

**CITY OF VERGENNES
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, MAY 20, 2013**

Members Present: Shannon Haggett-Chair, Tim Cook, Rebecca Duffy, Jason Farrell, Morgan Kittredge, Alexandria McGuire, Stacy Raphael, Mike Winslow

Also Present: Mel Hawley, Zoning Administrator

Guests: Carol Jennings, Jim Sullivan, Scott Hardy

Shannon Haggett called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Mel Hawley informed the group that Jim Pease, from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, who was scheduled to attend the May meeting would instead attend the June meeting.

The Planning Commission heard from resident Carol Jennings. She stated that she is a resident of the senior housing center on Armory Lane and also owns a home on Short Street. She said that she has been trying to sell her home at 8 Short Street but that she had been told that it wasn't selling because the house is located in the Historic Neighborhood District.

Mel asked Ms. Jennings to clarify what she meant and what she was asking the Planning Commission to do. She responded by saying that she wants to sell her home so that it can be converted to apartments and that she was told this could not be done within the Historic Neighborhood District. She was asking the Planning Commission to consider recommending a change to the zoning regulations to allow this use in the district or to consider re-zoning the site of her home out of the HND and into a different district where the use would be allowed.

Mel pointed out that an accessory dwelling unit is allowed everywhere. He explained that this was where an owner-occupied one-family dwelling unit could contain a second dwelling under certain conditions. Ms. Jennings responded that none of her potential buyers wanted to live at the home and thus the idea of an accessory dwelling unit did not apply to her situation. Jason Farrell explained to Ms. Jennings that the designation of her property as HND did not change the situation from its former designation of Medium Density Residential as in neither case would the property comply with the minimum lot size requirements for a two-family dwelling. Shannon explained that the Planning Commission would need to discuss the request further. Ms. Jennings thanked the Planning Commission for hearing her request and left the meeting.

The Planning Commission heard from Jim Sullivan, Trustee of the Jeanne Jackman Trust, and Scott Hardy, a city business owner and Mr. Sullivan's associate. They asked that the Planning Commission potentially consider a recommended change in the zoning regulations to either allow

“Restaurant” as a conditional use in the Historic Neighborhood District, or to consider re-zoning the site held by the trust located at 15 North Maple Street out of the HND and into the Central Business District.

They explained that the building has been on the market since 2008 and they were seeking ways to make it attractive to a potential buyer and thought a “destination restaurant” might be a viable option. Jason Farrell asked about the traffic impact to surrounding residential streets. Scott discussed the possibility of a traffic study. Stacy Raphael asked if they had a buyer lined up or if they were only in the planning stages of this project. Scott responded that they were only in the planning stages.

Mike Winslow pointed out that a change in districts would mean that conditional uses that are now available in the HND would not be available to them in the Central Business District. Jim and Scott decided that they would firm up the direction of their plan prior to making a formal request to the Planning Commission for any recommended changes.

The minutes to the regular meeting of April 15, 2013 were reviewed. Mike moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Stacy with all voting in favor except Rebecca Duffy and Jason Farrell abstaining as they were not present at the April meeting.

The Planning Commission then had a lengthy discussion regarding requests to amend the current zoning and subdivision regulations. Alex McGuire raised concern that we may be falling into a trap of “spot-zoning” to correct perceived problems rather than correcting mistakes. Jason wondered if our time might be better spent pursuing our planned agenda for 2013 of exploring and executing policies in the 2009 municipal development plan that are not addressed by the new regulations – especially in light of the schedule to update the MDP in 2014. Everyone agreed that this was a better course. The Planning Commission agreed that letters would be sent to people awaiting decisions. Shannon and Mel will write and send letters to Carol Jennings and to Bill Houston.

Committee Updates:

Transportation: Shannon reminded everyone to attend the public forum on May 22, 2013 at the Vergennes Opera House at 7:00 PM to provide input on making Vergennes more pedestrian-friendly and bicycle-friendly – policies that fall under the Transportation Committee.

Education: Shannon reported that he had emailed Rebecca Coffey to determine the next steps but hadn’t yet heard back. He will continue to push this agenda with her.

Stormwater: Mel provided a copy of the current stormwater plan to Mike for his review.

Tree/Urban Forestry: Mike said that he wasn’t able to make much progress in his crowd-sourcing project. Tim Cook mentioned that the existing plan does make recommendations regarding appropriate tree species to be planted under power lines which was a question and concern that he had. He also recommended that any implementation of the plan should be split into the downtown section – which complements many of the recommendations in the

Middlebury College Study – and into the entry corridors of the city. Shannon suggested that Tim bring that idea up at the public forum so that it will get on the priority list that will be given to the City Council.

Under new business, Mike questioned whether or not the Planning Commission ought to consider recommending regulations governing private use of public lands, specifically the harvesting of fiddlehead ferns at Vergennes Falls. His concern was that without some kind of policy or ordinance in place, resources could be overharvested and ultimately used up. In lieu of the City having a Conservation Commission, this seemed to fall under the review of the Planning Commission. Jason, Mike and Stacy stated they would research and report back at a later date whether or not other municipalities had anything to cover this concern.

The meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mel Hawley, Clerk