

May 24, 2023

To Richmond Planning Commission and Keith Osborne, Director of Planning and Zoning

One of the agenda items for the Planning Commission meeting on May 17<sup>th</sup> involved the potential effect of S.100 on the village residential neighborhoods. I attended that meeting and have since been considering further the provisions of S.100, which apply to the two village residential areas being discussed by the Planning Commission for potential zoning changes because they are served by municipal sewer and water.

For instance, the law states that up to five dwelling units are allowed per acre. Clarification is needed to confirm that the number of dwelling units is prorated based on the lot size, meaning that one dwelling unit will be allowed for each 1/5 acre. S. 100 also states we must allow up to four multi-family dwelling units as a permitted use. While the two provisions appear to be unrelated under the law, we want to be sure that we are not inadvertently combining them – S.100 allows for at least five dwelling units an acre and also allows up to four multi-family units as a permitted use. How these apply to existing small lots is another aspect to consider.

Making sure we handle the density and allowed uses carefully will make a significant difference in the both residential village areas, but especially in the south village residential neighborhood where current lot sizes are larger. Given the current draft minimum lot size of ½ acre in the PC-envisioned south residential village zone, we need to understand what the actual density will be on that size lot, let alone on smaller lots. It would be helpful to have some type of visualization of S. 100 provisions and all zoning concepts being discussed in Richmond to get a true sense of the land use impact.

Those are just two considerations, and there will be others! Making assumptions about the requirements and standards associated with S. 100 without the benefit of direct guidance from state planning staff is ill-advised. It will be helpful to hear Richmond's representative to the Vermont House, Jana Brown, discuss S. 100 whenever Jana is available to attend a Planning Commission meeting. However, Jana may not be sufficiently familiar with the specific requirements in the new law, or how those interact with each other. For an explanation of the technical aspects of the law, the staff from the Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development will provide a summary of S. 100 as they do for every planning-related law. That summary is key to address the technical aspects of S.100, which I think is critical for the Richmond Planning Commission to have before making any new proposals for the public to consider. My understanding is that the S. 100 summary and associated information will be provided after the law is enacted.

S.100 also specifies that we could not require more than one parking space per dwelling unit. If there is not enough parking is provided on the lot itself to accommodate the number of vehicles actually used by residents, where will people park in our neighborhoods? There is no on-street parking in either area of the village and the streets cannot accommodate it. Providing sidewalks in our neighborhoods will be essential, not simply "whenever feasible" as the latest draft states in the *District Specific Development Standards* section.

As I said at the Planning Commission meeting, I believe the Planning Commission should involve the residents in the north and south village neighborhoods now as the zoning is being discussed, well before a final draft is even contemplated. If the Planning Commission waits until a final draft is ready, those involved in deliberations may already be wedded to the zoning specs, and less likely to make changes suggested by the public to truly meet the neighborhood needs. We all recognize the need to bring new housing opportunities, however, it must balance within existing neighborhoods. To that end, my suggestion is that the town reach out and both inform and invite residents and property owners to attend any Planning Commission meetings when the zoning is being discussed. In fact, hearing from residents once the technical aspects of S.100 are better understood is key to moving forward in a productive way.

I appreciate the Planning Commission's substantial effort and commitment while undertaking the zoning re-write. I urge you to fully understand the technical aspects of S. 100 before moving ahead substantially with the zoning options for the north and south residential areas. It is better to be informed at the outset rather than propose zoning that does not comply with S.100 or that generates greater density beyond state requirements and that harms village residential neighborhoods.

In previous Planning Commission meetings and even this week in a televised interview with a planner in a different town, the general assumption given is that it takes fifteen years for there to be wholesale changes to neighborhoods as a rationale for people not to worry about the types of denser development now allowed by S.100 or in local bylaws. In reality, once the zoning is enacted, a property owner can immediately propose a project that includes any and all of the new standards, so it is critical to get the zoning right!

People love the scale of Richmond's village, and it is completely appropriate for the Town to incorporate the provisions of S.100 and adopt standards which enable the village to remain a vibrant, small village (and not live like Burlington, Williston or other major regional centers).

Thank you for considering my thoughts and ideas. Unfortunately, I will be unavailable for the next Planning Commission meeting, and do appreciate my thoughts being shared with the Planning Commission via the meeting packet or during the meeting itself.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely, Cathleen Gent