

Richmond Planning Commission
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR February 3, 2021

Members Present: Chris Cole, Virginia Clarke, Chris Granda, Alison Anand, Brian Tellstone, Mark Fausel, Caitlin Littlefield,
Members Absent: Jake Kornfeld, Joy Reap
Others Present: Ravi Venkataraman (Town Planner/Staff), Dan Noyes, Ashley Farr, Christy Witters, Sid Miller, Heidi Bormann, John Linn, Ashley Farr, Lee Baughman, Trish Healy, Brian Washburn, Ben Bush, David Healy

1. Welcome and troubleshooting

Chris Cole called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

2. Adjustments to the Agenda

Chris Granda requested a discussion of energy-related changes to the zoning regulations at an upcoming Planning Commission meeting. Cole suggested discussing this item further under other business along with future Planning Commission agenda items. Cole recommended discussing the CCRPC Essentials of Land Use Planning and Training with Jake Kornfeld.

3. Public Comment for non-agenda items

None.

4. Planning Commission Community Outreach: Commercial within the village areas (Railroad Street, Round Church Corners Complex, Goodwin-Baker Building)

Cole overviewed the topic and the purpose of the agenda item to the public. Ravi Venkataraman requested Cole that all attendees introduce themselves for the record. All attendees stated their respective names for the record. Cole deferred to Virginia Clarke to lead the discussion. Clarke overviewed the locations within the scope of discussion for this item, and the topics of discussion with the public: the overall uses within the Village Commercial District, and the allowance of housing within the Village Commercial District. Cole added regarding housing allowances an overview of housing allowances with consideration to commercial uses. in the Jolina Court District and the Village Downtown District. Clarke asked Sid Miller his needs for the Goodwin-Baker Building for the future. Miller said that currently the entire Goodwin-Baker Building is office space, but due to COVID, he has had discussions with tenants about the future of the office space. Miller said that he is permitted for restaurants and gymnasiums but has not found tenants that are interested in pursuing such uses. Miller said he is uncertain about the future, and said that the option to put in residential units could take the pressure off of him. Cole asked about the parking. Miller said that the building had parking for up to 75 cars. Clarke asked about the division of the building and the state of the building. Miller overviewed the units in the building per floor and said that the building is in good shape. Anand asked about Miller's consideration of combining residential and commercial uses. Miller said that others have approached him about putting in residential units in the building, that he was not interested in renting residential units, that he had cost considerations for renovating the building for residential use, and that he faced challenges with the Town about putting in residential units in the building when he first purchased the building. Anand asked Miller what he would ideally like the building to be. Miller said office spaces. Clarke said that the Goodwin-Baker Building could be part of the Residential/Commercial District so that residential uses could be incorporated. Cole said that in prior discussions, people were not interested in including rental housing, but that condominiums may lead to different conversations. Miller asked about the uses for the Residential Commercial District. Clarke summarized the proposed uses under consideration for the

Residential/Commercial District. David Healy overviewed the history of the building's use as an underwear factory, and said that as a resident in the neighborhood appreciated the current commercial use of the Goodwin-Baker Building. Trish Healy said she also appreciated the presence of the building in the neighborhood, and the current character of the neighborhood. Cole discussed the current shifting nature of white-collar work. Erin Farr asked about day care uses and educational facilities within the Goodwin-Baker Building. Clarke said that these uses would be considered Conditional Uses within the district. Clarke identified areas under consideration along Railroad Street and asked Dan Noyes about his intentions for the corridor. Noyes discussed the subdivision he created at the end of Railroad Street, past the Richmond Rescue building and his aim to create office space, warehouse space, light manufacturing and other commercial uses within the subdivision. Noyes said that his concern for his corridor pertains to easing permitting for commercial uses within his corridor and allowing more commercial uses for his corridor. Clarke asked about housing along his corridor and any conflict between the Railroad Street corridor and the Borden Street development. Noyes said there were some instances of conflict between the Railroad Street corridor and the Borden Street development. Heidi Bormann said that she has faced permitting issues with her tenants in the past and allowing more allowable uses would help her attract tenants. Cole said that changing uses is an issue if there are residents within the district and would not be as much of an issue if there are no residents in the district, and that easing permitting for commercial uses for Bormann's location would be practical. Bormann said that she would like to see her building as fully commercial. Cole concluded that based on past discussions and practices, the Village Commercial areas should not have housing units. Noyes said that existing commercial areas should be protected as commercial areas for the future. Anand said that certain commercial uses can be compatible with residential uses, certain commercial uses need to be separated from residential uses, also concluded the attendees' wants to separate uses by district. Bormann said that she and Noyes may be facing different issues with different needs compared to Miller. Clarke asked Bormann about residential uses. Bormann said that at the onset of this discussion, she would have liked to include residential uses, but now she does not, because residential uses would be incompatible. Mark Fausel asked Noyes about incorporating residential uses in his new subdivision. Noyes and Venkataraman clarified the borders of the current zoning districts and the location of Noyes's recent subdivision project. Fausel asked if allowances for residential uses in the subdivision location would benefit the town. Noyes said he currently is not interested in developing residential uses in that location, but may be interested in the future, due to the ongoing changing nature of real estate. Fausel asked if Noyes would like particular uses included in the district. Noyes said he would like warehousing uses included in the district. Clarke said that warehousing uses are on the proposed list of uses. Cole said that the commission is looking to encourage the development of housing in areas that are walkable to the rest of the village and outside the floodplain. Noyes said housing could be an option as a last resort. Venkataraman clarified details about Noyes's subdivision project, adding that currently, allowed commercial uses require DRB review for site plan review. Clarke said that that aspect could be reviewed and revised. Venkataraman said that for many uses in particular contexts, DRB review does not provide any necessary oversight above and beyond the Zoning Administrator's review. Cole agreed, adding that certain arcane practices and procedures will need to be revised. Anand asked if Noyes's intentions for commercial uses in his subdivision project could be compatible with residential uses on higher floors, akin to Jolina Court. Noyes said it could be possible. Clarke overviewed the commercial areas south of the Winooski River and topics of discussion. Brian Washburn said that residential uses would not be compatible with the commercial area and create traffic conflicts. John Linn concurred with Washburn, adding that reducing setbacks could allow for more parking. Clarke asked Linn about the proposed uses. Linn said that commercial uses shouldn't be lost with the zoning revision. Clarke agreed, adding that the commission will revise and combine definitions, and then present the proposal to the public when finished. Noyes asked the commission about shared parking. Clarke said that shared parking is under consideration. Cole said that shared parking is allowed in the Village Downtown District. Fausel asked about commercial uses on the lots north of the commercial area under discussion. Noyes said that commercial uses would be viable there. Ashley Farr said that commercial uses were something he had looked into and may be looked into further in the future. Cole said that considering the current discussion, any areas added to the commercial district would phase out small-scale residential uses. Farr said that that would be inconsistent with the current housing issues in town, and that he would like to see more flexibility and ease with permitting. Bormann said that financing properties with residential

and commercial uses in a district that does not allow residential uses is challenging, compared to financing properties with residential and commercial uses in a district that allows both residential and commercial uses. Clarke said that the current work is to plan for the next twenty years. Cole transitioned to the next agenda item, and thanked the public for their input.

5. Nomination of Zoning Administrator

Fausel was impressed with Osborne's resume and background. Cole asked how the hours would be split. Venkataraman said the hire would work 30 hours with Richmond and 10 hours with Huntington, and that this would be subject to voter approval of budget. Cole thanked Venkataraman for serving as the Zoning Administrator since mid-November along with his role as the Town Planner. Venkataraman gave a shout out to Taylor Newton, Senior Planner at CCRPC, for providing assistance as the DRB coordinator in the meantime.

Motion by Fausel, seconded by Brian Tellstone, to nominate Keith Osborne to serve as the Zoning Administrative Officer for a three-year term for the Town of Richmond. Voting: unanimous. Motion carried.

6. Other Business, Correspondence, and Adjournment

Caitlin Littlefield said she attended the essentials of land use planning and training and that it was very helpful. Venkataraman said that he has the recording, and can distribute the recording and the slides from the workshop.

Cole overviewed the schedule for future meetings, and said he expects the commission to be reviewing zoning drafts at the end of April. Cole said that after April, other items the commission would discuss would be the Gateway District, and short-term rental housing. Cole asked Granda if he would like to discuss energy codes after the end of April. Clarke suggested discussing the energy codes in sections. Granda said that he could bring in experts to discuss this item in detail. Cole said he would appreciate experts presenting on the subject. Venkataraman clarified details on zoning and the energy code. Granda said that at this point, he would not advocate for the adoption of stretch code, but would suggest ideas worth pursuing to meet energy goals.

Clarke suggested as a follow up to the wetlands discussions that the town should pursue putting together a surface waters inventory. Cole said that surface waters for the most part are the jurisdictions of other permitting agencies, including the Army Corps of Engineers and ANR. Venkataraman said that he hasn't encountered a surface water inventory in his experience in Vermont, and that planners in Vermont tend to rely on ANR maps. Cole said that surface waters are already heavily regulated by the state.

Cole recommended to Venkataraman to revisit the list of future planning topics in April for the benefit of the newer members.

Motion by Tellstone, seconded by Fausel to adjourn the meeting. Voting: unanimous. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner