

7.16.25 meeting minutes PC1

Members present: Alison Anand, Ian Bender, Virginia Clarke, Rebecca Connell, Mark Fausel, Chris Granda

Members absent: *(none – one vacancy)*

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

1. Welcome

Clarke welcomed members of the Planning Commission and others and opened the meeting at 7:02 pm.

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

As no changes were suggested, the agenda continued as posted. There were no comments on non-agenda matters.

3. Review minutes of 7.2.25 meeting

As there were no corrections or additions to these minutes, they were accepted into the record as written. Clarke reminded the board that Bryton Moeller had resigned, so there is now a vacancy which we will advertise to fill soon. Osborne said we are currently looking for an assistant zoning administrator, as he (Osborne) is doing all the zoning work at the moment. Osborne said he is currently interviewing 3 candidates.

4. Discussion of Acts 47 and 181 in relation to the Village Commercial (VC) District

Clarke started the discussion by saying there were several reasons to look at the VC District: one reason was to finish up with the village district updates; a second was to align this district with the requirements of Act 47 and 181; and a third was to resolve an ambiguity that has existed in the PUD section regarding the VC district prior to any of our recent updates of that section (5.12).

Clarke described the 5.12 inconsistency: section 5.12.2(b) says that a Residential PUD shall be allowed in the VC district – that means a development which consists entirely of dwelling units. However, section 5.12.2(g) says that in the VC district, at least 50% of the gross building floor area must be in commercial use. So which is it. She also said that, confusingly, in the Purpose section of 5.12 it says that a Residential PUD is a type of PUD, so when the term “PUD” occurs throughout the RZR, one doesn’t really know if this does or doesn’t include Residential PUDs. Granda suggested that the problem wasn’t in the definition of “residential PUD” as a subset of “PUD” but in the language of Section 5.12.2.

Fausel suggested that we create 3 separate terms: “Residential PUD,” “Commercial PUD” and “Mixed (i.e. having both residential and commercial uses) PUD” and then state which one(s) are allowed in each zoning district. Osborne said he had not seen the term “Residential PUD” used in other zoning documents, and said that, in fact, the term “PUD” usually referred to a residential project, and that “Mixed PUDs” had at least some commercial uses.

Granda suggested that the term “PUD” should just refer to the relaxation of setback requirements and not be concerned about uses, which could just be specified within each zoning district. Osborne said that originally the main use of the term “PUD” was to put structures closer together in a project to allow for open space in some other part of the development. Clarke said that, here in Richmond, we have used the term “PUD” more broadly to allow exemptions from other parts of our district requirements, like having multi-use buildings, or several different uses on a lot, not just exemptions from setbacks. Connell said she liked the floor area %, but Clarke suggested that requiring a % of commercial use might limit needed housing. Granda mentioned that our experience with Jolina Court was that in the absence of demand for commercial space, it doesn’t make sense to require it, because it’s not useful if it remains vacant.

Further ideas discussed included continuing to require commercial on the ground floor in the Village Downtown District, but allowing a mix of any type in some other districts. Clarke reported that she had had an initial conversation with Richmond Hardware owner Dan Noyes about allowing residential uses in the Village Commercial district, and he had said he would think about whether he wanted to provide more flexibility to future owners of the Railroad St properties by allowing some residential uses there, even though in general he feels that residences and businesses like his don’t make good neighbors. Fausel suggested that some parts of the Village Commercial district might be more suitable than others for a Residential PUD, and that this would be decided on a case by case basis. Bender said he agreed with keeping some areas in commercial use only, in order to preserve a place where businesses could be developed.

Osborne said that if we put down in writing a new strategy for talking about PUDs, we should be able to know fairly quickly if it would work or not. Fausel suggested a matrix of what kind of PUD uses would be allowed in each zoning district. Clarke suggested that we also could think about the Round Church Corners Complex commercial area, and if we would want to combine it with the Railroad St commercial area into a single “Village Commercial” district. She also mentioned that if we allowed residential uses, we would have to incorporate Acts 47 and 181 into the district. Osborne reminded the commission that this work would be a lower priority for him and for the PC, as we had the Town Plan work which had a more urgent timeline.

5. Discussion of revising the Village Residential/Commercial Zoning District to align with Acts 47 and 181

Clarke started the discussion by saying that the PC had already put much of Acts 47 and 181 into this district, which is also served by municipal water and sewer, on account of the Brandy Saxton report for the Housing Committee, which had told us that many of these standards would be coming into law soon. We already allow duplexes, 3-4 unit buildings and multi-use buildings. Now we need to change the language of the Residential Density section and the minimum lot size to match the 1/5 acre lot size required by the statute, and to be consistent with the language of the other sections we have updated. We might also want to reduce the required lot frontage for the small lots. We also need to allow for the

greater building height required by the new “Affordable Housing Development” section (will be Section 6.16 if approved by the Selectboard). Osborne screen-shared a zoning map of the village area. This map can be found under “Ordinances and Policies” on the Town website. An additional change that Osborne recommended was requiring some sort of buffering between a new infill development and its neighbors, especially between lots with different types of uses, in order to try to reduce commercial / residential neighbor conflicts. Clarke also suggested that we put in more stormwater regulations as we are already seeing run-off issues where there is greater residential density. Osborne said he was reviewing possible new stormwater regulations beyond the current general requirement that developers show some kind of mitigation strategy, but that he was aware that such regulations increase the cost of building housing. Fausel wondered if CCRPC might help us with this. Clarke said she and Osborne would draft these few changes and the PC could review it again at a future meeting.

6. Other business and updates

Osborne mentioned that the main work at the moment was the Town Plan. Connell volunteered to work on it as Moeller has resigned from the Steering Committee, especially working on further outreach. Clarke said that the next step was to review the comments received from the outreach activities thus far and incorporate that information into updating 11 sections, with each of the 5 Steering Committee members working on 2 sections. The Housing Committee is working on the Housing Section. The goal is a first draft within the next 6 weeks. Fausel asked that there be continuity and compatibility with the previous Plan, and Bender confirmed that the instruction to the Steering Committee has been not to divert too much from the 2018 Plan. One difference would likely be that the 2018 visioning work would be omitted, and the Almanac format would be revised. There was further discussion about how the information from the Almanac could be used and updated. Osborne said he would send the PC all the agendas for the Steering Committee so they could see what was being discussed.

Clarke also reminded the commission that the Selectboard would be holding its final public hearing on the Jolina Court amendments on August 4th.

7. Adjourn

As there was no further discussion, Bender motioned to adjourn, seconded by Granda. As there were no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 8:57 pm. Granda, Bender, Anand and Fausel confirmed that they could attend the next PC meeting on August 6th.

Minutes submitted by Virginia Clarke