

**CITY OF VERGENNES  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES  
PUBLIC HEARING  
MONDAY, JUNE 30, 2014**

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

Members Absent: Tim Cook, Stacy Raphael

Also Present: Mel Hawley, Zoning Administrator, Robert Feuerstein, Sarah Morris, Sarah Cowan, Chris von Trapp

Shannon Haggett called the public hearing to order at 7:00 p.m. and read the notice of public hearing for the purpose of the Planning Commission to hear testimony in relation to the re-adoption of the municipal development plan.

Sarah Cowan, Chair of the Vergennes Economy Task Force focused the majority of her testimony on the “Statement of Our Goals and Objectives” section on pages 10 – 12, commenting on the following general policies and goals:

Policy #2 – While generally happy with the stated goal to consider the potential impacts of economic and residential growth and development on the City’s facilities, services and infrastructure, Ms. Cowan expressed concern of the age of the water and sewer systems.

Policy #4 – Ms. Cowan strongly endorsed the goal to actively promote a strong, balanced, and diverse economy that provides satisfying, rewarding, and stable jobs while maintaining high environmental standards. She recommended that use of terms such as “clean” and “green” be considered.

Policy #5 – Ms. Cowan questioned the inclusion of Vergennes as a “public service center for northern Addison County.” She advocated a need for balance and the public perception that Vergennes has more than its fair share of public services which could potentially strain resources. She recommended developing metrics which would identify and define what is existing as well as allowing reflection as to if we have too much or too little in this area.

Policy #7 – Ms. Cowan endorsed the policy to promote safe and affordable childcare and to integrate childcare issues into the planning process. She added that public childcare is missing in the current mix for Vergennes and having that available can be very important for economic development and attractiveness.

Policy #10 – Ms. Cowan asked, “What is the definition of a neighborhood in the context of this policy?” and recommended that “provide” be changed to “promote”.

Policy #11 – Ms. Cowan wondered if the City’s important natural features and open spaces had been identified and expressed concern about the perception that more open space may be needed given the small geographical size of Vergennes.

Policy #12 – Ms. Cowan asked that the Planning Commission consider revising the goal to read, “To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vergennes’ natural resources and to maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.”

Policy #13- Ms. Cowan asked that the Planning Commission consider revising the goal to read, “To protect, maintain, enhance, and where feasible, increase indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities.”

Policy #14 – Ms. Cowan stated that at first she was concerned that stormwater issues were not included in the goal, but when she realized that it was covered in a later section of the plan, her concerns were allayed.

In addition to these policy-specific concerns, Ms. Cowan expressed an overarching concern on what “could” happen as a result of wording in the plan and that the Planning Commission should be careful about what is written in the plan as some items may be interpreted differently than as intended.

Finally, Ms. Cowan said that the Vergennes Economy Task Force is potentially pursuing the steps necessary to increase the physical size of the Designated Downtown area which could bring additional resources to the area.

Mel Hawley updated everyone in regard to the schedule for expiration of the designation, and that when the Downtown Designation is renewed, if the area is expanded, it would necessitate an off-cycle update of the municipal development plan.

Next, the Planning Commission heard testimony from Ferrisburgh resident Sarah Morris. Ms. Morris is also a member of the Vergennes Economy Task Force. She reiterated many of the points made by Ms. Cowan and asked why Policy #2 in Chapter 2 was removed. The original text read, “Create an Economic Development Committee made up of City Council members, Planning Commission members, and business owners to develop a clear vision and strategy with regard to economic development within the City within 1 year of plan adoption. Develop a plan to attract new businesses and support existing businesses that are compatible with the character of Vergennes.”

Both Sarah Cowan and Robert Feuerstein agreed with Ms. Morris’ question. Alex McGuire responded that several years ago, after the adoption of the current plan, the City Council voted not to form such a committee with the reasoning that the Vergennes Partnership would fulfill that role and thus, the Planning Commission removed the policy as the goal was met. The three testified that in light of the formation of the Vergennes Economy Task Force, and the activity level of the Vergennes Partnership, the deletion of the goal may want to be reconsidered.

Next, the Planning Commission heard testimony from Chris von Trapp, also a member of the Vergennes Economy Task Force. Mr. von Trapp expressed concerns regarding Chapter 4 –

Protecting our Natural Heritage.

Policy #2 – Mr. von Trapp stated that as a city, we should be the economic oasis for the region. He was concerned that by supporting the policy “to work with local land trusts and other non-profit organizations to encourage voluntary protection of critical habitats...” that we would potentially contribute to urban sprawl by inorganically protecting open space within the city thus pushing development outside the city.

Policy #6 – Mr. von Trapp questioned the importance of “the preservation and wise use of prime agricultural soils for agricultural use...” within a city.

Policy #10 – Mr. von Trapp wondered if we really needed to protect clayplain forests within a city.

Agricultural and Rural Residential District – Mr. von Trapp asked why there would be such a district within a city and was worried about the minimum 5-acre lot size required there. (Note – current regulations in force require a minimum lot size of one acre for one-family residential uses and 4 acres for non-residential uses.) Again, emphasizing that the City of Vergennes is a city.

Next, the Planning Commission heard testimony from Robert Feuerstein, also a member of the Vergennes Economic Task Force and a principal owner of Kennedy Brothers, Inc.. Mr. Feuerstein asked that Policy #5 on page 11 include telecommunications center in the list of goals that Vergennes should develop and maintain. Mr. Feuerstein also stated that he would rather see more intensive or massive development within the City limits and asked what level the Planning Commission envisions as the desirable level of development. Shannon Haggett responded that The Planning Commission hasn’t directly discussed that question and that each member has their own opinion of the desirable level. He added that the Planning Commission would solicit community input through public process to determine a guiding level instead of unilaterally coming up with such a level.

Mel Hawley stated that Danelle Birong had emailed him with a list of typographical errors that she had found in the draft plan. He said he had forgotten to bring the email, but would share the information with the Planning Commission.

Mayor Bill Benton had sent a memorandum to Shannon Haggett outlining eight comments and recommendations to be entered as testimony:

- 1) Page 17, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph: “According to the 2000 Census....” Can we get updated 2010 Census Data?
- 2) Page 30, Public Works: We need more on equipment details, highlights of past years, future projects and adequate funding.
- 3) Page 41, Job Corps: Job Corps offers great potential, a discussion should take place with them to determine what they can provide to the city over the short and long term. We need to try and incorporate them into our planning documents as they represent over 10% of the population.
- 4) Page 43, #7: Delete police department from facilities study needs.

- 5) Page 45, Parks and Recreation #30: Maintaining, enhancing and expanding recreational amenities is great but we need to balance that with funding for public works for additional work and maintenance. Benefits and costs need to be balance with priorities and grant opportunities.
- 6) Page 52, last paragraph: “large, infrequently flooding basin....” It seems to be flooding more often, change description?
- 7) Photographs: Many of the photographs are dated showing stores etc. from 2009 or earlier. Photos should be updated to show that this document represents 2014.
- 8) All in all great job Vergennes Planning Commission. Thank you for all your hard work.

Shannon Haggett closed public hearing at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mel Hawley, Clerk