

Town of Richmond Housing Committee Notes

Date: August 24, 2021

Time Started: [started a discussion without a quorum at 7:45]

Time Ended: [ended without a quorum at 9:33p]

Ravi Venkataraman (Host)

Present: Virginia Clarke, Mark Hall, Sarah Heim (Chair), Connie van Eeghen

Guest: Brandy Saxton

Absent: Mark Fausel (alt), Miranda Lescaze, Zachary Maia, Jackie Pichette (alt)

Quorum is 5; 5 votes to pass any motion

1. Welcome and troubleshooting
2. Adjustments to Agenda
3. Approval of July 8, 2021 meeting minutes – postponed due to lack of quorum
4. Update to Zoning For Affordable Housing Project from Brandy Saxton (PlaceSense)
 - a. Brandy: Three key issues to keep in mind as we go forward
 - i. Conformance with State and Fair Housing Law (Federal and State laws, with Vermont having expanded protected classes to include income level); Brandy's memo describes the limits of what the Town can do
 1. Zoning Commission has draft a plan based on resident preferences, but to make no allowance for multi-unit housing is a red flag. If not included, the state legislature is likely to make the decision for the Town.
 2. The Town currently allows conditional use review, one criterion of which is compatibility of Town character (other criteria relate to traffic, use of community facilities, utilization of energy use of adjoining properties, and conformance with bylaws) – the State has removed "Town character" as a criterion; this makes "conditional use review" of low relevance
 3. Residents have concerns about multi-unit housing and rental housing; these are real concerns and need to be addressed, but prohibiting 3 and 4 unit housing is not justifiable
 4. We have an opportunity to think about how to support the provision of housing in our community, knowing that the law is likely to be changing, the priorities of the residents, and the goals of the Town. Brandy noted that conversion to multi-unit housing can be destabilizing to the neighborhoods, but usually due to lack of proper standards review and enforcement of building code maintenance. It is important to address the number of units proportional to the size of the property with space for cars, outdoor space, storage, etc.
 - ii. People go to Town governance to take action against annoyances (such as loud motorcycles driving through the Town) which the Town can't legislate about. The Town can't legislate about landlords using properties for rentals. When voices ask for what is not possible or ethical, there is a need for an approach that raises understanding and awareness.
 1. We do not need to change what we have in place but we may not deny an application for three or four unit residences in village areas that are served by municipal water and sewer (see Brandy's Technical Memo of Aug 23 2021). Such actions are now considered discriminatory.
 2. We (including the Planning Commission and SB) need to understand the law in order to explain it to our fellow community members. Sarah Heim volunteered to help in this effort.
 3. Richmond uses the PUD process to support multi-housing units, but this is not a recommended strategy. Vermont is a Billing's Rule state, where municipalities are allowed to do only those things the State allows them to do. The PUD process is an example of action that is not supported by State legislation.
 - iii. Limited supply of land restricts where housing can be added: Richmond is constrained by flood plain. There are about three properties (4 acres, 5 acres, and about 60) that allow growth; two properties

are south of the river which create some challenges. There might be a dozen housing units that could be added based on these properties. There won't be a massive transformation for Richmond: the market, economics, and current use all affect growth.

1. If these properties are developed for other uses than housing, then the opportunities gone.
 2. Farr Farm property can be guided by PUD for a certain form of development, e.g. walkability
 3. Many details involved in deciding what can and can't be supported
- b. Brandy will make a similar presentation to the Planning Commission in the near future.
 - c. Brandy completed the analysis of the surveys (resident and non-resident) and shared her results in two separate reports, distributed prior to the meeting
 - i. Generally, age is the determinate factor in the housing experience, not income; looking at differences in ages shows differences in challenges and barriers to housing (residents' survey)
 1. Sample of non-residents is too small to draw good inferences
 2. Barriers are high; people are having trouble finding what they want and can afford
 - ii. Results are typical of Brandy's experience: importance to access to outdoors drives interest in Richmond, plus convenience of location to job market in Chittenden County
 - iii. Representation was highly Chittenden County based
 - d. Summary: there's not much land to build affordable housing on, our fellow community members are not aware of the laws around limiting multi-family units. What are our opportunities as a committee to encourage affordable housing?
 - i. Brandy: the opportunities are few. Go back to those remaining pieces of property and think about how those pieces fit into the puzzle and what tools will help support them. Consider broadening the focus from the Village to the whole Town, and consider how to keep affordable housing units affordable when they are bought and re-sold. The Champlain Housing Trust owns the land; the owner just owns the building: this helps keep units affordable. Richmond has a large mobile home park; how could those be redeveloped in the future to be affordable and more dense (with supported water/sewage, planned for the future). Goal: keep affordability and maintain housing quality.
 - ii. Focus groups: Brandy is still working on organizing these. The Scope of Work will be completed by the date previously agreed upon: January 2022.
 - iii. Zoning focus on the Village helps move changes through the Town community. Expanding to other districts over time, is a good strategy to continue.
 1. Virginia will follow up with members of the Richmond Racial Equity group for assistance in education and awareness raising.
 2. Incremental changes to districts may not solve fundamental problems with Zoning rules.
 - e. Our role as a Housing Committee: for the agenda next meeting
5. Discussion on reducing seats on the Housing Committee
 - a. Size of Committee: attendees agreed to recommend to SB to reduce minimum size of Committee to 7, with 4 votes to make a quorum
 - i. Ravi will take this recommendation forward to the SB
 6. Discussion on schedule for future meetings
 - a. Ravi will re-poll the group for future meeting dates.
 7. Update from the Planning Commission – postpone to next meeting
 8. Other business, correspondence, and adjournment
 - a. Next meeting: to be determined
 - b. Proposed agenda to include:
 - i. Housing Committee's Charter and Future Work as proponents on achieving the Town's goals – what should we be working towards as concrete tasks?
 - c. Connie to post an announcement on FPF for additional committee members