

**Richmond Planning Commission
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR March 17, 2021**

Members Present:	Virginia Clarke, Chris Granda, Alison Anand (Joined at 7:18 pm), Mark Fausel, Caitlin Littlefield, Jake Kornfeld, Joy Reap
Members Absent:	Chris Cole
Others Present:	Ravi Venkataraman (Town Planner/Staff), Gary Bressor, Jean Bressor, Rose Feenan, Allen Knowles, Gerald Feenan, Fran Huntoon, Alan Franchot, Judy Rosovsky, Trish Healy, Victor Rossi, Dan Johnson

1. Welcome and troubleshooting

Virginia Clarke called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm. Clarke said that she may have technical difficulties in the middle of the meeting due to an unstable internet connection. Chris Granda volunteered to serve as Chair in case Clarke disconnects from the meeting.

2. Adjustments to the Agenda

Granda said he would like to confirm that energy code discussions are included in the next meeting agenda. Clarke said that this can be addressed during the Other Business item.

3. Public Comment for non-agenda items

Cathleen Gent said she had a comment for an agenda item and would like to make sure her comment is addressed. Clarke said that the intent of tonight’s meeting was for the Planning Commission to discuss findings from the Community Outreach meetings. Gent asked that her comments be stated prior to deliberations. Granda recommended that time be allocated now for public comment for agenda items, to make sure the public has the opportunity to speak. Clarke agreed. Gent read a letter from residents of Thompson Road, requesting that the Planning Commission consider including Thompson Road in the Village Residential Neighborhoods-South District, not requiring sidewalks due to existing constraints, and clarifying the list of allowable uses to prevent undue adverse impacts from chain commercial stores.

4. Approval of Minutes

Motion by Brian Tellstone, seconded by Granda to approve the February 17, 2021 meeting minutes. Voting: unanimous. Motion carried.

Motion by Joy Reap, seconded by Caitlin Littlefield to approve the March 3, 2021 meeting minutes. Voting: 7-0 (Tellstone abstained). Motion carried.

5. Debrief on Community Outreach Work Plan

Clarke presented a draft schedule for the process going forward. Granda said he was concerned about how the schedule does not include non-zoning topics, because the Planning Commission had expressed interest in pursuing non-zoning topics. Venkataraman said that he created the schedule so that the commission had a sense of the process going forward, and that the schedule is malleable based on the commission’s priorities and needs. Gerald Feenan asked if this was the first time the commission saw this schedule and if this schedule was publicly available prior to the meeting. Clarke said that the schedule was a discussion tool. Feenan said he would like this information prior to the meeting in order to provide substantive comments. Littlefield said that this schedule was provided in the packet prior to the meeting and the packet was posted on the Town website before the meeting. Jake Kornfeld was concerned about the spacing of the meetings because he was unsure about the amount of discussion per meeting and

suggested meetings in between to discuss non-zoning items. Venkataraman said that he doesn't expect much comment for the final subtasks under each task, but that he agrees with Granda and Kornfeld that the meetings should be more spaced out to allow for more discussion and noticing so that the public is aware of these meetings. Clarke said that the time spent on the second meetings per task will depend on whether commissioners are prepared to discuss items during meetings. Venkataraman said that he'll modify the schedule, and that he will be setting up a web page that outlines the dates of future meetings and discussion items, similar to the Community Outreach Work Plan, so that the public is aware of future discussions. Fausel suggested combining particular public hearings into singular meetings, for efficiency and so that the public would not have to attend every Planning Commission meeting. Clarke said that that made sense. Venkataraman agreed, based on the number of discussion meetings anticipated.

6. Debrief on Village Residential Neighborhoods Discussion

Clarke overviewed the possible new zoning districts, and asked if the residential neighborhoods north of the Winooski River and south of the Winooski River similar or dissimilar, as this would determine whether the commission should create separate residential zoning districts north of the Winooski River and south of the Winooski River. Gary Bressor asked why the houses at the end of Church Street are in the Village Residential Neighborhoods District but not its surround areas. Venkataraman said that he thought the houses would want the same rights as the rest of the residences in the Village Residential Neighborhoods, that the land surrounding the houses are protected, but that the property could be split among the districts in a multitude of ways. Clarke asked if Bressor had a recommendation. Bressor said he did not, but said it was odd that the houses were in one district and the land surround them were in a different district. Venkataraman said that Bressor brought up a good point and that it warrants discussion. Clarke asked if the draft zoning document was in line with the comments the commission received. Fausel said that the commission should clarify that the proposed zoning is a modification of the existing High Density Residential District. Clarke said that the current discussion should focus on whether this district should be solely for residential uses. Littlefield made the distinction that in the High Density Residential District, multifamily dwelling uses are allowed, and that in the proposed zoning, multifamily dwelling uses would not be allowed, and highlighted the value of diverse housing types. Clarke asked if multifamily dwelling uses should be allowed in the district. Littlefield said that she did not have a strong preference at this point, that she found prior comments about renters to be discouraging, and that the town plan calls for the creation of diverse housing types in the village. Clarke said that renting should be encouraged as homeowners usually begin as renters, that there are other housing configurations outside of multifamily dwellings that would create rentals, and that rental housing is an equity issue. Granda said that keeping the status quo of the neighborhoods is in line with the Town Plan, with the exception of density, that the zoning should enable the housing to adapt to the change with the community needs to remain sustainable, and that the town should make sure renters have opportunities. Granda said that he would be in favor of allowing up to four-unit multifamily dwellings. Kornfeld concurred. Granda said that limiting the dwelling types in the neighborhood could push property values up and prevent homeownership. Fausel said that he is against allowing multifamily dwellings based on the public comments and the fact that the neighborhoods are already fully built out, and that additional units can be built out along the major thoroughfares. Reap asked for clarity on which lots could accommodate more density on Baker Street and Tilden Avenue, said that she wouldn't want to force development in the Village Residential Neighborhoods, and that the comments about renters was disheartening. Littlefield added that the culture towards renters needs to fundamentally change. Granda said that there is no firm line between renters and homeowners, and that the comments about renters caught him by surprise. Alison Anand said that the commission should consider standards and regulations for home occupations. Trish Healy talked of her experiences renting out a duplex on Baker Street, and said that in her neighborhood, there aren't many lots that could accommodate a three- or four-unit building. Anand asked if the commission has received any comments in favor of three- or four-unit multifamily dwelling uses. Healy said no. Reap asked if Baker Street and Tilden Street should be in a separate district. Reap asked about Lemroy Court. Venkataraman clarified that the district lines are in line with the potential lot lines, but the land on the corner of East Main Street and Lemroy Court and the land south of Lemroy Court are considered one lot, owned by Harrington's. Clarke said that the end of Lemroy Court is considered a neighborhood. Littlefield said that even with adjustments to the language, there aren't many residents who would support higher

density housing. Clarke recommended changes to the draft purpose statement. Clarke asked the commission about uses that are allowed per the High Density Residential District but not allowed per the Village Residential Neighborhoods District. Fausel recommended making parks and schools allowable uses. Venkataraman said that with multifamily dwellings, even if the commission were to allow it, developing a multifamily dwelling on a smaller lot would not be feasible due to the lot coverage limits, and that the commission could create separate lot size and density allowances to allow smaller lots to retain the existing nature and larger lots to be developed further. Clarke called for a discussion on uses that are listed in the High Density Residential District and not listed in the Village Residential Neighborhoods District. Anand said there should be standards for home occupations and cottage industries, and that additional consideration is needed. Reap called for redrawing the map to allow for higher intensity uses along Jericho Road. Fausel agreed. Clarke asked about West Main Street. Anand asked about public comments received regarding the lots along West Main Street. Clarke said that the commission did receive comments from one of the residents along that portion of the West Main Street corridor, who expressed interest in the Village Residential Neighborhoods District. Venkataraman said that he heard from Heidi Bormann, who expressed interest about retaining the developability of her parcel along West Main Street located in the Gateway District. Clarke said the question is whether that lot should be part of the Village or the Gateway in general. Fausel said that that apartment building does not appear in character to be a part of the village. Reap and Healy recalled a number of comments from the public that called for keeping the portion of the corridor residential and as-is. Clarke asked if the commission had any other comments about the map and the uses. Fausel recommended reaching out to Dr. Parker regarding his doctor's office on the corner of Jericho Road and Burnett Court, and making sure that schools and parks are allowed in the Village Residential Neighborhoods. Clarke said that extending the Residential/Commercial District up Jericho Road would bring existing commercial uses into conformance. Fausel said that extending the Residential/Commercial District up Jericho Road would allow for the developability and viability of certain larger parcels. Clarke called for looking at the areas south of the Winooski River. Fausel asked what the extent of water/sewer is on Cochran Road. Venkataraman identified it on the proposed zoning map. Clarke asked if the lots along Cochran Road should be in the Village Residential Neighborhoods as shown in the map, or left as-is. Fausel suggested aligning the Village Residential Neighborhoods with water/sewer coverage. Clarke asked if the neighborhoods south of the river needs to be in a different district with different standards, and if the Round Church District should have design standards. Fausel recommended having different Village Residential Neighborhoods districts and design standards for the Round Church District. Anand asked which lots on the map are an acre, for a sense of scale. Clarke asked Gent the size of her property. Gent said that her lot straddles Thompson Road, the portion west of Thompson Road is a third of an acre, and the portion east of Thompson Road is a quarter of an acre. Anand asked if Gent wanted the lots north of hers to be included in the Village Residential Neighborhoods per her letter. Gent said she and her neighbors wanted two of the lots to be part of the Village Residential Neighborhoods. Fausel asked for clarification regarding lot size. Gent said that previous discussions stated the possible lot size at half an acre and the neighbors found this reasonable, and that many portions of the neighborhood have wetlands or steep slopes. Bressor identified lots on the map that are approximately an acre, and clarified areas that are developable in the map. Granda called for a time check. Clarke concluded the discussions on the item. Feenan said that he wanted the commission to make sure that access to the Residential/Commercial areas on the Farr property would not be possible via Thompson Road.

