

Richmond Planning Commission
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR May 4, 2022

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

1. Welcome and troubleshooting

Virginia Clarke called the meeting to order at 7:06 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. Both the April 20, 2022 and April 23, 2022 meeting minutes were accepted into the record as written.

Clarke thanked the neighbors in the Gateway area for their time and for leading the Planning Commission across the properties.

5. Debrief on the Gateway area site visit and discussion on next steps

Clarke opened the topic for discussion among Planning Commission members about takeaways from the site visit and next steps. Alison Anand said she appreciated the site visit. Anand noted that based on readings on her decibel meter, the ambient sound level in the Gateway was between 70 to 80 decibels and the trucks driving on Route 2 registered at 100 to 110 decibels. Anand added that she spoke with Gateway residents individually during the site visit, noting that all were negatively affected by the noise impacts and all did not like the idea of more housing in the Gateway area. Lisa Miller asked Anand for more details. Anand added that the residents told her that the Gateway area did not have enough land area for additional housing, and that because the area is seen as a commercial area, the idea of the neighborhood wouldn't be fitting for the Gateway area. Miller agreed with Anand's concerns about the sound impacts, noting how jarring the noise impacts are along Route 2 and the loudness of the ambient noise in the back of the lots. Miller said that she was surprised by the size of the swales within the Gateway area in comparison with their depiction on maps, and that working with the swales in the area would make the potential project costs high. Miller said that the northwest portion of the Gateway would be appropriate for commercial because of the noise and the shallow depth of the lots. Miller said that a

master plan would be needed to manage the future development over time. Joy Reap highlighted the need for housing in town, noted the presence of housing developments near highways and freeways, and said that the housing study said that housing could be potentially located near freeways and highways. Dan Mullen noted that the residents in the Gateway area were not keen for change, and that based on his experiences in urban areas, effectively soundproofed housing could be built. Mullen said that the commission's role is to provide options for future development, not play the role of developer within this area, but that the current residents do not want changes to allow for future subdivision. Clarke said that based on her experience, she did not get the sense that people were opposed to subdividing their lots, that people were not sympathetic for a secondary road based on the amount of land needed, that people weren't wholly unhappy residing in the Gateway area, and that placing houses closer to Route 2 would cause adverse noise impacts. Miller said that based on the noise impacts, the natural constraints, the residents, and the fact that the Town does not have a master plan to manage future development in the area, allowing for mixed use development would be best. Miller said that the overall goals for the Gateway appear challenging to achieve without municipal water and sewer service. Reap said that the current ideas for the Gateway are similar to what currently exists, and that having talked to the property owners and residents in the Gateway area, the general consensus approves of the proposed changes to the zoning. Clarke concurred that the commission would neither be able to allow for more than what is existing nor create a master plan for the area due to the existing impacts and constraints. Anand said that she understands that property owners have the freedom to develop how they would like per the Zoning Regulations but felt that creating a new neighborhood in the Gateway area did not fit in that context. Clarke said that she concluded that no one is in favor of creating a secondary road and housing in the Gateway area. Anand concurred.

Mark Fausel said that the markup draft in the meeting materials would allow for the zoning administrator to approve a wider range of uses, and does not mention the appearances of buildings. Fausel said that larger concern is how new development would look in the Gateway and that the DRB's role in reviewing aesthetics is useful. Clarke asked Fausel how the Gateway should look. Fausel said that the Gateway should appear more like a rural village with wood structures, not a corrugated metal box store. Fausel said that the commission should negotiate allowances with the current property owners in the Gateway like it had with Jolina Court. Clarke said that other than the Reaps, the other property owners do not know how they want to develop their property in the future, and that the commission needs to think beyond the present by providing guidance for future development to property owners. Fausel suggested that the commission dig deeper by asking property owners about aspects they want changed on their property. Reap said that the people who currently own the property may not be the ones developing the property in the future, that the focus of the commission should be on where the Town wants the community to head towards, and that the commission's role is not to be reactive towards the needs of developers. Reap noted that she owns property in the Gateway District, and that she wants best for the Gateway as a whole.

Clarke said that design standards can be taken into consideration further.

Miller said that the commission should provide guidance to property owners based on the principles of zoning itself. Miller asked Clarke if development in the Gateway can proceed without municipal water/sewer service. Clarke identified certain property owner's ability to retain what they have with the systems in place, but further development would be curbed without water and sewer service. Miller asked Clarke whether to plan according to the existing systems or according to anticipated water and sewer service. Clarke said that the commission could plan for both, with on-site systems working as a natural limit.

Clarke moved the discussion to the discussion document in the meeting materials. Reap asked about the reference to deep front yards. Clarke said that Brandy Saxton noted that typically in villages the front-yard setback is 10 to 15 feet, that the average front-yard setback in Richmond is much more than that, and therefore a deeper setback of 30 feet should be considered. Reap said that the 30-foot front-yard setback should be ok, and that the commission needs to keep in mind the location of the parking areas. Clarke said that the setback on Reap's property is 60 feet from the edge of the road. Reap asked what the setback would be considering the edge of the right-of-way and the center of the road. Ravi Venkataraman said that the setback from the center of the road would be closer to 63 feet considering that Route 2 is a four-rod road and about 30 feet from the edge of the right-of-way. Reap asked about the setback from the edge of the roadway. Venkataraman and Clarke expressed uncertainty about the exact number from the edge of the road. Reap asked Clarke and Venkataraman for clarification, and that based on that clarification, she will place flags on her property to indicate distances.

