

**CITY OF VERGENNES
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, MARCH 17, 2014**

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

Members Absent: Stacy Raphael

Also Present: Elise Schadler, UVM Extension; Leslie Hendricks, UVM; Mel Hawley, Zoning Administrator

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

Elise Schadler and Leslie Hendricks informed the Planning Commission about the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program. Funded in part by a grant from the USDA Forest Service, Vermont's Urban & Community Forestry Program (UCF) is designed to help communities plan, plant, and care for their community trees. Since the program's inception in 1991, the program has provided technical and financial assistance to over 150 Vermont communities and more than \$1,000,000 in competitive grants have been awarded to Vermont municipalities and volunteer organizations all over Vermont.

Elise stated that the UCF works closely with the Department of Environmental Conservation - particularly on green infrastructure and watershed/stormwater runoff issues. She said UCF became aware of the Vermont Watershed Grant application, submitted by The Lake Champlain Committee to help revamp the Tree Plan for Vergennes throughout the 2014 year and wanted to work with us.

UCF has received a multi-year grant from the USDA Forest Service to support 20 Vermont communities in moving their urban and community forestry programs forward in three specific ways by 2016:

- 1) By providing assistance in inventorying the public, town-owned trees in the community,
- 2) By working with the community to develop a management plan for the community's trees, and
- 3) By providing opportunities for town staff (including Public Works employees) and key volunteers to be trained in tree care best practices (or any other training needs identified by the town).

Within the past year UCF has worked with Essex Junction, Colchester, and Winooski to tackle the first grant objective (the inventory) and this past fall UCF enlisted a GIS student at UVM to

develop a list and map of other key Vermont communities based on total population, impervious surface cover, and our assessment of local capacity to participate.

At this point UCF is starting to reach out to communities included on that list (Bristol, Shelburne, Swanton, and Northfield have already signed on to start work this spring) to see if they would be interested in working with UCF through this initiative. Vergennes was one of the communities on that list and so, based also on the need to update the 1998 Vergennes Tree Plan as identified in our application for the Watershed Grant, UCF thought this might be an opportune time to approach Vergennes with this opportunity.

UCF will be working with the LANDS program, a conservation and stewardship internship program through UVM's Rubenstein School of Environment & Natural Resources, this summer and fall to conduct tree inventories using UCF's tree inventory system. The interns will develop an inventory report based on the work they do and then UCF will continue to work with each Town to develop a management plan and identify training needs.

This work would be free to the City of Vergennes and would augment any ongoing work related to the public trees in the community. Everyone present agreed that this would be a great opportunity to meet some of the Planning Commission's goals and objectives.

Mike asked Elise and Leslie questions regarding the data gathered during the inventory phase. They responded that the inventory captures species, diameter and condition, and that everything could be put into the i-Tree system. i-Tree is a software suite from the USDA Forest Service that provides urban forestry analysis and benefits assessment tools.

Mel also mentioned that the City will sometimes utilize street tree assistance from students enrolled in the Forestry Program at Job Corps. He suggested that it might be a resource for this project and for UCF overall. He said that Elise should contact Tony Staying to explore the idea more completely. Elise thought this was a good idea and would contact him. Leslie stated that she would draft a memorandum of understanding between UCF and Vergennes and asked to attend a future meeting to go over the next steps for the Vergennes project.

The minutes to the regular meeting of February 17, 2014 were reviewed. Mel noted that on page two, "Vermont Center for Rural Development" should be amended to read, "Vermont Council on Rural Development." Jason moved to approve the minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Rebecca with all voting in favor except for Mike who was not present at the February meeting.

Mel stated that in the State's Capital Bill, there is a proposed allocation of \$50,000 to hire a third party contractor to work with the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) and local organizations, which may include the Planning Commission in development of a master plan for State of Vermont Property within the City of Vergennes. This was mentioned during the City Meeting by Representative Diane Lanpher. There is concern that at some point the Federal budget won't be able to support the Job Corps Program at its current level and the Vermont center might be on the chopping block. With 125 jobs at stake along with the loss of lease payment to the State and more importantly, ongoing maintenance of the buildings and property, there is a desire to have a master plan. If this remains in the Capital Bill we will have further discussion.

The Planning Commission held a brief discussion of recent Vermont Supreme Court rulings in Ferrisburgh. Shannon stated that Alex had asked to have the item on the agenda as she felt it deserved examination by the group, as the language of the town's plan may have factored in the rulings. Shannon added that he had copies of the two decisions available if anyone wanted to read them. Rebecca asked for a copy of them.

Shannon contended that the rulings stated that “the purpose provisions of the town plan consisted of aspirational language and that it did not impose a regulatory restriction.” He contended that the Planning Commission should bear this in mind and strengthen the language of the updated plan wherever possible. He added that the definitions used also played a part in the rulings and that we should ensure that our definitions are clear and concise.

Jason stated that his interpretation was a bit different and that the ruling focused more on the fact that similar development already existed in the areas in question and that inconsistency was more critical than the aspirational language. He then reminded the group that the process of developing the plan was to capture and convey the desires of the entire community rather than a vocal minority. Everyone agreed with this point of view.

Shannon reminded everyone about the VCRD Community Visit Program being held on Tuesday, March 18, 2014. He asked everyone which sessions they planned to attend to ensure that the Planning Commission had representation in all sessions. After everyone shared their plans it was determined that we had proper coverage.

The group then continued a review of chapters three, four and five of the municipal development plan. Below is a chart outlining the status of various sections in chapters three and four:

Section	Contact	PC Initiator	Status
City Hall	Mel	Mel	Complete
Opera House	Gerianne Smart	Mel	Complete
Police	George Merkel	Mel	Stacy will edit
Fire	Jim Breuer	Mel	Complete
Health - VARS	Tony Korda	Mel	Complete
Health - other	Little City Practice	Alex	Not needed - complete
Public Works	Jim Larrow	Mel	Complete
Water	VPWD	Alex & Mel	Complete
Wastewater	Mel	Mel	Complete
Storm Drainage	Mike	Mike	Complete
Solid Waste	ACSWD	Mel/Shannon	Complete
Parks & Rec.	Recreation Committee	Alex & Mel	Alex/Mel will follow up
Boys & Girls Club	Mike Reiderer	Shannon	Complete
Bixby Library	Jane Spencer	Stacy	Stacy will follow up
Education	ANWSU	Shannon	Complete
Energy	Mike	Mike	Complete

Park & Ride	Jason	Jason	In progress
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The group reviewed Rebecca's edits for the education entry. It was suggested that abbreviations be replaced with their full description (e.g. "Individual Education Plan" instead of "IEP"). The group agreed with the rest of the edits.

We reviewed the water service and solid waste entries. Mike asked what "VFD" stood for. Mel did some speedy research and determined it means "Variable Frequency Devices". Mike asked if the entry could be sent to him electronically so that he could reword the entry to make it consistent with the voice of the rest of the plan. Shannon said he would send it to him.

After reviewing the solid waste entry, Alex asked if the City's current containers have spots for trash, recycling and food scraps. Mel responded that only trash and recycling are accepted. The group updated the entry to reflect that fact.

The discussion then returned to the seventh and eighth bullet-points on page 80, regarding loft apartments and residential uses on the ground floor. In the February meeting, it was suggested that we ask Jason his recollection of events during the 2009 plan re-write regarding these items. He stated that he thought they were present in the prior plan and carried over in the 2009 version. We combined the two bullet-points to read, "Residential uses are prohibited at the ground level. Residential apartments in combination with professional or artistic businesses as a conditional use shall be encouraged above ground-floor commercial uses."

We then started review of the Northern Gateway District entry. In the first paragraph it was suggested that reference of "the new power substation" be replaced with "new Police Station". Mike asked that policy 4 on page 68 be moved to the entry for this district as outlined in an earlier meeting.

We removed the second bullet-point which read, "Uses shall complement, enhance and support our downtown businesses."

We broke up and edited the third bullet-point into four separate bullet-points to read as follows:

- "Development and redevelopment in the Northern Gateway District shall use flexibility in design by emphasizing the planned unit development concept. Flexible, performance-based zoning standards shall therefore be developed that allow mixed-use development in which residential uses are integrated with commercial, employment, and civic uses."
- "No project or parcel shall be used entirely for residential purposes."
- "Residential uses are prohibited at the ground level. Residential apartments in combination with professional or artistic businesses as a conditional use shall be encouraged above ground-floor commercial uses."
- "Buildings should be designed to a human scale for aesthetic appeal, pedestrian comfort, and compatibility with other land uses."

The project calendar for the municipal development plan update was reviewed and updated to revisit outstanding sections of chapter three and resume our review of chapter five, beginning with the Industrial District at the April meeting.

Committee Updates:

Transportation: No update at this time.

Education: No update at this time.

Tree/Urban Forestry: No update at this time.

New Business: No new business was presented.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mel Hawley, Clerk