

5.21.25 meeting minutes PC

This meeting was conducted remotely via Zoo

Members present: Ian Bender, Virginia Clarke, Rebecca Connell, Mark Fausel, Chris Granda, Bryton Moeller

Members absent: Alison Anand

Others present: Keith Osborne (Director of Planning and Zoning), Tom Astle (MMCTV)

1. Welcome

Clarke opened the meeting at 7:05 pm after a quorum was reached and welcomed members and others.

2. and 3. Review agenda and public comment on non-agenda items

As there were no suggested alterations, the meeting proceeded with the posted agenda. There was no public comment.

4. Review minutes of 5.7.25 meeting

As there were no modifications to the minutes, they were accepted into the record as written.

5. Approve or adjust document for Selectboard with a revision of Section 5.12 that will allow for residential use in the “back” ¾ of the ground floor of the Creamery building 2 on Jolina Court

Clarke read the suggested language (see “meeting materials”). There was discussion about whether building 1 should be identified by name or parcel number so that the other building in the Jolina Court Zoning District, the Richmond Community Kitchen, would not be affected, and whether applying this to the Creamery parcel alone would be considered “spot zoning.” To level the playing field for both parcels in the district, the Commission decided to act on Fausel’s suggestion to revise the proposed 5.12.2(g) to refer to a percentage of the floor space rather than a number of square feet. Osborne said he would make sure the % would approximately equal the existing Bridge-St-facing unit of building 1. Bender then made a motion, seconded by Granda, to approve the language to be amended by Osborne with a % instead of the 900 sf, and send it back to the Selectboard (SB) for their 6.2.25 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

6. Discuss scenarios that may inform the discussion about the Creamery on Jolina Court’s residential density, which the PC will take up after the SB provides further direction at their 6.2.25 meeting; including alternative access and outreach

Clarke reviewed her impressions of the SB’s 5.5.25 meeting where the residential density issue was discussed. Fausel, Granda and Bender also attended this meeting. She felt that in general the Selectboard was persuaded by the pro-housing voices at the meeting, and so wanted more units allowed than the current 31; that they somewhat like the residential bonus idea, and that they might favor an additional floor being allowed. The SB continued

their public hearing until 6.2.25 at which point they planned to revisit the density issue and most likely refer the proposed amendments back to the Planning Commission (PC) for changes. Clarke reviewed some possible scenarios using the PC's previous work and the tangential issues of Tier 1B opt-in and increased building height. Fausel felt we should take more time with this and have a deeper community discussion about the density and height issues. Osborne thought that if the SB decided on a specific way they wanted the PC to revise the proposed density requirement, they would likely continue the hearing until a specified date to get a response from the PC. Granda felt that this process has gone on long enough, and now it is the SB's job to make a decision and seek further input only if they think that is necessary. Grand said we should move on this when possible to avoid further delays in their construction schedule if possible, even though the main delay currently is high interest rates. Clarke said she thought Buttermilk would need to have the zoning finalized before seeking financing for the project.

There was further discussion about outreach by the PC concerning the 6.2.25 SB hearing date. Clarke emphasized that the SB had not yet given us instructions, so we shouldn't use any specific numbers for a potential density increase. Fausel and Bender felt that the potential for a large increase should be mentioned specifically. Granda reminded the PC that the SB could even decide not to increase our suggested density, so specific numbers should not be mentioned. Clarke said she would put out a FPF post next week inviting folks to come and weigh in on the density issue, and asked Fausel not to put in any specific numbers if he posted because the only numbers we know for sure are the ones the PC proposed to the SB. Fausel said he might post as a private citizen.

Osborne mentioned that the question of putting a road in through the FEMA buyout sites between the Town Center and the river has not been completely resolved, but it seems unlikely to be allowed. He also said that a traffic study through the CCRPC's UPWP could be done (grant funded) next summer if we applied for it in January 2026, and that the study would meet the criteria for this grant program. Clarke said that to do a study before then would be at the town's expense.

7. Discuss Tier 1B non-opt-in recommendation to be sent to SB

Clarke reviewed the letter that Osborne had prepared to reflect the PC's decision to recommend not opting-in to the Tier 1B designation for CCRPC's new mapping system. The points made included that the pros of opting-in include reducing time and costs for developers thus potentially encouraging more housing. There may also be some granting or other cost-saving opportunities available when the program is fully developed. The cons include requiring that the town assume all responsibility for assessing Act 250 compliance including any studies that might need to be done. Moeller expressed some confusion about the wording of the "cons" section of the letter, and suggested that the letter should emphasize the fact that we just felt it would be too challenging for us to perform a project review that sufficiently protected the environment. There was further discussion about the fact that Buttermilk will likely be lobbying for the Opt-In position, as will Taylor Newton from CCRPC and the Richmond Housing Committee. Clarke asked the PC if they wished to

continue to recommend the “Non-Opt-In” position. There were no negative comments, so this was an implied “yes”. She said they would work on the letter to make it more clear what the PC’s actual difficulties are with the opting-in position.

8. Discuss report for the SB on a comparison of the new CCRPC FLU map with the Town’s FLU map

Clarke said that she and Osborne had submitted a brief recommendation to the SB, for their 5.19.25 meeting, which looked at the suggestions tentatively made by the Housing Committee to change the designation of a couple of parcels. These changes seemed sound from a planning perspective, and even though the SB wanted recommendations by the deadline of May 19th, we told Charlie Baker that there would be more information coming from various Richmond working groups on the mapping question by the end of May. She then asked the commissioners if they had comments about changing the Farr Farm upland parcel from “rural ag and forestry” to “Transition” and the 160+ Thompson parcel behind the GMP solar array on Gov Peck Rd from “rural ag and forestry” to “rural general” due to its proximity to other developed parcels. She said that these comments join the comments of many other offered through the CCRPC survey, and that, while at this time the new map has no regulatory power, it does need to “align” with our town maps. As none of the commissioners had any comments on the maps, Clarke said the PC as a group would not make any further recommendations. She also said the CCRPC map was not wildly out of line with our 2018 Town Plan “fuzzy” FLU map.

9. Updates

Clarke discussed the draft sign-up sheet for staffing the various Town Plan 2026 events that were being planned by the Steering Committee, and said the PC members will be needed as personnel at these various activities. She said we should have more exact dates and times soon, and that PC members would need to sign up. Connell said she could sign up for the 4th of July tabling, for the workshop on 7/12 and for a Farmers Market table.

Bender reported on conversations he has had with local business people who confirmed that their employees could not live in Chittenden County, thus confirming the reality of the housing crisis. Clarke mentioned some of the ideas for the workshops on 7/10 and 7/12, which will include the housing issue as a current challenge, and said there will be more information on this soon.

10 Adjourn

As there were no further updates, Granda motioned to adjourn, seconded by Fausel. There were no objections, so Clarke adjourned the meeting at 8:55 pm.

Minutes submitted by Virginia Clarke