

# Richmond Planning Commission

## Regular Meeting

April 3, 2013

### ***Approved Minutes***

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**Members Present:** Mark Fausel (Chair), Lou Borie (Vice-Chair), Lauck Parke, Christy Witters

**Members Absent:** One vacancy

**Others Present:** Cathleen Gent (Town Planner/Staff to the DRB), Ellen Ward

**7:04 PM** Call to order by the Chair.

**Public Comment** – None.

**Mail** - Gent reviewed the mail.

#### **Meeting Minutes & Town Planner Report**

*Meeting Minutes: For March 20, 2013* – One amendment was offered. Motion by Parke, seconded by Witters, to approve the minutes as amended. Voting: 4 in favor; 0 opposed; 0 abstentions.

*Town Planner Report* – Gent provided a brief update to the report. The Planning Commission discussed a new possible project for the SFY12 Ecosystem Restoration Grant, since the Town Center project and the Kenyon Road projects aren't moving forward. Gent and Witters discussed a stormwater mitigation project as part of the Depot Street parking lot project which is being proposed to address a stormwater problem in the area where the parking lot will go. Witters discussed possible stormwater mitigation ideas and Gent explained that the Selectboard will need to approve a change in the project scope of work for the Depot Street parking lot during its April 15<sup>th</sup> meeting since Richmond will lose the grant money if a final change in the scope of work is not approved by the state by April 24<sup>th</sup>. The Planning Commission unanimously endorsed the change in the scope of work to focus on the Depot Street parking lot. The Planning Commission also requested that Gent communicate with Town Manager Geoff Urbanik that the Planning Commission would like to be involved in the planning of and review the plans for the Depot Street parking lot and would like information about the Depot Street water and sewer line project.

#### **Planning Commission – General Planning Discussion**

In light of Witter's decision to resign from the Planning Commission, the Planning Commission had a general discussion about the experience of serving on the commission and possible ways to improve that experience and enhance public outreach. Witters said it was a hard decision to resign, as she liked working with the Planning Commission and that she plans to stay involved with certain projects, like the Depot Street stormwater improvement project if that moves forward. Witters cited many reasons for her resignation, starting with the proposed zoning bylaws being voted down last fall. The lack of civil discussion on the Front Porch Forum has left a bad taste for her for volunteerism. She said she thinks people need to work as a town to overcome that lack of civil discussion and that the Front Porch Forum is not a good forum because of its censorship in some cases and lack of censorship in others. Another reason for Witters' resignation is that work is very busy and that she has a two- and a five-year old. Witters added that, for her to get involved again as a town volunteer, the type of public discourse has to change. Fausel said it is unfortunate that Witters is leaving and that she is a huge asset.

Borie said he shares his frustration with how things are discussed in town and that Front Porch Forum is not a good vehicle, since it is not multi-dimensional and allows for nasty postings, which is not effective. He added that he would like to get people involved discussing the issues earlier in the planning process. Many people don't weigh in until the last minute, which is not an effective way with complex issues. Borie said he would like to see more outreach to get people involved early on and that getting the agenda out on Front Porch Forum is a good start because it shows that the commission meets every other week. Witters said that it was very helpful, shortly after the bylaws defeat, when Ellen Ward posted on Front Porch Forum a summary of what the Planning Commission was doing. Fausel said that Front Porch Forum is a powerful tool which is not going away. The key is to try to direct the conversation with a perspective that isn't negative. He added that he would like to see other forms of communications that don't allow people to say things anonymously. Fausel suggested that there would be value in Richmond having direct email contact with residents and asked if the town web site would be a resource to create that system. Gent said that the current web site would not and that a new web site will be built soon. Fausel said that at least the agenda and links on the web site are helpful. Parke

