

**CITY OF VERGENNES  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING AND ANNUAL MEETING  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2015**

Members Present: Shannon Haggett-Chair, Mike Winslow-Vice Chair, Jason Farrell, Tim Cook, John Coburn. Cheryl Brinkman

Members Absent: Morgan Kittredge (on an approved leave of absence)

Also Present: Mel Hawley, Zoning Administrator, David Austin

Shannon called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. He asked if there were any amendments to the agenda and hearing none, asked visitors if they would like to make any comments.

David Austin commented on the recently adopted amendments to the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations. Mr. Austin reiterated his opposition to Section 1609.F.2 concerning ground-floor residential use in the Central Business District. He asked for clarification on how ground-floor residential use was introduced in the current Municipal Development Plan.

Shannon responded that during the City Council's public hearing process for the Municipal Development Plan in 2014, James Amblo, a property owner in the district testified to the City Council that ground-floor residential use ought to be allowed in the district as he was having difficulty renting space in in the rear portion of his building for commercial use and would like residential use for this space as a possibility.. After much discussion by the City Council, they instructed the Planning Commission to draft language to allow ground-floor residential use in the Central Business District which was incorporated into the Municipal Development Plan. Mr. Austin stated that he was unhappy with the process and that in his opinion, the City Council should have asked Mr. Amblo to meet with the Planning Commission to address his concerns and then the City Council should have followed their recommendations rather than to act directly from Mr. Amblo's testimony.

Mr. Austin stated that he had considered generating a petition to oppose the passage of the amendments to the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations, but had decided not to do so, as he thought the rest of the amendments were sound. He asked if the Planning Commission intended to revisit this issue. Shannon responded that it was his feeling that the Planning Commission would revisit the issue. Jason added that he would like to hear more from the community at large as to the public vision for this issue. He noted that respective to ground-floor residential use in the Central Business District he had really only heard from a handful of people and that the Planning Commission's goal should be to get a more representative assessment of opinion before making any recommendations. Everyone agreed. Mr. Austin thanked the Planning

Commission for their time and for their work and then he left the meeting.

The minutes to the regular meeting of October 26, 2015 were reviewed. Cheryl moved to approve the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Jason with all voting in favor.

The Planning Commission Rules of Procedure requires that a reorganization meeting be held annually in November. The rules require the election of officers. Jason moved that the current slate of Officers, Shannon Haggett as Chair, Mike Winslow as Vice Chair and Mel Hawley as Clerk be re-elected. The motion was seconded by John with all voting in favor.

The rules also require that the Planning Commission Rules of Procedure be subject to re-adoption at the annual meeting in November. John moved that the Planning Commission Rules of Procedure be re-adopted. The motion was seconded by Tim with all voting in favor.

The Planning Commission next began to discuss items that should be considered as updates to the Municipal Development Plan. The commission brain-stormed ideas that may be considered for updating based on timing and/or need. The following is a preliminary list of items for consideration:

- 1) The current Agricultural and Rural Residential District being modified to a residential district.
- 2) The need for language surrounding the siting of solar energy projects within the city.
- 3) Updated language for materials management to conform with state regulations that are currently being phased in.
- 4) The City's Designated Downtown status.
- 5) Developing a vision or plan for City-owned properties.
- 6) Incorporation of recommendations from the Strong Communities, Better Connections (SCBC) program.
- 7) Incorporation of transportation recommendations. Some of this will tie in with the SCBC program, but some of it will be developed from other projects like the sidewalk survey that is underway, etc.
- 8) Incorporation of an update Urban Forestry Plan using information from the recent UVM tree survey.
- 9) Development of a plan for stormwater/wastewater management.
- 10) Revisiting ground-floor residential use in the Central Business District.

The Planning Commission agreed to focus on the top priorities out of this list and for members to take the lead in coming up with discussion material/draft language for future meetings. The agreed upon priority items were:

- 1) Designated Downtown. The City's Designated Downtown status is set to expire in 2017 and this would be an ideal time to update the plan to reflect current needs surrounding this designation. It was agreed that the Vergennes Partnership should be the driving force for this section and Mel and Shannon would reach out to Renny Perry and Amy Bodette-Barr for their participation.
- 2) Solar siting. Shannon and Cheryl volunteered to start working on this item.

- 3) Stormwater/Wastewater recommendations. Jason volunteered to investigate this item, looking at plan and regulation language from other communities to determine what might be a good starting point for Vergennes.
- 4) Urban Forestry. Shannon reported that Claire Tebbs from the Addison County Regional Planning Commission had contacted Mike and him regarding the development of an urban forestry plan to build on the work of the UVM tree inventory. The ACRPC has funding to do this and a deadline of January 2016 to do the work. Shannon said that while this item may not be a top priority for content reasons, it is from a timing perspective and therefore should be worked on now. He and Mike volunteered to work with Claire on this item.
- 5) The Strong Communities, Better Connections project. The deliverables for this item are not expected for several months, but when they are available, Tim has volunteered to lead the process on it.
- 6) Public outreach. All the priority items outlined above will need to have public involvement to help guide Planning Commission efforts. John volunteered to develop a plan for public outreach and engagement for all these items.

Everyone agreed to begin work on their items and would update the rest of the Planning Commission in December.

Transportation items update – No update.

Education items update – No update.

Stormwater items update – No update.

Tree/Urban Forestry items update – Update covered in the Urban Forestry section above.

Materials Management items update – No update.

No new business was discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mel Hawley, Clerk