

Town of Richmond Housing Committee Notes

Date: February 10, 2022

Time Started: 7:39

Time Ended: 9:25

Ravi Venkataraman (Host)

Present: Virginia Clarke, Mark Hall, Sarah Heim (Chair), Connie van Eeghen, Kristen Hayden-West

Guest: Brandy Saxton

Quorum is 4; 4 votes to pass any motion

1. Welcome and troubleshooting
2. Approval of January 13, 2022 meeting minutes
 - a. Moved to accept: Mark Hall
 - b. Seconded: Sarah Heim
 - c. Unanimously passed
3. Adjustments to Agenda
 - a. Zachary Maia has resigned from this committee
4. Update on the Zoning for Affordable Housing study
 - a. Brandy Saxton previously distributed the draft recommendations to the Committee; she shared a summary of the interviews and focus group reports at this meeting. In summary:
 - i. Employer focus group: range of types of business represented with diverse employee bases: Sweet Simone, Green Sea, Little Tots Academy (low wage employees), Hatchet/Big Spruce, Mann and Machine, Richmond Home Supply; identified different needs but all agree that attracting and retaining employees is a challenge. Raised permitting issues, in agreement with developers and contractors group feedback.
 - ii. Older resident focus group: all female but diverse in their employment/retirement status and need for alternative housing. All want to stay in Richmond but not secure in finding housing to meet their needs in the long term: single level, small outdoor space, low maintenance. Good discussion about location (in Village or further out), transportation options, and agreement that Richmond should not become Tafts Corners.
 - iii. Two focus groups with younger residents, two people each group: diverse ages, all with their current housing needs met; all spoke to the challenges re: high cost for homes that need repair; feel “stuck” with their starter homes in Richmond.
 - iv. Interviews: Riverview Commons, Richmond Restoration, Huntington Home, Hillview Design Collaborative, Buttermilk; had common themes (with some different perspectives included); concerns about process of development review/permitting more than concerns about zoning standards, especially the amount of time needed for approval; difference in expectations about how important the “rulebook” is; it is important to balance commercial and residential space but this is challenging to do, especially with high demand for residential and low demand for commercial space; market realities are also constraints: banks won’t finance a modest house on an expensive piece of land, and land in Richmond is getting more expensive
 - v. Discussion: there are opportunities for housing development, such as using existing stock in the Village better (but the Village is locked in to a set number of square feet); possible expansion of Riverview Commons (whose population is moving towards senior residents – former home owners who are looking for single level living and can afford to buy a manufactured home [\$80-90K + \$15K for a pad per new state requirements] as banks don’t provide standard mortgages for these homes)
 - b. Recommendations: based on the input received from the Committee and other sources, answering “What can the Housing Committee do.”
 - i. Outreach and education to change the culture from NIMBY to YIMBY
 - ii. Advocate for projects to diversify and enhance housing stock

- iii. Collect data annually; track key metrics
 - 1. Mark: has the town in the past tracked these metrics? Any goals or targets for growth?
 - a. Ravi: tracking has been mixed over time, per annual reports. There are required reports which go to Regional Planning, recently available based on Ravi's work
 - b. Virginia: no targets known or tracked; more hit and miss. Regional Planning has set housing targets for us but the Town has not attended to these. Would be a good goal for Housing Committee.
 - c. Connie: there is value in collecting data to inform Town leadership and residents to move towards community goals, such as the Inclusion Statement recently passed by the Selectboard
 - iv. Support positive relationships with developers, landlords, and housing orgs (switch the order so this one precedes current #3, data collection)
 - v. Streamline DRB and permitting processes (Planning Commission) – might be faster to accomplish
 - vi. Revise zoning and subdivision regulations (Planning Commission) – might be faster to accomplish
 - vii. New member training and continuing ed for Planning Commission and DRB (Selectboard)
 - viii. Explore land trust model to create new housing and preserve affordability: the trust owns the land, the home is owned by the homeowner, with recaptured increased value is split between trust and homeowner; done frequently by Champlain Housing Trust; this is not creating a model to take responsibility for housing development but to support it; funding might come from various new sources such as increased permitting fees for larger homes (a form of wealth tax) or state level property tax on sales or options taxes (no likely to be popular) or ARPA funds (discussed in previous meetings).
 - ix. Assess condition and efficiency of housing stock; make recommendations to improve – could tie in with ARPA funding opportunities and lower operating costs of some homes
- c. Mark: Where does this committee have a role or voice in this – these recommendations help answer that question.
 - i. Sarah: recommend that this topic return on next month's agenda for deeper discussion
 - ii. Brandy: remember, the challenge in making change happen in communities depends on getting the supporters of a plan to show up; those who oppose will always show up
- d. Next steps: Brandy will finalize the report and send to Ravi. Last deliverable is to do a public presentation on final report; plans for this are still being shaped.

5. Update on the Planning Commission and its work plan

- a. Virginia: next two meetings will be outreach to Gateway residents on sewer expansion, as this affects changes in zoning regulations. Currently stalled at Water and Sewer as they figure out the bond vote, which will take a little while.

6. Discussion on housing allowances and equity

- a. Sarah and Mark presented their research.
- b. Mark described the potential for potential in the Gateway area and shared data about Richmond at large
 - i. Housing units: 1635
 - ii. 12 permits/yr over past six years
 - iii. Building Homes Together campaign targeted 5K units in Chittenden county by 2025; for Richmond, this is 20-25 units per year or 1.2% growth
 - iv. Willis Farm is interested in development and could support 5 lots (3 commercial and 3 residential)
 - v. Other lots in Gateway have wetland, but also 8-10 added acres no in wetlands
 - vi. 12 units/acre is the minimum for low income housing to support affordability
 - vii. Density caps: should we get rid of them? A technical review memo provided five alternative approaches.

- 1. Virginia: 8 units/acre has been the standard used by the Planning Commission to date

- c. Sarah briefly reviewed a working draft on equity considers for new housing developments

- i. These questions can include; affordability, accessibility to village, traffic, environment, etc.
 - ii. Included resources available to support our understanding and future discussion
 - iii. Next meeting: continue presentation and discussion for later presentation to Planning Commission
- 7. Update on ARPA Committee - postponed
 - a. Other business, correspondence, and adjournment
 - b. Next meeting: Thursday, March 10 @ 7:30p
 - c. Proposed agenda to include: discussion of Affordable Housing study recommendations (Brandy Saxton's draft report); continued review of housing allowances and equity presentation and discussion, update from Planning Commission on outreach to Gateway
 - i. Moved to adjourn: Virginia
 - ii. Seconded: Connie
 - iii. Unanimously passed

Recorded by Connie van Eeghen