

4.16.25 meeting minutes PC

This meeting was fully remote.

Members present: Alison Anand, Ian Bender, Virginia Clarke, Mark Fausel, Chris Granda,
Bryton Moeller

Members absent: Rebecca Connell

Others present: Keith Osborne (Director of Planning and Zoning), Erin Wagg (MMCTV), Mike
Chiarella

1. Welcome

Clarke welcomed members and guests.

2. Review agenda

As there were no adjustments to the agenda, the meeting proceeded with the posted agenda.

3. Public comment on non-agenda items

There was none.

4. Review minutes of 4.2.25 meeting

As there were no additions, corrections or comments, the minutes were accepted into the record as written.

5. Richmond Rescue inquiry

Michael Chiarella from Richmond Rescue recounted the history and expansion of Richmond Rescue since its founding in 1971. He recounted that after the renovations in 2019 Rescue had maxed out its 50% lot coverage for building and parking. Rescue has grown from 500 to 1500 calls per year from Richmond and surrounding towns, and now needs more space, Chiarella is wondering if the lot coverage for the district could be expanded, at least to 60%. He said they liked their downtown location, despite its various limitations, which include close proximity to the floodplain, but they have also been looking at other sites for expanding within the next 5 – 10 years. Granda felt that the floodplain was an issue, as the new maps would likely show an enlarged area, and he felt that the future of Richmond Rescue should be a stand-alone topic on the Planning Commission (PC)'s longer-term agenda. Osborne said that it is possible to build in the floodplain, if buildings are elevated and floodproofed, but that it would increase the expense. He also mentioned the problem of Railroad St becoming impassible with flooding. Chiarella said he had no other concerns about growth or other changes to the neighborhood. He volunteered to be a contact for Town Plan work on emergency planning and resilience. Granda added that a West Main St location for Rescue might encourage the extension of water and sewer lines out into the Gateway.

6. Report on 4.7.25 Selectboard (SB) meeting for PC items

Osborne reported that the Flood Hazard Overlay District proposals from the OC were approved with no changes, and will go live on 4/29. The Jolina Court and associated amendments will have their SB public hearing on May 5,th and Brendan O'Reilly is likely to attend for Buttermilk. Clarke said that the PC and the SB understand that the proposal is not Buttermilk's preferred outcome of the rewrite process.

7. Discussion of Tier 1B, CCRPC's Future Land Use (FLU) map, and new Richmond housing targets

Clarke said she had presented the 1B idea to David Sunshine, Chair of the DRB, who relayed it to the other members, but that there was no response as yet about how they feel about it. She said that the Jolina Court parcel was one of the few that would be large enough for 1B's provisions to apply to (i.e. to have 50 dwelling units), but reminded the commissioners that the Creamery is a special case because it is already under an Act 250 permit, so Act 250 oversight would remain, but it is also under the "Interim 1B" provision, so they might not even have to get an amendment to their existing permit if they build by 1/1/27. Osborne reminded the PC that we need to make a recommendation to the SB about whether to "opt-in" or "opt-out" of the Tier 1B designation.

A discussion then followed about whether there were any other lots in the Water and Sewer District that would be large enough to put a 50-unit development, and whether the undevelopable lots in the CCRPC's "Planned Growth Area" should be included in this district as they are not really planned for growth. Clarke said that any areas that meet the criteria for the CCRPC's new "framework" of districts will likely be mapped in those districts, but that actual "growth" will be determined by our zoning. The Farr Farm parcel was discussed, with its potential natural resource concerns if it is ever developed. Osborne mentioned that Act 250 has greater resources for scrutinizing projects, and that the state would be paying instead of the Town if engineers or other specialists were needed for oversight. Moeller ascertained that the "carrot" of the 1B exemption would be saving developers time and money, thus facilitating more development, but that we might want the Act 250 oversight. Bender said he might consider opting in.

Osborne said that CCRPC's final date for "opting-in" isn't clear, but it's sometime this spring. He also said he felt that perhaps this is a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't quite fit Richmond. Granda concurred with that. Fausel said he is not in favor of "opting-in," as the onus would then be on us for the oversight. Moeller said they thought they could go along with that. Guest Chelsye Brooks, also a new Town Plan 2026 Steering Committee member, commented that municipal water and sewer is not actually required, only that soils are capable of accommodating a community wastewater system, which could potentially affect other areas besides the village. Clarke said that the PC seemed to be favoring not "opting-in" and that she and Osborne would draft that for a SB recommendation with rationale, and bring it to the PC to comment on at our next meeting.

Osborne then reported on the CCRPC new housing targets. The low, medium and high end targets for Richmond are 8, 16 and 24 dwelling units per year. Clarke said these were

arrived at by the CCRPC using a formula they had developed to disaggregate the regional goal. Richmond is designated a “suburban” town and has certain mid-sized characteristics, and so these housing goals are provided for us to aim for, in order to help alleviate the housing crisis. Osborne confirmed that there are no “teeth” or requirements that we actually meet these targets, but felt that at least the low targets might be attainable based on our historical record, especially since we are currently seeing more ADU’s being developed, which count towards the goal. Osborne also pointed out that our zoning is “friendly” towards housing, especially in the village areas, and not the kind of barrier towards housing development in our core areas that other towns might have. Clarke said that, in the absence of further comments about the housing targets, she and Osborne would draft a reply stating that we had no issue with these numbers. Granda added that we also have no real strategy to meet the targets.

In starting the Future Land Use mapping discussion, Fausel questioned whether it matters what we want on the map if CCRPC is just using their own criteria to create this map, and if there are no negative consequences for us with their choices. Clarke suggested that we would want the regional map to represent, in general, what Richmond wants, and that this map might be put to uses that we would care about in the future. Osborne mentioned the “road rule” possibility; Moeller mentioned alterations in the current use program, and Clarke mentioned “forest blocks” as items that might be regulated differently in different districts, so we should have our needs represented. Clarke added that we have looked at the village areas in quite a bit of detail, and maybe we should now look at the outlying areas as well. She suggested that she and Osborne make an attempt to bring a draft to the PC of concerns that we might have with the proposed framework so we can try to make the map accurate.

8. Debrief on 4.15.25 Town Plan 2026 Steering Committee meeting

Chelsye Brooks provided a report on the meeting. She said information management and data gathering was discussed, with Andrew Powers taking a lead on that. Jason Osterman will be working on some Front Porch Forum posts to get the word out about this project. Clarke would continue to send out letters to groups, and Brooks would look into what statutes need to be incorporated. Bender will help gather contacts. Osborne’s proposed charette event was discussed, as was Anand’s proposed pool party. Bender added to the report by saying that the committee would try to strike a balance between using the expertise of people in town, but also encouraging other non-experts to participate in the process as well and valuing their input. He said the committee would try really hard to make sure people are aware that this is happening, with early and often outreach. Next meeting will be April 30th and then the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month.

9. Committee prioritization of “other” work

Clarke said that the Chiarella inquiry might fit in with a review of the Village Commercial district. Osborne mentioned that correcting “technical fixes” and developing stormwater regulations were his interests. Clarke mentioned that incorporating Act 47/181 changes into the Village Residential/Commercial district might be fairly quick and would be less

confusing for applicants. Osborne also suggested finishing the Master Development Plan revisions by working on the Subdivision regs and the PUD section. As there were no further comments about what our next priority should be, Clarke suggested that she and Osborne just prepare one of these pending topics and bring it to the commission for review.

10. Adjourn

As there was no further discussion, Granda moved to adjourn, seconded by Moeller. There were no objections, so Clarke adjourned the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Minutes submitted by Virginia Clarke