

Montpelier Planning Commission
December 12, 2011
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Jesse Moorman, Chair; Tina Ruth, John Bloch, Eileen Simpson and Alan Goldman, and Jon Anderson.
Staff: Gwen Hallsmith, Director of Planning & Community Development
Emily Campbell, Youth Member

Call to Order:

Jesse, Moorman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

Review & Approval of November 14, 2011 Minutes:

Upon a motion by John Bloch and Tina Ruth the November 14, 2011 Minutes were approved unanimously.

Comments from the Chair:

Jesse Moorman thanked those who attended the Neighbors Day on November 19th. He would like to familiarize the Planning Commission Members with the great materials that were produced for that meeting. Mr. Bloch said he received positive comments from people and said they loved the map.

Mr. Moorman said he doesn't know what it is realistic in terms of the timeline and say let's get this done and to the City Council by a certain date. He hopes it can be within this next year. He is interested in the idea of a community supper sometime this year where they have more of a product to let people talk about. They could have a target date for the supper.

Mr. Bloch said one of the concerns he came away from at the last Council meeting is that if they are going to wipe out the VISTA slots and the other planner, what is Gwen going to have to work with in the second half of the year? He doesn't know what they are going to do for a budget.

Mr. Moorman said they need input from the staff in terms of capabilities and timelines.

Ms. Hallsmith replied there are a lot of tiers to the budget proposal and the first tier of cuts doesn't include the VISTAs. Obviously, if the cuts are made their department will be decimated and she is hopeful that won't happen. More than half of the department is on the chopping block and that doesn't impact for him. They pay the VISTAs \$8,000 a year each for their full-time work. It provides an entry level position for young people getting out of college and provides the department with a tremendous resource in terms of the outreach work and community organizing work they do. She thinks it is important to keep them.

They represent a commitment by the city for both youth, development and low income support and advocacy as much like the Housing Trust Fund allocation. The Planning

Department brings in money for other things in the city. Between the Community Development position and her position they have raised \$15 million during the last five years. This is one of the things we need in hard times are people raising money for city functions.

Mr. Bloch said they are looking to cut 5 percent across the board.

Ms. Hallsmith said they are looking to see what the budget would look like to do that. That doesn't necessarily mean they have made a decision to do it. It's not an easy task and not something you can do without cutting important city services. There is not a lot of fat in the city budget. People talk about sacred cows when it comes to the city budget and nowhere do they talk about the kind of interest payments we made on the bonds that we use. If you want to look at it through the lens of who benefits from the city budget they tend to think firefighters – firefighters, police, the people who keep your roads clear and the people who put the fire out in your house when it is burning down, the police that protect you, they are not the upper echelons of our country's income brackets by any stretch. Most of our works in those categories can't even afford to live in Montpelier. The people who are in the upper income brackets of our country are the people who hold the bonds and earning interest off of municipal bonds. Hundreds of thousands of dollars a year we pay out of municipal budget on that interest.

Ms. Simpson said one of the concerns she has about the effect of the budget is getting back to their work she recalls vividly looking at the existing zoning regulations and found them impenetrable. That package needs to be fixed and she doesn't see how Gwen's staff can do it. That means it would be outsourced which would be a fiscal item.

Ms. Hallsmith replied she actually has faith in her and her staff's ability to do most of it because it is part of their job but it does take longer that way and needs to be a little more deliberative. It is probably reasonable to shoot for a September or October spaghetti supper. They need to figure out which of the zoning types they want in each of the districts. The way she pictures the zoning revision is that a lot of it is contained in how the districts are elaborated. Changes are driven by the Master Plan and there are some changes to the floodplain ordinance. There is a question as to whether or not they want to keep the sign ordinance in the zoning or have it as a separate ordinance. A lot of the stuff out of the district zones is administrative procedures and standards.

Mr. Moorman told Clancy it would be important to have his input at a meeting to talk about what needs fixing.

Mr. DeSmet said he would need some guidance on narrowing the focus because some of the things need to stay but rewritten and clarified. Because we are enabled by state law some has

to stay but just make it more palatable and easier to understand. Members should be a little more familiar with what is in there now than what he feels they are.

Mr. Anderson wondered if it would be useful to have a meeting where Gwen and Clancy say what they see as the table of contents for the new ordinance. Combined in that meeting would be a plan of what sequence we think they should be discussed. It would be useful to divide their meetings up into having one section of real substance they want to visit and another section of boiler plate they want to go over.

Ms. Simpson said after that process they should start creating some case studies so we work through those with the product they are preparing and see how it works.

Ms. Hallsmith replied there are all kinds of case studies in the office.

Mr. Anderson said there needs to be a housing replacement ordinance. He would be happy to work with staff to put identify some models.

Ms. Hallsmith added they have one in Burlington. It would be like the land use budget they referred to combined with the growth and density bonus and mandatory clustering. She said she has listed in all of the drafts some of the additional work that needs to be done. One of the things they have looked at is the housing replacement ordinance. That was one of the questions she had before she got into the Village/Commercial District and the Village District because that is where they would go. She has listed in all of the drafts some of the additional work that needs to be done. In the Village/Commercial it would be the housing replacement, flood hazard overlay, historic design guidelines and the parking. In the Rural District they talk about the density bonus for clustering and transfer development rights.

Mr. Moorman said they made a decision for the Village/Commercial District to eliminate the parking requirement meaning somebody doesn't have to build 1.8 parking spots per square feet. At the next meeting he would like it put on the agenda. He likes the notion of a proposed table of contents with plan of attack. They should all know the existing code. They should also review case studies.

Ms. Hallsmith replied she would propose a schedule.

Future Agenda Items:

Mr. Moorman said they will have this as an agenda item moving forward.

Mr. Anderson said he recently saw Williston's zoning ordinance. They allowed uses by SIC code. The Commerce Department has a name for every possible business in the country so when we do reporting you put it under the right thing. SIC stands for Standard Industry Code.

Mr. Moorman said they could talk about that at their next meeting.

Mr. DeSmet said it stands for Standard Industrial Classification under the SEC standards.

Ms. Ruth said she would be open to Jon's suggestion about working in smaller groups. Mr. Goldman agreed.

Mr. Moorman said the next two items for next meeting will be looking at the staff's proposal of a plan of attack table of contents and the draft neighborhood standards. There is a Barriers to Housing Report. Let's put that on the next agenda to review. He saw references to the Planning Department included in it.

Other Business:

Tina Ruth said she is the city's representative to the Regional Planning Commission. They had a meeting on November 2nd with the Regional Planning Commission and the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation. They had each appointed three members of each body to a committee to look at the concept of co-locating together. This is part of Challenges for Change, the law which passed a year or two ago trying to promote the ways to streamline government and make it more efficient and more effective. They want us to consider consolidation. Steve Patterson of the Northeastern Development Association, which does both planning and development, spoke to them about how it works in his area which is the three Northeast Kingdom counties and a very different area. They have a huge board of 55 people. All of their 20 legislators are on the board. They have economic interests but don't have town representatives from every town and have a 9-member executive committee that runs the organization. She received a notice for the next meeting asking members to be ready to vote whether to consolidate the two bodies. She has talked to Bev Hill and Gwen to see how they felt about the two functions coming out of the same office. She felt this was way premature to be voting on consolidation at this point. She hasn't heard anything yet from City Council. She is prepared to say this is way premature and should be looking at reorganization in some other way. She also asked how closely the two bodies work together because one of the things they are talking about is relocating in Barre. She feels it would be nice for Barre to have another organization functioning over there but she hopes it won't be this organization because our fact goes back and forth. Eric does all the GIS work for the Regional Planning Commission as well and it would be very inconvenient not have them close by. Representing the city she cannot vote yes for a consolidation or co-location. She would either have to abstain or vote no because there simply hasn't been enough discussion.

Members discussed who would staff it. Who controls the executive committee? Who is the board? How do you prioritize what this combined commission works on and advocates for? Who has the voice.

Gwen Hallsmith said it is way premature to be thinking about voting on it. There are other regional functions that may belong better with regional planning like the Act 250 Commission. That's the implementation arm of the Regional Plan in a lot of ways and yet

they are a whole other group someplace else. She thinks regionalism is important and it is a disaster right now in Vermont, and it's an expensive disaster.

Mr. Moorman advised Ms. Ruth to touch base with City Council. He thanked Ms. Ruth for bringing it to the Planning Commission's attention.

Adjournment:

Upon a motion duly made by Mr. Anderson and Mr. Bloch the Planning Commission adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen Hallsmith, Director
Planning and Community Development

Transcribed by: Joan Clack