Reap expressed concern about the statement regarding calculating density based on topography. Clarke pointed to the list of features, and said that the list of features is nonregulatory. Reap asked about the reference to transit. Clarke said that this is a reference to traffic calming measures to accommodate for public transit and pedestrians in the future, and that the feasibility of transit is yet to be determined. Reap reviewed the list of allowed uses, and asked about storage and car wash uses.

Clarke reviewed streamlining the permitting process, as shown in the discussion document. Reap asked for allowances for car wash, storage and pharmacy uses, and noted that for pharmacies, the importance is how the potential pharmacy looks.

Reap noted concerns about the vegetated buffer, the solar ready roofing standard, the parking standards, and the traffic impact standards. Reap asked about the standards for the Buttermilk development. Venkataraman said that the requirements for traffic mitigation for Buttermilk will probably come later with Act 250 amendments, that the proposed language was pulled from the Jolina Court Zoning District regulations, and that the standard is based on Act 250's traffic requirements. Venkataraman said that it is hard to hit the trip end threshold for residential uses, but whether a commercial development hits the trip end threshold depends on the quality and intensity of the use. Venkataraman said that hitting the trip end threshold would not prohibit a proposed development, but call for additional scrutiny to the proposed development.

Reap asked about signage allowances for business in the back of the Willis Farm properties. Venkataraman and Clarke said that the signage regulations need to be fixed. Venkataraman said that a broader discussion on fixing the signage regulations to make it content-neutral is necessary.

Chris Granda asked about fueling station uses. Clarke said that the proposed zoning amendments related to vehicle fueling station uses passed on Monday, that the Mobil gas station is no longer in the Gateway District, and that the proposal would not allow for vehicle fueling station uses in the Gateway District.

Clarke asked the commission about curb cuts. Miller supported keeping only the existing curb cuts, and creating no additional curb cuts. Reap concurred.

Reap asked about requirements for screening from I-89. Clarke said that that requirement has been removed from the proposed zoning.

Clarke asked the commission to come up with ideas for design standards for the Gateway District, and recommendations for other sections to fix, such as signage, for the next commission meeting. Miller asked for Gary Bressor's opinion on the proposed standards at a later date.

Reap asked for clarification about the lot coverage allowance. Venkataraman said that the current standard is 40 percent lot coverage and the proposal is 60 percent lot coverage. Reap asked about lot coverage in the village. Clarke said that the standard varies, and isn't more than 40 percent in the proposed zoning. Clarke voiced concerns about the stormwater management along Route 2 in the Gateway.

Clarke said that a revised document will be provided for the next commission meeting.

6. Discussion on implementing the Richmond Housing Study

Clarke acknowledged that the housing study was done for the Housing Committee, but included a number of recommendations for various town boards and committees, including the Planning Commission. Clarke overviewed possible changes to the zoning regulations in the zoning districts in Richmond Village based on Brandy Saxton's recommendations, such as allowing three- to four-unit multifamily dwelling uses, and making allowances for areas that can accommodate infill.

Miller said that she cannot gauge the possible impact of the suggestions for zoning changes Clarke listed in the meeting materials. Anand concurred, adding that she could see how three-unit buildings could be more acceptable than four-unit buildings. Clarke referenced recent proposed state statute that would require municipalities to allow three- and four-unit dwellings everywhere single-family dwelling uses are allowed, and that three-unit buildings could be the compromise between four-unit buildings and two-unit buildings. Anand noted the congestion present in states other than Vermont, and that congestion would alter the character of Vermont. Clarke said that she respected the quality of life but noted the problems of limiting housing development, such as a lack of housing—which is currently ongoing—a limited workforce, and the fracturing of farmland and natural resource areas with outward sprawl. Miller noted the importance of an official map to manage long-term development and traffic mitigation. Mullen said that the commission should review all alternatives to accommodate more housing, like using underutilized buildings, that Richmond's road structure is adequate, and that improving mass transit access would help with mitigating traffic.

Clarke asked the commission how it would like to proceed. Anand suggested continuing these conversations to the next meeting.

7. Other Business, Correspondence, and Adjournment

Venkataraman said that he has had conversations with Josi Kytly, suggesting to her the idea of doubling their density allowance if affordable housing units are provided. Venkataraman said that at this point he would like to work with a couple Planning Commission member and a couple Selectboard members to review the proposal, fact-find, and give a recommendation to the Town on how to proceed, and asked for volunteers. Clarke said that she is volunteering, asked for a commission member to volunteer, and asked Venkataraman on the time frame. Venkataraman said that Kytly would like to move quickly on this idea, that this month the focus will be on fact finding, and that the facts would be presented to the

Selectboard at the end of the month. Granda said that information will have to be brought forward thoughtfully and carefully, and that he would like to help but is challenged with time. Clarke said that the commercial space requirements, the density allowance, the parking requirements, among other aspects will need to be addressed. Miller offered to help and said that she is not aware of the history of the project. Anand offered to help and said that she is time-limited during the summer months. Anand said she had—and still has—concerns about traffic impacts.

Clarke said that she will work with Venkataraman to set up a work plan and schedule.

Clarke said that the proposed zoning amendments on vehicle fueling stations, nonconforming uses and structures, and wetlands passed on Monday evening.

Clarke said that she has invited the DRB to have a role in the zoning reorganization process.

Fausel asked for background on the proposal from Buttermilk. Venkataraman said that he reached out to them about an idea he had to upzone their development area, and they responded with the proposal after a number of conversations he had with Kytle. Venkataraman said that he was prompted to reach out to Kytle because of the housing study, and his concerns about the amount of parking in the development that could be better utilized.

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

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner