

12.3.25 meeting minutes PC

Meeting was held remotely.

Members present: Ian Bender, Chelsye Brooks, Virginia Clarke, Mark Fausel

Members absent: Alison Anand, Rebecca Connell (*one vacancy*)

Others present: Keith Osborne (Director of Planning and Zoning), Erin Wagg (MMCTV), Trevor Brooks, Marcy Harding, Karen Yaggy, Adam Wood

1. Welcome

Clarke welcomed members and guests and opened the meeting at 7:04.

2 and 3. Review agenda and non-agenda item public comment

Clarke reviewed the 2 main items on the agenda. After it was determined that Brooks planned to recuse herself from the discussion and voting on **item 5**, thus making a vote of approval impossible, this item was tabled until the next PC meeting on Dec. 17th. There was a short discussion about the new Town Plan public comment period that would be open until 12/5, discussed by the Steering Committee (TPSC) on 12/10 and, if appropriate, incorporated into amendments for the Jan 5th SB hearing.

Guest Marcy Harding then brought up her non-agenda concerns, which revolved around the fact that she doesn't feel that people know what is happening with the Town Plan, specifically with the map (meaning the Future Land Use or FLU map), and that she doesn't feel that enough public discussions have taken place that have addressed the new map. She feels that the process by which the Richmond FLU map came to differ from the CCRPC map is not clear, and has not been followed by the public. She asked if a methodology had been used consistently throughout the town. She mentioned that there were some details that seemed incorrect to her. She suggested that Richmond use the CCRPC version of the FLU map and that we wait until the Land Use Review Board (LURB, i.e. the new Act 250 board) has finalized its rulemaking about Tier 3 land, where there may be enhanced Act 250 oversight. This will happen sometime in 2026. Clarke said that the Tier 3 decisions would be made by the LURB, and were not dependent on our map, except that the important natural features that the LURB is trying to protect with Tier 3 may be the same as the natural features we feel are important enough to be designated Rural Conservation.

Bender said that the PC has had conversations about the FLU map, and it was clear that the FLU map is not a zoning map, and regulations will only follow if and when the PC revises our zoning using the FLU map as advisory. Clarke said that if/when the PC takes up revising our large Agricultural/Residential zoning district, which includes the whole of the CCRPC teal and green areas, there will be many discussions and public hearings about it. Harding said she was concerned about the fairness of the process of developing the map. She said she feels that there may be Act 250 implications for land in the new Rural Conservation district that people don't know about. Brooks said that it had been really difficult for the Steering Committee to get people to be interested in the Town Plan process given all the

outreach work that was done, and she wondered it would be any different if the decision was postponed.

Guest Karen Yappy then presented her comments. She first said that the FLU map was hard to find, and she encouraged the PC to add the map into the Plan in the FLU section or attach a link to it. She also suggested that we show what lands are already under conservation easements, and also describe how we have used Conservation Reserve money. She continued that there seemed to be a large amount of conserved land which might interfere with necessary housing construction, and that she didn't see how infill in the Village would be able to meet the housing needs. She was concerned that the 3 rural designations were promoting low density housing. Clarke mentioned that the 3 rural designations had definitions/purposes that were assigned to them by the legislature, through Act 181 by way of CCRPC, but that the exact meaning of terms like "lower density" for Richmond would be up to the Richmond Planning Commission. An example would be clustered housing in the rural areas, which would still have an overall "lower density" (dwelling units per acre) but the houses might be relatively close together, appearing to have a higher density. Yaggy said she was concerned that the "lower density" terminology in the FLU section might narrow down the ability to provide more housing, and she really wanted to ensure that the language allowed residential building beyond the Village. Clarke said she understood these concerns, but also that while Richmond doesn't actually have a lot of flat land that is easy to build on, the goal is to find those places, like the Sadler Meadow development that Yaggy mentioned, that are suitable for building and allow residences to be built there.

Harding suggested a beige/yellow strip of consistent width along all the roadways to make building and administration easier in the Rural General designation. Clarke thought this might miss the nuance of the landscape. Yaggy agreed with Harding that the map seemed very spotty, and not easy to administer zoning for. Osborne said that zoning would be administered through the Zoning map, not the FLU map, so these confusions wouldn't apply. He added that there would be lots of public discussion before the zoning map was changed, and that there was not necessarily a single way to base a zoning map on the FLU map.

Fausel concurred that until our zoning regulations actually change, this FLU map has no teeth to regulate development, and the PC has so many goals to work on, that such zoning changes would take some time to be effected. He also thought that Yaggy's idea of having the parcels that were actually under conservation easements highlighted, or on a separate map would be useful, and he also thought we should be promoting lower or middle income housing. He recommended moving forward on the Town Plan, so that these other issues could be considered. Guest Adam Wood, a Selectboard member, said he thought there were some exciting options for clustered housing to reduce infrastructure and stormwater costs, and that this kind of strategy could both preserve the rural character of the town, while also encouraging growth.

Marcy Harding reiterated her concern that the FLU map is regulatory in the Act 250 sense, and any increase in Act 250 oversight may discourage housing. Clarke responded that the LURB is aware that we need housing, but also that we need to preserve natural resources, which is why the compromise of Act 181 came about. Brooks added that the definition of Rural Conservation is not “areas that cannot be developed,” but just areas that need more careful consideration if developed. Clarke added that she thought this map was a step forward for Richmond, as it’s hard to think about protecting our natural resources without knowing where they are. Obviously, we need to balance this with the housing question, but that will be the task of the PC, to figure out the best compromise. Land that is not very easy to build on is expensive to build on, so the affordability question come in as well.

Clarke also said she could put out some more Front Porch Forum posts about the maps now being available to look at either online or in the planning office, and that in the final draft of the Plan the maps will be with their sections. Osborne added that all the maps could be reached on the PC page or the Steering Committee page by the “mapping link,” but that because the FLU map seemed to be of most interest, he could put in a separate link just for that map. Yaggy suggested posting a copy of the FLU map in the cabinet outside the Town offices. Clarke said it would be helpful to know what it is you are looking at, so good to look at the information in the FLU section of the proposed Plan (pp 41-48) for context. Clarke said they could look at the posting idea, as well as FPF posts with a direct link to the maps. Osborne said he was finding a general lack of public engagement in the current Town Plan process,

Harding thanked the PC for allowing her so much time to air her concerns, and Fausel encouraged her to bring specific concerns to the PC anytime, especially when zoning changes were being considered, so the public could be made aware of them.

4. Review minutes of 10.15.25 and 11.19.25 meetings.

As there were no changes or additions to these minutes, they were accepted into the record as written.

(5. tabled until 12/17)

(6. tabled indefinitely)

7. Other business

Clarke agreed to write a couple of FPF posts about the FLU map.

8. Adjourn

As there as no further discussion, Bender motioned to adjourn, seconded by Fausel. As there was no objection, Clarke adjourned the meeting at 8:42 pm, and confirmed the next PC meeting for 12/17/25.

Minutes submitted by Virginia Clarke

