

Montpelier Planning Commission
October 25, 2004
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: David Borgendale, Chair; Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; Anne Campbell; Richard Sedano; Irene Facciolo; Curt McCormack; Marjorie Power (arrived after the start of meeting)
Staff: Valerie Capels, Planning & Community Development Director
Others: Ken Jones, Jim Libby

Call to Order

Mr. Borgendale called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

draft

Minutes

Ms. Grodinsky made a motion to approve the minutes of September 27, 2004, seconded by Mr. McCormack. Ms. Grodinsky said that she believed that it was Mr. McCormack rather than Mr. Borgendale who mentioned “sharing the road” in the Transportation section. The Commission voted to approve the minutes with the correction.

Review of Agenda

Ms. Grodinsky requested that the review of the Master Plan timeline and PR plan be moved up on the agenda as she needed to leave at 9:00.

Open Space Advisory Committee Resolution

Mr. Borgendale said that the outstanding issue remaining from the previous discussions of this matter was the purpose statement. He had drafted the purpose statement in the current draft and that it reflected a suggestion from the Open Space Advisory Committee that the words “and tools” be added to the first sentence.

Mr. Sedano made a motion that the resolution be adopted. Ms. Campbell seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Sabin’s Pasture Rezoning Update and Review of Schedule

Ms. Capels said that she expected the Planning Commission would receive the draft zoning that day or the next. In an e-mail from the consultant that day, she had been informed that the consultant had not yet looked at Chris Smart’s comments. The consultant did not think he would get to it until the end of the week. As a result, it is not clear when a draft will be available for the Planning Commission. The date is important in terms of the schedule of the November 16 meeting and December 1 hearing.

Mr. Sedano said that he thought the Commission was going to set the hearing for the meeting after November 16. Mr. Borgendale said he agreed with that concept because he would like the November 16 meeting to be an opportunity for the Planning Commission to discuss the zoning and ask questions of the consultant. Ms. Capels said that, with that understanding, the Commission could go forward with the November 16 meeting, which will be televised and plan for the hearing to occur at the December 1 meeting.

Ms. Facciolo asked when the Planning Commission's report on the proposed zoning would need to be completed. Ms. Capels said that it would have to be ready with the draft ordinance on November 16. She would prepare a first draft which might be a rough draft. She provided copies of the applicable section of Chapter 117 to the Commissioners. Mr. Borgendale said he expected that there would be commentary on the report during the hearings.

Mr. Borgendale said that the Planning Commission needed to give Ms. Capels guidance on the drafting of the report either at this meeting or through a subcommittee. Mr. Sedano said that the Commission could discuss the part of the report relating to the Planning Commission's goals for the zoning. Ms. Capels said that she thought that those types of things can be discussed at the next meeting.

Mr. Borgendale reviewed the dates as follows:

November 8, 2004 - Discuss the draft and warning the public hearing

November 16, 2004 - Meet with consultant

December 1, 2004 - Public Hearing

Ms. Capels said that the key unknown is the date on which staff and the Commission will receive the draft ordinance. Ms. Campbell asked whether the consultant had been informed of the schedule. Ms. Facciolo said that the timeline is in the contract.

Ms. Campbell made a motion that the Planning Commission ask the City Manager to underscore to the consultant the importance of the timeline. Ms. Facciolo seconded the motion. Ms. Campbell said that she felt that a clear message should be delivered to the consultant regarding the importance of the schedule. Borgendale asked whether a motion to this effect is necessary. Ms. Capels said that the consultant is aware of the Commission's timeline and that she will convey their concerns to the City Manager. Ms. Campbell said she was willing to withdraw the motion. Ms. Facciolo agreed to the withdrawal.

Mater Plan Timeline and PR Plan

Ms. Power arrived and joined the meeting.

Ms. Grodinsky said that she sent the Commission members an e-mail regarding setting a date to get the Master Plan chapters out in a draft form. She said that she was proposing a date within the next few weeks. She also proposed posting notices of the at the library and other locations describing the availability of the chapters. Ms. Campbell said that she felt that was a very good idea. She suggested that the outlines of the goals and policies be used as the drafts.

Mr. Borgendale said that he would urge that the Commission include some kind of a vision statement with the draft chapters. He said that Ms. Capels had written a draft vision statement that the Commission needs to discuss and revise. He suggested that the Commissioners provide comments by the next meeting.

Ms. Grodinsky suggested that the draft chapters be readied for the public by November 16. Mr. Borgendale said that he was inclined to put a draft up even if it is an early draft that has not been

fully reviewed by the entire Commission. Ms. Power said that she has serious reservations about putting information out unless there is a consensus on the documents. She recognized commissioners' desire to put something on the Web, but she did not want the Commission to be placed in a position where it is receiving criticism on drafts of sections of the Master Plan when the response might need to state that the full Commission is not sure if it really wanted to say those things. Mr. McCormack said that the Planning Commission will receive criticism no matter what stage the document is in when it is made available to the public. Early drafts may generate criticism that the Planning Commission is not in agreement on some statements, but that a late draft would receive criticism that the plan was a "done deal" before the public had adequate opportunity for input. Ms. Power said that the problem is that the current drafts are somewhere in the middle of those two situations.

Ms. Grodinsky said that the chapters reflect the information and comments from the stakeholders at the forums. She felt that the information in the chapters is ready for the public to comment upon. Ms. Campbell said that the Commission received information at the forums and now is the optimum time to get input. Mr. Sedano said he has concluded that the information should be placed on the Web site at this time to show the public that the Commission wants a transparent and engaging planning process. He said that it is important to manage people's expectations by explaining what stage the Commission is at.

Mr. Borgendale asked Ms. Capels if she could sit down with the Commissioners and put all of the documents into a consistent format. Ms. Capels said that she would format the documents and did not believe that it would be necessary to meet with the Commissioners.

Ms. Grodinsky made a motion that the Commission members review the vision statement before the next meeting and discuss any proposed changes and that the Commission members get their Master Plan chapters to Ms. Capels by a date that would allow the drafts to be available to the public by November 16. Mr. Sedano seconded the motion, but said that he wanted to change "chapters" to "issue brief." Ms. Grodinsky said that the change was acceptable and added that she would draft the explanation of the status of the drafts in order to address the public's expectations. Ms. Capels suggested that the date for her receipt of the drafts be November 3 in order to allow her to put together a mock draft for the November 8 meeting. Mr. Borgendale said that he could not commit to those dates for the education brief since he did not yet have a date for a meeting with the Board of Education.

Ms. Grodinsky reviewed the motion: That the Commission members review the vision statement before the next meeting and discuss any proposed changes and that the Commission members get their Master Plan issue briefs to Ms. Capels by November 3. The motion was approved the motion 6-1 (Ms. Power opposed).

Ms. Grodinsky raised the matter of the poster for election day. She checked with Charlotte Hoyt and was told that placing the poster in City Hall would be fine, but that it would need to be staffed. Ms. Capels said she checked on the photographs for the poster. She said that the "Above and Beyond" photos are proprietary, but the CD could be purchased for \$100. The photos of Montpelier that were used in the Visualizing Density presentation could be shared with

the Commission. There are also useful images relating to density and sprawl on the Vermont Forum on Sprawl Web site. Ms. Power said that it might be better to use schematics rather than photos of locations in Montpelier.

Ms. Grodinsky said that she would not be able to pull the poster together as she had to leave on a trip in the morning and would not be back until Monday. She could cover the time period from 5:30 to the close of the polls. Mr. Borgendale said he might be able to cover some time in the morning. Ms. Campbell said she could be available from 2:00 to 4:00 if she is not in New Hampshire.

Ms. Grodinsky asked who would take on the task of pulling the poster together. Ms. Power offered to do it. Ms. Capels said that she and Stephanie Smith may be able to provide assistance.

Mr. McCormack asked for a quick briefing on the poster. Ms. Grodinsky said that it is part of the PR plan that she sent out. She would also like to put up a map of the Sabin's Pasture zoning with a notice saying that comments and questions can be brought to the meeting. Mr. Borgendale said the Commission needs to make sure that everyone understands that the Sabin's Pasture zoning concepts may be applicable to the entire city.

Master Plan Draft Topic Goals and Policies

Economic Development

Mr. Sedano described his draft on this topic. He listed important factors, issues and questions from the Economic Development forum. Ms. Facciolo said she did not understand the first goal. Mr. Sedano said that the balance of economic development, the natural environment and community is not a zero sum balance. Ms. Facciolo said that the word "balance" implies a relative scale. Ms. Power said that State development law refers to undue adverse impact. She said that development can be viewed in relation to economic impacts, scale and harmony with maintaining the character of Montpelier. Ms. Campbell said that it seems that the question would be answered in the vision statement. She said that the chapter would speak more to economic development with an awareness of the vision statement.

Ms. Campbell suggested that the tapes of the economic development forum would be helpful in developing this chapter. She also suggested that the Commission follow Ken Jones' advice to focus on a few specific goals that it wants to work toward in the next five years. Mr. Borgendale said that there should be a goal of increasing the proportion of people who both live and work in the community and to set specific targets for this goal. The section should also identify those kinds of economic activities that are desirable in the community and that should be promoted, such as promoting desirable private economic interests. Mr. Sedano asked whether the Commission wanted to include measures it favors to bring the desirable businesses to the city. