clarke, Mark Hall (Chair), Andrew Mannix, Matt Parisi, Connie van Eeghen

Guest: (none)
Absent: (none)

Committee is approved at 5 members, 2 alternates (5/16/22); quorum is 3

- 1. Welcome and troubleshooting
- 2. Adjustments to Agenda none
- 3. Approval of the February 27, 2024 meeting minutes
 - a. Accepted as written
- 4. In progress projects:
 - a. Town meeting debrief/Handout effectiveness
 - i. A little learning:
 - 1. A handout related to an agenda item may not be handed out in the meeting space, although handing out in the hallway is ok
 - 2. There were some consistent "no" voices, especially when voting on charities
 - 3. The paper balloting process, early in the day, tired people out from discussions and was confusing
 - ii. No responses on "interest form"
 - iii. Extra flyers are in the Town Center, Planning and Zoning Office
 - b. Housing Summit Ideation
 - i. CvE: like Speakers' Events on Housing to create a local picture of what is important about housing in Richmond
 - ii. Mark: What is our objective
 - iii. Lisa: SB does not have a single idea about a Housing Summit; we have a problem but we need an understanding that includes land available, state and local law, and other issues
 - iv. Matt: we are being reactive, not proactive; what we're doing now is not enough. A 1.5 acre lot in the village residential district does not have the zoning density (7 units) to work for a developer
 - 1. Keith: the Town would have to be a Housing Manager to make it work, which is not a fit
 - 2. Andrew: managing the property is not the Town's role; facilitating it is. How do we connect with people who say "no"
 - a. It's hard to get water/sewer allocation in Richmond; make it easier. How did Essex figure out how to make this easier? The Town eats some of the cost. No developer wants to come here to set up housing; they are tagged as "bad" people in Richmond. Extending the W&S line could be key to building more housing at scale in Richmond.
 - b. Act 250 is an impediment also, but this will take time to sort out
 - c. Educate the public: what does a developer actually do? What do they need in order to move housing forward here? Make this part of the overall conversation.
 - d. Virginia: the anti-developer sentiment is very strong. The Planning Commission has been working on this. Is it part of the community identify? An educational campaign is one possibility.
 - e. Andrew: we need a longer Grand List in order to spread the cost of housing and the support needed for housing.

- i. Matt: confirmed the anti-developer feeling. Make the financial case for more housing. Support more housing, e.g. more units at Jolina Court, but make them equity (ownership) based. Won't need more infrastructure.
- 3. Lisa: money matters a lot. We have a sewage/water treatment plant that is the twice the size needed, which could lower sewer/water base if we increased the number of users. Taxes will inevitably go up; this can be counterbalanced with more owners in Richmond.
 - a. Virginia: the W/S users have to put out the money up front to extend the line this cannot be paid by the town under the current W&S policy, but can we change this? Could we create a fund to support future housing infrastructure investments? We would need a champion to figure all these threads out and create a coherent, saleable plan.
- v. Mark: what is our next step?
 - 1. List of sources of information Mark will set up
 - 2. Education opportunities
 - a. Perpetual table at Farmer's Market
 - b. Charette: in person discussion for a conversation
- vi. CCRCP Housing Convening, April 8 not discussed actual date is April 18th
- 5. Shared Equity discussion
 - a. Matt: while undergrad at UVM, qualified for a shared equity home (rather than continue to pay rent) with Champlain Housing Trust; started on his path toward housing development
 - i. CHT keeps 65% of net increase in equity when home is sold (now 75% per Keith), determined by independent appraiser
 - ii. Monthly fee; other constraints; high level of bureaucracy
 - iii. Fixes the cost; rent won't increase
 - iv. Could be implemented better, on a smaller scale
 - b. Mark: what would that look like in Richmond?
 - i. Matt: Buttermilk is approved for 31 units; want an additional 24 units (55 units in total) in building 2
 - Virginia: has looked into some being condos. However, very difficult to get money from local lenders because cost of construction is already high and complexity makes it higher (mixed rental and ownership means both a landlord and a housing association have to work together on maintenance). Might consider some senior units that would be "aging in place" ready, or some kind of rent control, that would help alleviate the pressure on housing
 - 2. Matt/Andrew: developers can create structures that mix rentals and condos; been done
 - 3. Virginia: Buttermilk has offered 15 "affordable" units based on an informal definition if they can build 125 units this won't happen.
 - ii. Matt: rental housing is a Band-Aid
 - 1. Virginia: we need all: affordable, senior, rental, ownership... in Richmond. The Jolina Property belongs to Buttermilk; it is not viable for them to work with a 3rd party, non-profit development agency on this project.
 - 2. Matt: Buttermilk is waiting for the increase in density that they want.
 - 3. Virginia: considerations for higher density housing at Jolina Court include limited access, traffic, traditional village image, and desire for more commercial space Remember that the property was originally planned to be commercial; it was a struggle to get residential units. Now Williston and Richmond have large inventories of empty commercial space; residential space is at a premium. The Town may be able to support an additional ~20 units on top of the 31 approved for, but the Planning Commission is still in the discussion phase. Shared equity is a good idea, but likely will not work for Buttermilk.
 - iii. Andrew: summary, shared equity can be a racket and results in renting your own home, although you do get to pay down your own mortgage.

- 1. Matt: commercial lenders across the country are getting worried; the cost of building is too high for a positive return.
- 6. Affordable Housing definitions discussion
 - a. Keith has a worksheet on this definition table for now; discuss next meeting
- 7. Other business, correspondence, and adjournment
 - a. Elections:
 - i. Chair: Virginia nominated Mark; Connie seconded
 - 1. Mark is willing to take this position for one more year
 - 2. Unanimously voted: Mark is Chair
 - ii. Clerk: Mark nominated Connie; Virginia seconded
 - 1. Connie is willing
 - 2. Unanimously voted: Connie is Clerk
 - iii. Vice Chair: Virginia nominated Matt; Connie seconded
 - 1. Matt is willing
 - 2. Unanimously voted: Matt is Vice Chair
 - b. Water/Sewer regulations: Matt suggested we need to understand better how to make changes in policy or update the infrastructure
 - i. Could be proposed at a W/S meeting
 - ii. Learn how it works first, for example, through conversations with Essex; invite to join us at a future meeting and perhaps join of their meetings; or talk to David Sanders, Chair of the W&S Commission
 - Andrew will follow up; Virginia will consider who from Richmond W/S system
 - iii. Continue at next meeting
 - c. Next meeting: April 24, 2024 at 5:30 (no Clerk; find a sub!)
 - d. Proposed agenda to include: Affordable Housing definitions; Water/Sewer regulations/policy; suggestions on Committee goals/work from Matt and Andrew
 - e. Agreed to adjourn at: 7:00

Recorded by Connie van Eeghen