

## Town of Richmond Housing Committee Notes

Date: October 14, 2021

Time Started: 7:33p

Time Ended: 9:15p

Ravi Venkataraman (Host)

Present: Virginia Clarke, Mark Hall, Miranda Lescaze, Connie van Eeghen

Guest: Kristen Hayden-West

Absent: Sarah Heim (Chair), Zachary Maia,

Quorum is 4; 4 votes to pass any motion

1. Welcome and troubleshooting
  - a. Miranda Lescaze volunteered to chair the meeting in Sarah's absence
2. Approval of July 8, 2021 and September 30, 2021 meeting minutes
  - a. Moved to accept: Connie van Eeghen
  - b. Seconded: Mark Hall
  - c. Unanimously passed
3. Adjustments to Agenda
4. Review of zoning regulations related to Zoning for Affordable Housing project
  - a. Virginia Clarke provided a brief introduction to zoning, starting with a description from Wikipedia describing zoning laws as a historical source of racial and class bias and environmental harm in the U.S.
  - b. Ravi: zoning started out in the early 1900s as a way to classify land use. "Euclidean zoning" classifies land by use, form, area, and shape/placement of building. Also performance: intensity and density of use (rarer). Can be used to create hierarchies and power structures. It is a powerful instrument that can affect people's daily life, personal and economic.
    - i. Virginia: also lot coverage, lot size, permeable surfaces allowed, setbacks, amount of frontage on the road
  - c. Virginia: the Planning Commission has considered switching to form based zoning, but this will be a lot of work and has not been addressed yet. The State provides a set of laws describing what we can do in zoning:
    - i. Delineate districts
      1. Commercial districts: (note that commercial properties are not in as high demand as 20 years ago)
        - a. Village commercial: Goodwin/Baker on Millet St; Railroad
        - b. Commercial: Mann and Machine
        - c. Industrial commercial: by Exit 11
        - d. Gateway commercial: Mobil station and entrance to Village (may be considered as a residential/commercial district with mixed use, e.g. office space, professional services, arts and crafts, museums... rather than heavy industry)
        - e. Downtown: Bridge and Round Church corner complex (would like to put into residential/commercial district; make part of walkable downtown)
      2. Residential districts
        - a. Mobile home park (no commercial uses allowed)
        - b. High density residential (up Jericho Rd plus Tilden and Baker – includes Southview, so not really that high density)
        - c. Agriculture residential (rest of the Town)
        - d. Residential/commercial (East Main St and most of Bridge Street; original residential but gradually included businesses in what were formerly private homes; more multifamily housing; maintains private home appearance) – may be expanded because mixed use districts increase walkability, including West Main and up Jericho Rd
        - e. Jolina Ct (Creamery parcel – has some special considerations)
      3. Two overlay districts that cross the others
        - a. Flood hazard – additional regulations apply

- b. Shoreline protection – shore line of Lake Iroquois
  - 4. Districts have two kinds of uses
    - a. Permitted: zoning administrator can provide
    - b. Conditional: review by DRB with additional information, a hearing
      - i. Less permitting decreases costs and makes residential housing easier
      - ii. Multifamily units must go through conditional use review
  - ii. Regulations for all districts
    - 1. Height, lighting standards, access, prevention of hazards, noise...
  - iii. Procedures for applications; rules for structure of zoning
    - 1. All land development requires permits that are reviewed for consistency to regulation
- d. Discussion
  - i. Mark: what are the rules re: multi family structures
    - 1. Virginia: duplexes count as single family structures. The only multifamily buildings discussed are three/four units, which are allowed in res/comm district, Gateway, and high density commercial. No discussion of more than four unit structures.
  - ii. Miranda: space above Big Spruce?
    - 1. Virginia: four units; allowed only very recently. Bridge St Block is four or five buildings that have some apartments above the first level. These were grandfathered in from prior to zoning regulations.
  - iii. Kristen: Gateway district could have multifamily units under current regulations?
    - 1. Virginia: yes, through conditional use. Past Mobil station is commercial; may move the station to the commercial district of Exit 11. Gateway district may include a B&B, an accessory dwelling of an existing building... these can be permitted by the zoning administrator. A single family dwelling would have to go through DRB review – does this still make sense? Needs a vision: more mixed use? More residential?
  - iv. Virginia: some “residential only” areas are up for consideration, as this is restrictive zoning and prevents more flexible use. Homes identified as “home occupation” structures allow mixed use. Some people in mixed use districts support multifamily buildings; others prefer a commercial district without residential dwellings. Mixing uses is hard, as they come with characteristics or expectations that are not always compatible
- e. PUD process: Planned Unit Development, with a master plan with a density what a subdivision would allow. For example, a building with 8 units that abides by the density limitations could be approved. This is a lengthy procedure which makes development harder. The purpose is clustered housing so as not to spread housing across agricultural land. Jolina Ct is an example of a PUD approved building.
  - i. We could write more of this kind of building into regular zoning, reducing requirement for PUD.
- f. Tools for increasing housing through zoning
  - i. Easier permitting
  - ii. Allowing more units/building
  - iii. Ease restrictions on accessory buildings
  - iv. Allow more than one structure on a lot (right now: only one structure/lot)
  - v. Allow smaller lots (doing this in some districts)
  - vi. Allow conversion of single family homes or commercial buildings to multi family
  - vii. Reduce parking requirements
  - viii. Include more options in regular zoning
  - ix. Allow smaller buildings
  - x. Allow more of lot to be covered
- g. Considerations
  - i. People need green space; don’t pave everything
  - ii. Storm water management requires unpaved land
  - iii. Slow changes are easier to adjust to
  - iv. Higher density in village will require more infrastructure: sidewalks, bike paths, sewer, water...
  - v. Differences between districts are subtle, due to conditional use review

1. A review of the “high density residential” zoning regs showed up some inconsistencies and unlikely uses, e.g. extraction of earth resources
2. Ravi: better not to have so many uses or specific items, especially if aesthetically similar; may be better to describe more generally. Also better if there are fewer districts with fewer restrictions
- vi. Interest in increasing housing has been slow in developing; now quite high, as the housing crisis in Chittenden County is clear. However, some “NIMBY” responses are present in Richmond as well.
- vii. Planning Commission is considering the above listed tools to support housing needs.
  1. Could identify another area of Richmond for more housing, e.g. Gateway District
  2. Consultant is looking at commercial, Baker, Church, Thompson Rd, Bridge... which have residential components, and any other area served by Town water/sewer
- viii. Discussion:
  1. Miranda: people may ask for more housing, less expensive, welcoming younger families, and also may not want change in their own neighborhoods. It may require more education/PR to help open up these perspectives. There may be tension between resident voices and the Town Plan.
  2. Virginia: making persuasive arguments for good planning is essential. Any zoning changes go through the Planning Commission, hearings, Selectboard, more hearings, and can either adopt or set for a vote. So bringing the community along is very important. Develop these discussions at the Planning Commission to iron out these perspectives. Current strategy: go slow and make small changes – with small impact.
  3. Virginia: in 2012, all zoning regulations were rewritten, went up for a vote, and failed. This was disheartening. The proposed regulations are wordy, filled with jargon, and could be improved by making them more simple.
  4. Kristen: policies are now tried and judged on Front Porch Forum; this needs to be part of the community education effort. Are there good examples of this in other communities? Virginia doesn’t know any but thinks it would be a good strategy for making the case.
    - a. Ravi: used FPF for announcements rather than advocacy. The state laws create structures for how the PC must act; the Housing Committee has more latitude.
    - b. Virginia: The consultant will bring this to the forefront.
- h. Thanks to Virginia for providing such a great overview!
5. Discussion on the potential expansion of the water/sewer district
  - a. W/S Commission has a proposal for expansion on next agenda, based on a grant received that will pay for a portion of Phase 1; vote for is this coming Monday is to approve holding a vote for expansion
  - b. Looks promising for expansion out Rte. 2 and up Governor Peck
  - c. Future decisions would still have to be made on whether to extend the lines, after the district is expanded
  - d. Plans for education/communication may be helpful to give everyone the same information, prior to a future vote of users and future users of the water/sewer system
  - e. Next steps:
    - i. Results of W/S Commission and next steps: Virginia will email us the results
6. Update on Zoning for Affordable Housing project
  - a. Ravi: not much progress in two weeks, due to lack of those interested in focus groups
    - i. Residents over 65
    - ii. Residents under 35
    - iii. Employers: four have agreed so far
  - b. Brandy is presenting to PC on Wed, next week; see Town website for agenda
7. Other business, correspondence, and adjournment
  - a. Ravi: Selectboard is putting together ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act): includes infrastructure in a broad sense; could include putting funds in a housing trust fund to develop housing in partnerships or a revolving fund to support future homeowners
  - b. Next meeting: November 11 (Veterans Day)
  - c. Proposed agenda to include: Brandy’s presentation to PC; Gateway; ARPA Committee Letter
    - i. Moved to adjourn: Virginia Clark

- ii. Seconded: Mark Hall
- iii. Unanimously passed

Recorded by Connie van Eeghen