1 said that it is important for multiple channels of communications and that many people were horrified by  
 2 what went on in the fall with Front Porch Forum. He discussed the course evaluation process at the  
 3 University of Vermont, where he teaches. For many years, course evaluations were done by paper and  
 4 were handed into the professor at the end of the course. The participation rate was high. The university  
 5 decided to go paperless and the participation rate went from about 87 percent to rates in the low teens  
 6 and a lot of negative comments are prevalent in the evaluations today. Parke said he would like to  
 7 identify Richmond opinion leaders and their opinion channels. He added that he thought the last  
 8 Planning Commission meeting was really valuable because a lot of people came to discuss the density  
 9 in the village. Parke said that sending out the mailings to everyone about the upcoming public  
 10 information session about the zoning changes is very important. He then suggested that the Planning  
 11 Commission should get out and hear from people directly, for instance setting up a table at the  
 12 Richmond Market on Saturday mornings to ask people why they voted against the proposed bylaws  
 13 because it is important for the Planning Commission to see their perspectives. Parke discussed his  
 14 attendance at one of the neighborhood sessions when the proposed zoning bylaws were first being  
 15 worked on. He said that he felt the presentation was strident and that he did not think the Planning  
 16 Commission was there to hear from residents. For instance, the attendees were being told what would  
 17 be in the R10 area. After that meeting, he realized those who didn't necessarily agree with the changes  
 18 would have their chance to vote on the bylaws later. He added that he would like a more proactive and  
 19 public discussion and that there is a silent majority that is receptive to changes in planning.  
 20

21 Parke asked if it would be possible for someone from the Times Ink to write articles for the newspaper,  
 22 similar to what Kurt Hughes used to do as a neutral observer for the Selectboard meetings. Gent said  
 23 the newspaper resources might be limited, but that she will ask. Parke said his point is that it would be  
 24 good for a neutral person to help distribute information about what the Planning Commission is working  
 25 on as a way to get information to the public.  
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27 **Richmond Zoning Regulations Revisions: Work Session**

28 *Planning for April 17<sup>th</sup> public information session*

29 The Planning Commission reviewed the draft materials prepared by Gent. The Commission suggested  
 30 a number of changes to the letter that is being mailed to every Richmond mailing address. Gent said  
 31 that the cost of the mailing is over \$700 and the Planning Commission confirmed that this is an  
 32 important investment to inform the public.  
 33

34 The Commission also reviewed a draft bulletin board flyer that Gent prepared. Fausel suggested that  
 35 we use the sandwich board outside the Town Center to announce the meeting and Gent said she will  
 36 take care of that. Gent will also contact or ask Planning Commission members to contact members of  
 37 the public who attended public hearings about the proposed bylaws about the floodplain section  
 38 changes.  
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40 The Planning Commission discussed the draft presentation for the April 17<sup>th</sup> meeting and offered some  
 41 changes. Parke suggested that, should there not be any people there on April 17<sup>th</sup> who are interested in  
 42 the hearing about the zoning regulations changes, that the session could be switched over to get  
 43 people's opinions about the proposed zoning and subdivision bylaws that were defeated in the fall.  
 44 Fausel said that the Planning Commission needs to focus on the three changes during the April 17<sup>th</sup>  
 45 session and that the Commission should finish the work on the three changes to the bylaws and then  
 46 take some time to talk as a group before having a public session to discuss the defeated bylaws. He  
 47 suggested that he would put together a survey that could be handed out at the public information  
 48 session. He will send a draft survey to Gent, who will distribute it for comments to the full Commission.  
 49

50 Fausel asked for one change to the draft set of changes for Section 6.8 – Flood Hazard Overlay District.  
 51 He asked that, per Section 6.8.11.a)v., parks, playgrounds, and other outdoor recreational facilities not  
 52 involving structures be moved to Section 6.8.10, which allows those items to be approved by the zoning  
 53 administrative officer.  
 54

55 **Adjournment**

56 Witters made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Parke. So voted. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.  
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58 Respectfully submitted by Cathleen Gent, Town Planner/Staff to the DRB