7. Discussion on possible zoning amendments for Accessory Dwelling Units, Nonconforming Lots, State Permit References, Certificates of Occupancy, Variances, and Wetlands

Clarke recommended discussing this item at the next meeting. Venkataraman requested a short discussion as a primer, that he will be presenting two to three zoning amendments per meeting from this point forward in order to clear up the legalese and make the implementation of the Planning Commission's intent possible. Venkataraman added that for Certificates of Occupancy, the Zoning Administrator currently has to inspect every deck that is built, which he says is not good use of the limited amount of time the Zoning Administrator has per week. Reap agreed that most of the suggested zoning amendments can be quickly reviewed and approved, and suggested that it be brought at the beginning of the next meeting. Clarke asked that the commission read through the materials Venkataraman has provided in the

packet for the next meeting. Venkataraman said that he will be bringing to the commission additional amendments per meeting for the next few months. Granda suggested making this item a standing item at the beginning of future meetings. Anand and Clarke agreed.

8. Other Business, Correspondence, and Adjournment

Granda asked for confirmation to discuss energy standards during the next two planning commission meetings for 45 minutes each, and said that the Richmond Climate Action Committee (RCAC) and Town Energy Coordinator Jeff Forward have agreed to speak at the upcoming meeting. Reap was concerned about how Granda's and Venkataraman's items would detract from the ongoing discussions on zoning districts. Anand said that the commission has had a history of not finishing tasks. Clarke asked for additional details from Granda. Granda said that he and the RCAC will present details and options. Clarke said she is in favor of postponing discussions on energy standards to focus on the zoning districts discussion. Granda said he brought this item to Venkataraman's and Cole's attention to schedule for future meetings and acted upon that understanding. Littlefield said she would appreciate discussions on the energy standards to diversify the workflow of the Planning Commission. Clarke agreed to include discussions on energy standards during the April 7th meeting.

Motion by Granda, seconded by Fausel to adjourn the meeting. Voting: unanimous. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner

Comments in the Chat:

19:01:12 From Jean Bressor to Everyone : Jean and Gary Bressor

19:01:14 From Cathleen Gent to Everyone : Cathleen Gent

19:02:41 From Fran Huntoon (she/her) to Everyone : Fran Huntoon

19:02:59 From Alan Pierson Franchot to Everyone : Alan Franchot

19:03:08 From Allen Knowles to Everyone : Allen Knowles, 112 E Main St

19:03:09 From Gerald Feenan to Everyone : Gerald Feenan

19:03:17 From Gerald Feenan to Everyone : Rose Feenan

19:35:35 From Joy Reap, Planning Commissioner to Richmond Town Host(Direct Message) : Ravi can we look at the maps?

20:20:32 From Caitlin Littlefield, Planning Commissioner to Everyone : Mark, to directly respond to your comment, at the Tilden/Baker meeting one individual was clear that they felt renters did not contribute or seek or engage in the neighborhood. But otherwise, it's very encouraging how much Richmond residents tend to welcome renters.

20:51:15 From Fran Huntoon (she/her) to Everyone : 1/3 acre

21:00:14 From Joy Reap, Planning Commissioner to Everyone : I know we need to move on, but I'd like to make one more comment about the area south of the bridge. I don't think the parcels on Brooklyn Court that aren't visible from Bridge St should be in the church viewshed zone.