

Richmond Planning Commission
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR November 17, 2021

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

1. Welcome and troubleshooting

Virginia Clarke called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm.

2. Public Comment for non-agenda items

None.

3. Adjustments to the Agenda

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

Lisa Miller pointed to a syntax error in the purpose statement, but could not identify the exact location of the error.

The commission approved the minutes as written. Clarke recommended that the error Miller identified can be revisited when found.

5. Discussion on Zoning For Affordable Housing project recommendations

Clarke introduced the discussion by stating that Brandy Saxton will be providing draft zoning regulations for the commission’s consideration, and adding that discussing a possible application of Saxton’s recommendations in the technical memo to the Residential/Commercial District regulations would be fruitful.

Clarke reviewed the proposed location of the Residential/Commercial District, noting its difference from Saxton’s recommendation in the technical memo. Ravi Venkataraman clarified that the technical memo is based on planning theory and trends which may not wholly be reflective of the town’s needs, and that the draft zoning Saxton is preparing will be more suited for the town since public input would be integrated. Venkataraman said that in the end the commission will have three possible zoning maps at its disposal--(1) the technical memo map, (2) the draft zoning map Saxton prepared, and (3) the draft zoning map the commission prepared—and that Clarke’s document is one variation of the possible options.

Miller found the syntax error she previously referred to in the purpose statement of Clarke’s document. Venkataraman highlighted the portion and explained the syntax error. Others concurred that it should be changed.

Clarke said that Saxton's recommendation called out for an emphasis on multifamily housing. Clarke noted the proposed changes to group home, multifamily dwellings, and mixed-use developments. Venkataraman suggested changing the definition for single-family dwelling to include group homes, because per statute, group homes are considered single-family dwellings. Alison Anand asked if group homes are specifically for persons with disabilities. Venkataraman said that per statute it is for persons with disabilities and houses no more than eight persons. Clarke raised the question for discussion about rehabilitation facilities and other kinds of support housing. Anand asked about uses to support people who are homeless. Clarke said that the support housing use would be for homeless people. Venkataraman said that the support housing use could capture a larger range of people who need supportive services. Clarke asked if group housing includes shelters for less than eight people. Venkataraman said it does not, and group home is specifically for people with disabilities.

Reap asked if the DRB can deny conditional uses. Clarke said no, but that the DRB could place conditions of approval. Venkataraman clarified that most probably based on the location and the list of conditional uses that the DRB will approve the application, but that the DRB has the ability to deny applications based on how it applies the criteria and its findings. Venkataraman said that two of the listed uses have guarantees to be approved per statute, but the other listed uses could be denied by the DRB. Clarke said presumably these uses would be approved since they are listed as possible uses. Venkataraman said yes, but that there is the rare chance that the use could be denied based on the DRB's findings.

Clarke pointed out that with multifamily dwellings, the character of the area cannot be taken into consideration in the DRB review. Reap asked why multifamily dwellings are included as conditional uses. Clarke said that the DRB could place conditions of approval on multifamily dwellings. Venkataraman said that by removing character of the area from the conditional use review criteria, the DRB's review becomes minimal and based on the reduced review criteria, the DRB would not be able to place many—if any—conditions on developments. Clarke said that the purpose of conditional uses could be debated further, but that the conditional use review process is generally condoned in Vermont municipalities. Reap asked about the definition of conditional uses. Clarke discussed the reasoning for conditional uses. Venkataraman reviewed the conditional use review criteria, and how the criteria is applied. Clarke summarized that if a use is a conditional use in the district, it was determined that the use is customary and compatible with the district. Venkataraman added that for all the listed conditional uses, site plan review is required. Anand said that the concept of conditional use is good as it would limit scale and size of uses. Clarke said that restrictions on scale and size would need to be written into the regulations.

Miller asked how many parcels are within the proposed zoning district, called attention to the cumulative effect of new uses in the district on traffic, and suggested updating the official map to include new roads to distribute traffic flow. Clarke said that discussions about new roads will be challenging. Cole said that there is state policy on traffic impacts and that state policy allows municipalities to put in place traffic impact fees.

Clarke reviewed the dimensional standards, and the density allowances. Mark Fausel asked for clarification on the eight units per acre allowance. Clarke specified that the proposed allowance would be for eight units per acre, clarifying how the allowance is set up. Fausel asked about placing multiple duplexes on a lot. Clarke said that currently, placing multiple primary structures on a lot is not allowed unless it were a PUD, and that that item would need to be further discussed. Fausel said that he would have think over the allowance for eight units per acre. Clarke said that the current density allowance for the district is six units per acre, and that the proposal would shift allowances from six units to eight units

per acre. Cole noted that the residents in the neighborhoods were concerned about the zoning for the residential/commercial district. Clarke said that further discussions about the Goodwin Baker Building is warranted. Cole said that the commission's outreach work is not reflected in this document, that it should be taken into consideration, and that residents in the neighborhood had apprehension about multifamily dwellings in adjacent districts. Chris Granda said that Cole may be requesting a broader application than intended by the residents, that by retaining the existing conditions the housing is going to become more expensive, and that maintaining affordability will require increasing density in a reasonable way. Reap said she was curious about the ability of the lots in the district to add housing. Venkataraman said that most of the lots in the district would not be able to build out per density allowances because of the size and shape of existing lots. Clarke recalled that past conversations with residents in the district lived in multifamily dwellings and encouraged the development of multifamily dwellings. Venkataraman added that with the shift in allowance from six units to eight units, the benefits are marginal and that he does not expect growth overnight. Miller suggested requiring a buffer between residential and commercial uses.

Clarke reviewed the design standards, noting that the current standards are not enforceable and that standards are not recommended. Dan Mullen asked about the reasoning against having design standards. Clarke cited Saxton's memo, stating that the zoning administrator is unable to enforce design standards, and this issue will need to be discussed further.

6. Discussion on possible planning projects for FY23 UPWP

Clarke overviewed the UPWP. Venkataraman summarized the transportation planning projects the Transportation Committee is considering. Cole added that for building infrastructure with a public/private partnership, the official map is a good tool to use. Cole noted that with impact fees, he does not envision them being town-wide but rather only in the village because the sidewalks would be in the village. Venkataraman said that with impact fees, Cole is correct that the fees have to go directly towards a specific project, that the collection of impact fees could be town-wide or localized to the area the infrastructure would serve, and that who pays the impact fee and determining who will benefit from the infrastructure will have to be further discussed.

Clarke asked if the bike/ped master plan will be completed by July. Cole affirmed. Cole added that for bike/ped infrastructure, a considerable amount of funds would be required for the grant match to build sidewalks and bike paths, that the Transportation Committee has worked with the Selectboard to build up a reserve fund for building infrastructure, and that the town has lagged behind adjacent towns with infrastructure due to lack of funds and infrastructure.

Clarke asked the commission if it would like to pursue a transportation planning project or a land-use planning project. Venkataraman said he has allocated funds for both transportation planning projects and land-use planning projects. Venkataraman said that the transportation committee has not decided on the projects it wants to pursue yet, that the UPWP application period has not opened yet, and that he is soliciting comment from the commission.

Anand asked about the infrastructure bill. Clarke said she does not know about this subject. Miller said that regardless by investing in reserves and planning projects would put us in a better position to receive funding and pay for grant matches in the future. Venkataraman said that the processes are to be determined and that he will learn more about the funds through VTrans and DHCD. Cole overviewed the budget creation process at the state level and the legislative process, that the budget will go into effect in early July, and that this bill is a long-term bill looking into infrastructure investments.

Clarke asked the committee about non-transportation projects. Clarke suggested waiting for discuss projects for the Gateway District after the water/sewer district expansion vote, and investigating clustered development standards in the A/R District. Clarke suggested looking into the Gateway District before July 2022. Venkataraman said that projects could begin before July 2022 depending on the staff availability at CCRPC. Cole said that the Gateway District seems like a better area for mixed use and for meeting town-wide housing goals, and that master planning the entire Gateway District would be a better option.

Clarke asked Venkataraman if any decisions had to be made tonight. Venkataraman said that the purpose was to begin decisions, and that if the commission wants to pursue a project, it should decide to do so by December 15th. Clarke asked if the commission wants to pursue a Gateway visioning and planning process. Fausel said that he does not see the benefit of 3D modeling work in his experience on the commission. Granda said that in past conversations about the Gateway, he has noted concerns about traffic impacts, the types of businesses and the impact of businesses on the village.

Mullen suggested requesting assistance with developing zoning regulations for aesthetic standards. Clarke asked if Mullen's suggestion would be specifically for the Gateway District or townwide. Mullen said his understanding of the bullet point would be for townwide revisions. Venkataraman said that he meant townwide revisions with the bullet point, as CCRPC staff would be able to provide a detailed review of a niche subject, that for affordable housing regulations CCRPC staff would be able to guide the commission on understanding the regulations, and that for aesthetic standards CCRPC staff may be able to compile renderings to guide applicants.

Fausel suggested purchasing the lot on the south side of Route 2 to protect the aesthetics of the Gateway District.

Clarke suggested discussing this item at the next meeting.

7. Discussion on outreach for possible Water/Sewer District Expansion

Clarke asked the commission if it would like to do outreach regarding the water/sewer district expansion vote, and said that the Housing Commission will be doing outreach. Anand asked when the Housing Committee meets. Clarke said that the Housing Committee meets on the second Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm. Granda said he does not have a compelling reason to be involved.

8. Other Business, Correspondence, and Adjournment

Clarke said that for the next meeting there will be no materials other than the agenda and minutes, that DEC Wetlands Tina Heath will be presenting on wetlands, and that Regina Mahony will be discussing the CEDS. Granda asked when was Heath's last presentation. Clarke said that Julie Follensbee presented to the commission, not Heath. Venkataraman said that Follensbee's presentation was in mid-December 2020.

Motion by Granda, seconded by Fausel to adjourn the meeting.

Voting: unanimous. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:02 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner