

12.17.25 meeting minutes PC

Meeting was conducted remotely.

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

Members absent: Alison Anand (*one vacancy*)

Others present: Keith Oborne (Director of Planning and Zoning), Dante DeNault (Acting Zoning Administrator), Tom Astle (MMCTV), Marcy Harding, Trevor Brooks

1. Welcome

Clarke welcomed members and guests and opened the meeting at 7:05 pm.

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

There were no changes to the agenda and no public comments on non-agenda items.

3. Review minutes of 12.3.25 meeting

As there were no corrections or additions to the 12.3.25 minutes, they were accepted into the record as written.

4. Recommendation from the PC to the SB to appoint Dante DeNault Zoning Administrative Officer and Keith Oborne Acting Zoning Administrator

Fausel made the appointment motion (as above), and this was seconded by Bender. Clarke then opened the floor for discussion on the motion. Oborne, the current Zoning Administrator, provided some background on DeNault, and stated that he thought De Nault was uniquely qualified and more than ready to step into this role after 3 months of mentoring. DeNault then offered to answer questions from the commissioners.

Fausel asked DeNault why he had come to Richmond and sought this position. DeNault recounted falling in love with central Vermont as an AmeriCorps VISTA member; following that with attending Vermont Law School and gaining a doctorate in law (JD) in order to pursue a career in environmental law, and particularly on water law. He added that he wanted to work with people on environmental issues, and that he felt the ZA position was really on his career path as it involves interpreting the laws that deal with land and people. DeNault said he would be in the office 4 days a week and working remotely on Thursdays. Fausel and DeNault then had a short discussion about storm water regulation, both in the rural areas and the urban areas, and DeNault agreed to help the Planning Commission with crafting new local stormwater regulations to fill in any gaps in statewide regulations.

Brooks then asked about collaboration between the ZA and the PC, as suggested by the *Vermont Zoning Administrators Handbook*. DeNault said he has been working with Oborne, and would like to have more communication with the PC in order to implement some changes to the zoning regs, but that so far he has been waiting for the PC to make contact with him. Clarke and Brooks agreed that more feedback from the DRB's actions would be

helpful in formulating and revising the zoning regulations. In answer to a question from Trevor Brooks, DeNault said he planned to use his skills in a governmental position so he had no plans to take the bar exam. As there was no further discussion, a vote was taken on the motion. The motion passed 5-0, and it will now be sent to the SB to make the two appointments official.

5. Review new Steering Committee recommendations for amendments to the draft Town Plan to be presented to the SB at their 1.5.26 public hearing

Clarke reviewed the reason for the additional amendments to the PC-approved draft, which was that the Steering Committee (TPSC) wanted to leave the public comment period open as long as possible knowing that many comments come in at the last moment. The TPSC put the new amendments together from the comments received prior to 12.5.25, and will present them with the draft at the SB hearing on 1.5.26. Clarke said the comments were mostly related to either equity or natural resources issues, and that the suggested amendments were not considered to change the meaning or concepts in the draft plan.

She then briefly reviewed the list of amendments :

- In Community Development – amendments adding emphasis to food security, including recommending a task force to study strategies supporting the connection between food access and farming – championed by Alexis Lathem
- In Education – several amendments supporting inclusivity and equity throughout this section by adding content to existing goals and actions – championed by the Richmond Racial Equity Committee
- In Transportation - addition of micro-transit model to Public Transit section
- In Utilities, Facilities and Public Safety - mention of Community Policing goals suggested to SB by Richmond Racial Equity
- New equity language supports goals of Act 154 (new equity legislation) and CCRPC
- In Natural resources –
 - for text of “Forests for the Future” – addition of explanatory language defining “forest block” and “highest priority” to clarify these terms
 - for discussion of Andrews Community Forest – revised paragraph to expand balance between recreation and conservation, removed negative language
 - retitled “Recreation” to “Outdoor Recreation” to better understand the relationship of recreation to natural resources
 - corrected Richmond Land Trust information and Conservation Reserve Fund information from those sources
 - new Nat Res action items that the Conservation Commission will champion concerning monitoring resources and public education about impacts to ecosystems
 - in the Appendix – additional information about new “Biofinder” mapping tool, which, as Oborne pointed out, is not regulatory but rather informational - this language may be somewhat changed at the next TPSC meeting on 12.29.25

Clarke said that the exact language of the amendments can be found in the meeting materials. She reiterated that these late amendments didn't change the meaning or concepts in the draft, but that the SB would have to decide if they altered the "extent" of the Plan and would thus delay the timeline by needing further PC review. At this time, there were no negative comments from the PC concerning the strategy or these amendments.

6. Discuss Future Land Use (FLU) map

Clarke reported that Marcy Harding had submitted comments about the proposed FLU map. These comments were not made into amendments by the TPSC as it was felt that the proposed map reflected the work done by the conservation folks to create a forward-looking map of future land uses. Clarke explained the methodology behind this map, starting with use of CCRPC's new FLU map, which consists mainly of current, rather than future, land uses, with the addition of natural resource overlays. She stated that it seemed to be a good idea to show where Richmond's natural resources are located so that we can plan development which will not destroy these resources. We wanted to give Harding a chance to present her counter-reasoning tonight.

Harding's main concern was that some properties in the Vermont Ag and Forestry Current Use Program (including her parcel), which were depicted as Rural Ag and Forestry on CCRPC's map, were now being shown as Rural Conservation on Richmond's proposed FLU map. She explained that she felt that this could cause difficulties in regard to future zoning regulations. She suggested that language from the Rural Ag and Forestry areas definition should also be included in the Rural Conservation areas definition (purpose); and also that some of the language in the Rural Conservation areas definition may not be compatible with managing forest lands including timber production. She also expressed her feeling that showing land with elevation over 900 feet, a number taken from the 2018 Town Plan, might somehow be restrictive.

Brooks joined the discussion by saying that agriculture and silviculture, as uses, cannot be regulated in any way by municipal zoning under state statute, so it makes no difference whether the land is in Rural Ag and Forestry or Rural Conservation from a local zoning revision point of view. She also said that forestry and agriculture have a series of required "acceptable management practices" mandated by the state, and that farming and forestry activities are not considered development. Harding then said that if Current Use parcels are going to be shown on the map in Rural Conservation, there should be an acknowledgement that ag and forestry activities are allowed in the Rural Conservation area.

Harding had further questions about the proposed map. She wondered why the Richmond map had nebulous blobs for the Rural General category, whereas the CCRPC map had more regular shapes. Clarke offered that CCRPC's map is parcel-based for the most part, and our map uses natural resource overlays that don't follow parcel borders in order to show where the natural resources are. She stated that this map is not a zoning map, so the nebulous blobs say nothing about what development is currently there, or about what

development constraints the PC might elect in future to place on the natural resource areas that occur on parcels. All this map is trying to show is the location of the natural resources, and the future PC will have to determine what significance that information has.

Brooks added that the beige blobs were a by-product of the overlaying of the different natural resource maps. Harding agreed that even the CCRPC map wasn't perfectly consistent with its tan (Rural General) shapes, but she thought that map preferable, even though our map had a more comprehensible methodology. She also pointed out that some towns were just using the CCRPC map for their town FLU map; and she made a second point, that the state now has two categories for forestry Current Us – the additional category being called Reserve Forest Land, which does not have any timber harvesting requirements. Harding thought that in the future this might be best depicted in the Rural Conservation category. She finished up by reiterating that the Current Use parcels should not be included in Rural Conservation. Clarke continued to make the point that we wish to understand where our natural resources are, and they do not necessarily follow parcel boundaries.

As this is not a zoning map, Clarke said, there will be a lot more discussion about any zoning regulations that may come from knowing where these resources are that the state wishes us to protect. Brooks added that the PC will consider lots of different information besides the FLU map when revising the regs. She also wondered if just changing the Current Use parcels to Rural Ag and Forestry would constitute a significant change. Clarke said this did change the concept somewhat of a map that just showed where the natural resources are, but that it would likely still meet CCRPC's criterion of compatibility. She suggested cross-referencing Current Use as allowable in both Rural Ag and Forestry and Rural Conservation. Fausel thought we should learn more about how timber harvesting is managed in state conservation lands, and if there is a conflict between logging and conservation. Clarke said we could discuss these issues some more, particularly on 12.29.26 when the TPSC meets again.

7. Other business

Oborne reported that he had applied for a UPWP (Unified Planning Work Program) grant from CCRPC to conduct a traffic study at the Bridge St / Jolina Court / Railroad St intersection, taking into account full build-out. CCRPC would manage the grant with Richmond's help, and the cost to the town would be minimal or none. The study would begin after July 1, 2026 and continue during the school year. He said this would help us to plan for the future as more development occurs.

8. Adjourn

Due to the hard deadline of 9 pm. Fausel motioned to adjourn, and Brooks seconded the motion. As there was no objection, Clarke adjourned the meeting at 8:59 pm.

Minutes submitted by Virginia Clarke