

Richmond Planning Commission
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR October 6th, 2021

Members Present:	Lisa Miller, Dan Mullen, Virginia Clarke, Chris Granda, Joy Reap, Mark Fausel, Alison Anand,
Members Absent:	Jake Kornfeld, Chris Cole,
Others Present:	Ravi Venkataraman (Town Planner/Staff), MMCTV, Kayla Vaccaro, Christy Witters, Cathleen Gent, Gary Bressor, John Rankin, Trish Healy

1. Welcome and troubleshooting

Virginia Clarke called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

2. Public Comment for non-agenda items

None from the public. Clarke asked Venkataraman to introduce Kayla Vaccaro. Venkataraman introduced Vaccaro as the planning intern, adding that she is a student at University of Vermont focusing on natural resource management and that her project with the town is to do with conservation subdivision design.

3. Adjustments to the Agenda

None

4. Approval of Minutes

No comments from the Planning Commission. Clarke accepted the minutes as written.

5. Discussion on Zoning For Affordable Housing project

Clarke introduced the topic, overviewing the purpose and intent of the Housing Committee, the planning grant the town received, and the role of the consultant Brandy Saxton. Clarke noted that Saxton has reviewed the current zoning regulations and the previously discussed proposed zoning regulations based on the community outreach work. Clarke said that Saxton will be attending the October 20th meeting to provide more information about the project and address questions.

Venkataraman reviewed Saxton's scope of work and the status of her work. Venkataraman also overviewed the currently ongoing focus groups and interviews. Cathleen Gent asked if changes to the technical memo would occur based on feedback from the community meeting. Venkataraman said that since the technical memo is a draft, it could be, but he could not give a definite answer at this time. Clarke said that the technical memo is based on Saxton's planning knowledge and lists recommendations, adding that the Planning Commission and Selectboard are not obligated to adopt Saxton's recommendations in her technical memo.

Venkataraman reviewed the resident housing survey report, noting that the report does not include the

responses he has received in the mail after the online survey closed. Venkataraman said that the purpose of the survey was to get a sense of the character of the town. Venkataraman said that Saxton had the current zoning regulations, draft zoning regulations, and the draft housing needs assessment the Housing Committee has compiled at her disposal when drafting the survey. Chris Granda asked about data about heating costs. Venkataraman confirmed that it was not included as a question, and was considered inherent when discussing housing costs, as housing costs typically includes utility costs. Granda asked if we could discern trends by comparing survey responses from previous years. Venkataraman said he could look back at surveys done during the compilation of the Town Plan and any other surveys to discern possible trends, but that this analysis would be inexact because of different questions and different samples. Granda said he was curious about if sentiments have changed over time and to what degree. Gent said that one could obtain trends over time with census-type housing data from Vermont Housing Finance Agency. Venkataraman overviewed the data Vermont Housing Finance Agency has on their site. Dan Mullen asked if transportation data was collected as part of the survey. Venkataraman said that such questions were not asked in this survey and that the census may have transportation-related data, like commuting trends. Gent noted that confidence levels and margins of error does not apply to this type of survey and the presentation of the data appears distorted and could be improved upon to reflect the proportion of the sample size. Bressor identified the point about needing multi-unit housing in town, noted the survey work he and Gent did within the neighborhoods south of the Winooski River, and said that lumping together two-unit and four-unit housing together hides the difference between the two housing types. Alison Anand said she agreed with Gent that the survey responses were not reflective of the entire town based on the demographics of the respondents. Trish Healy said she is in favor of keeping the allowance for no more than two-unit dwellings in the Tilden-Baker neighborhood.

Venkataraman reviewed the nonresident survey report. Lisa Miller asked about repolling respondents to get a clearer sense of what people thought and simplify poll data. Venkataraman said that he would have to ask Saxton but does not see it as feasible within the timeframe. Clarke said that a nonresident survey was created because of employers trying to get a sense of housing issues for their employees. Clarke said she was unsure about the utility of the surveys and about how the data from the housing needs assessment are used. Gent said that the data from the housing needs assessment are to get a sense of the housing stock and demographics, and that typically a housing needs assessment is conducted before a technical review. Gent added that housing needs assessments do not necessarily lead to zoning changes. Christy Witters noted that it appeared that many of the respondents want to live in a more rural area with more space and amenities. Bressor said he encouraged the commission to look outside the village to solve housing issues.

Clarke reviewed the technical memo, highlighting concerns about how the proposed zoning is more restrictive than the current zoning regarding multifamily housing, unenforceable design standards, dimensional standards, and density. Clarke reviewed the Neighborhood Development Area designation standards Saxton listed. Anand identified traffic concerns that could come with increasing density allowances. Granda asked about the lack of correlation between traffic impacts and density in the village and instead a correlation between traffic impacts and increases in population in nearby towns, such as Huntington. Anand asked about the availability of fully walkable neighborhoods in town. Mullen noted that the availability of mass transit would be a factor in relieving traffic impacts within town. Clarke said that these changes in density in the regulations would affect the town over the course of a long period of time and that reducing vehicle usage should be encouraged for climate change reasons. Witters asked about the Neighborhood Development Area designations and its benefits. Clarke raised the possibility of including the Gateway in a Neighborhood Development Area designation. Venkataraman said that the primary benefits for the Neighborhood Development Area designation are reduced state permitting fees

and Act 250 exemptions for affordable housing developments, that typically the location of the Neighborhood Development Area overlaps with the location of Village Center or Downtown designation, and that designating areas outside of the Village Center does not seem doable due to the distance from the edge of the Village Center and the Gateway and developable areas south of the Winooski River. Venkataraman said that he has typically seen Neighborhood Development Areas encompass a particular development or particular parcels, with exception to Burlington. Witters added that therefore the Creamery parcel could have taken advantage of the Neighborhood Development Area program. Venkataraman called an infill development project that incorporates income-restricted housing units as the ideal Neighborhood Development Area project. Venkataraman added that he couldn't imagine the best location for the Neighborhood Development Area designation in town, unless the town wanted to include the entirety of the village in a Neighborhood Development Area so that the entire village could benefit from the program. Anand raised concerns about the capacity of the schools. Gent called attention to other infrastructure, such as sidewalks, water, and sewer. Gent asked if the commission would be able to solicit enough feedback based on Saxton's scope of work, and noted that possibilities for other parts of town should be considered. Clarke said that Saxton's work is separate from the timeline for the commission's possible adoption of Saxton's recommendations, and that further discussions with the committee and the Housing Committee about Saxton's recommendations are needed.

6. Discussion on Wetlands

Clarke reviewed the reason for addressing the wetlands section of the regulations, and the proposed regulations as a whole. Clarke noted that past meetings indicated that the primary issue with wetlands had to do with the desire to create infrastructure crossings across wetlands, and that the proposed zoning creates allowances for crossings. Clarke defined Class II wetlands per Agency of Natural Resources, and concerns about regulating Class III wetlands. Clarke identified concerns with creating a regulatory wetlands map which would identify wetlands regardless of classification that the town wanted to protect. Anand said that the proposed regulations look to be an improvement from the current regulations. Anand asked if other municipalities have similar regulations. Clarke said that pieces were lifted other towns and from the state wetland rules, and that other towns have DRBs or Conservation Commissions weigh in on development within wetlands. Miller asked about offsets for mitigation. Clarke said that Agency of Natural Resources have an off-site mitigation program through its permitting process. Clarke added that the draft language will be reviewed by the Conservation Commission.

Bressor asked if the commission has check with the state for alignment with the state wetland rules, for clarity about public paths, and about restrictions on lawns. Clarke said that the reference to "public" before paths could be removed, that lawns affect drainage into wetlands, and that the state has restrictions on lawns within wetland buffers. Bressor said that the regulations could clarify that applicants have to meet local and state requirements for land development. Mark Fausel asked if the lawns reference is a state regulation. Clarke said yes, and that buffers are supposed to be naturally vegetated. Clarke asked Fausel for his opinion about removing reference to "public" regarding paths. Fausel agrees that the term "public" should be removed. Fausel asked for more clarity about regulating paths, trails and sidewalks. Venkataraman said that the regulations for crossings are specifically in regards to pavement, gravel or impervious surface above ground and underground infrastructure, and that this is in line with state permitting. Fausel suggested clarifying that the allowances for path, trails and sidewalks specify that it is for the installation of impervious surface on a wetland or wetland buffer. Gent recommended that the allowed paths be at grade preventing paths from being built up higher, and that state permits are required before issuance of local permits. Clarke said that the town cannot require the

provision of state permits in order to release local permits and agreed that applicants should be educated about the process. Venkataraman pointed out the proposed requirement of a project review sheet which would inform the state of possible land development within wetlands.

Miller asked about the process for updating the town's wetlands maps. Clarke identified issues with mapping wetlands on private properties and due to the seasons, and pointed out the wetlands advisory layer.

7. Other Business, Correspondence, and Adjournment

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

Clarke said that Saxton will be attending the next meeting to discuss the Zoning for Affordable Housing project, and that wetlands and nonconforming structures draft regulations as well as the coordinating committee will be on the next meeting agenda.

Voting: unanimous. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner