

Richmond Planning Commission  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FOR September 7, 2022

Members Present:	Virginia Clarke, Lisa Miller, Mark Fausel, Joy Reap, Chris Granda, Dan Mullen, Alison Anand,
Members Absent:	Chris Cole,
Others Present:	Ravi Venkataraman (Town Planner/Staff), Erin Wagg (MMCTV)

**1. Welcome and troubleshooting**

Virginia Clarke called the meeting to order at 7:06pm.

**2. Review of the agenda and adjustments to the agenda**

Clarke reviewed the meeting agenda.

**3. Public Comment for non-agenda items**

None

**4. Approval of Minutes**

Clarke identified two typos in the minutes. Ravi Venkataraman corrected the typos accordingly.

**5. Finalize and vote on the Village Residential/Commercial District and Gateway Residential/Commercial District**

Clarke overviewed the rationale for the proposed changes to the districts: to encourage the development of more housing, to align the districts with the current town plan, to make the document more readable, and to modernize the regulations.

Clarke reviewed the proposed changes to the Gateway Residential/Commercial District. Chris Granda asked about the appropriateness of references to plans in the proposed purpose section. Venkataraman said that he would recommend condensing the purpose statement, but that because purpose statements for the most part are nonregulatory and serve as a connection between the town plan and the zoning district regulations, plans referenced in the purpose statement would not have any effect on proposed land development. Granda suggested listing the number of curb cuts in the proposed regulations with the cap on curb cuts in the district. Clarke referred to the proposed language in the site design standards regarding curb cuts which explicitly limit the number of curb cuts to the amount in existence if and when the regulations go into effect.

Joy Reap asked for clarification on residential density allowances. Clarke went over the residential density allowance listed in square feet.

Granda asked about the definition of “transparency”. Venkataraman said that the proposed zoning regulations do not include a definition for transparency, and that if no definition is in the zoning regulations then the general dictionary definition is used. Venkataraman reviewed dictionary definitions of transparency. Granda asked why the term “transparency” is used instead of “windows”. Venkataraman said that the term “transparency” is what is used in other zoning regulations. Clarke asked Venkataraman if it would be problematic if the term “windows” is used. Venkataraman said that it would not be problematic if the Planning Commission would only like glass or glass-like windows to be considered. Alison Anand asked for the purpose of the transparency requirement. Clarke said that the purpose is to make the buildings human scale, and to make sure the buildings have attractive non-blank facades. Venkataraman presented a suggested revision: “A minimum 5 percent of the façade facing Route 2 shall have transparent, non-reflective windows”. Reap and Granda asked for the rationale for non-reflective windows. Venkataraman said that the point is to make sure the windows can be seen through, and don’t appear like blank walls. Granda said that such a restriction could prevent treated glass that could provide solar gains from being installed, and recommended removing “non-reflective”. Reap concurred.

Reap asked if the housing density limit could be clarified further to better explain that the amount of units allowed is pegged to the amount of land one has. Reap suggested “one dwelling unit per 5,000 SF of land”. Clarke asked Reap if a reference to the amount of units per acre is needed. Reap said that knowing the number of units per acre could be helpful. Miller noted that density is typically written as a quantity per area or volume, and that the current draft language is inverted. Clarke said that if the new proposed standardization of density is confusing for people, then a reference to the amount of units per acre should be included. Venkataraman showed the commission examples in zoning regulations in South Burlington and Hinesburg on how density is written. Reap said that South Burlington is a different context than Richmond. Venkataraman said that we can take some lessons from South Burlington, considering that in Richmond the lot sizes in the water/sewer service area are smaller, and that working with square feet would be easier with smaller lots. Reap and Clarke said they would be ok with including the approximation of the square footage amount in acres next to the density and lot size requirements. Mark Fausel concurred. Dan Mullen said that adding the approximate acreage guidance number could create ambiguity in the regulations, and having one number would reduce ambiguity. Fausel suggested adding the conversion in acres next to square footage figures. Venkataraman said that he agreed with Mullen that adding additional numbers would create ambiguity, and that the commission should choose whether it wants to express lot size and density in acres or square feet. Clarke recommended keeping the numbers in square feet. Fausel concurred.

Reap noted that hotel uses are not included in the list of conditional uses. Clarke said that hotel uses need to be included and that the exclusion must have been an oversight.

Reap suggested looking into rezoning the lot for sale along Route 2 to allow for needed residential development on a lot that may be connected to water and sewer. Clarke said that the rezoning of the lot would be beyond the scope of the current discussion. Fausel suggested placing that lot in a separate zoning district to further restrict development and to protect the viewscape.

Clarke asked the commission for additional questions and concerns regarding the proposed Gateway Residential/Commercial District. Granda asked why Clarke doesn’t recommend voting on the proposed Gateway Residential/Commercial District regulations now. Clarke noted that the tangential elements need to be discussed and voted on simultaneously. Venkataraman said that the commission could consider the proposed Village Residential/Commercial District at a later date, but considering that the

commission is close to finalizing those draft regulations, approving both districts and all the tangential amendments in one hearing would be efficient.

Clarke reviewed the proposed Village Residential/Commercial District regulations and the proposed zoning map.

Granda asked if the proposed regulations would preclude the development of a formula retail store. Clarke reviewed the proposed building design standards. Clarke raised the question of whether prohibiting national chains to be discriminatory in an area that allows retail uses. Granda said he raised the question because he anticipates the Selectboard and the public to ask similar questions during public hearings. Mullen questioned the claim that restricting formula retail stores would be discriminatory, and said that major cities have regulations in place to restrict those types of stores through design regulations. Venkataraman said that they cannot place restrictions based on particular brands as it would prohibit particular people from operating businesses, but that they can create use and size restrictions that would in effect prohibit retail operations that are similar in quality and nature to formula retail stores. Clarke talked about past considerations for historic design review districts and design review boards, and that in past conversations, they concluded that creating a design review board was not feasible. Clarke discussed the 2500-square-foot gross floor area restriction on commercial uses in the current district regulations. Granda said he was concerned about the possibilities if the ownership of Harrington's changed, and that he would be in favor of square footage limitations. Fausel concurred. Clarke asked Venkataraman about setting square footage limits. Venkataraman suggested a building footprint limitation over a gross floor area restriction because the latter could inhibit housing development. Clarke asked the commission for their thoughts on a 10,000 square foot building footprint limitation. Granda said that typical formula retail stores are 9,100 square feet on one acre of land, and suggested a limitation on retail operations to 5,000 square feet. Clarke asked for Venkataraman's opinion on such a limitation. Venkataraman said that this depends on what types of operations the commission wants to see on these corridors, whether it be another market or many small boutiques. Anand asked for clarification on why the commission wants to restrict Dollar-General-store-type operations. Granda noted how their operations typically circumvent local zoning regulations and how they impact local retail. Anand and Miller expressed the need to protect the character of the town as stated in the Town Plan. Granda overviewed links he sent in the chat regarding curbing the establishment of formula retail stores.

## **6. Finalize and vote on Tangential Amendments (Multifamily Dwelling Standards, Definitions, Site Plan Review, Multiple Uses on Single Lots, Parking)**

Clarke reviewed the proposed changes to regulations regarding multiple uses on lots and proposed changes to site plan review applicability. Clarke clarified that all conditional uses would be subject to site plan review standards, and multifamily dwelling uses would not be permitted uses town-wide with this proposed change.

Clarke reviewed the changes to the proposed multifamily housing development standards. Reap said that she will need to review the proposed multifamily housing development standards further. Miller asked for the types of guidance the state is providing to promote further development of housing. Venkataraman referred to the Enabling Better Places guide and the standards set in the state designation programs that they expect within water/sewer service areas in towns. Clarke asked the commission for additional comments and concerns on the proposed multifamily housing development standards. No members responded; Clarke said that based on the lack of responses, she is concluding that members are

willing to accept the draft multifamily housing development standards.

Clarke said that at this point, the commission is not ready to approve the draft amendments, and that she hopes the commission will be prepared to vote to set a public hearing on the proposed amendments. Fausel recommended finalizing the Gateway Residential/Commercial District draft regulations at least. Anand asked about voting on the Gateway Residential/Commercial District tonight. Clarke said that all of the tangential amendments will need to be finalized first. Fausel asked if the parking standards needed to be defined in order to vote on the Gateway Residential/Commercial District. Clarke asked Venkataraman about setting a public hearing date on the items that have been finalized and then setting a public hearing date on the unresolved items during the next Planning Commission meeting. Venkataraman said that that would be fine. Fausel expressed hesitation about bundling public hearings for the Village Residential/Commercial District amendments with the Gateway Residential/Commercial District amendments. Clarke recommended voting on public hearing dates during the next Planning Commission meeting.

## **7. Other Business, Correspondence, and Adjournment**

Motion by Anand, seconded by Miller, to adjourn the meeting. Voting: unanimous. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 9:23 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner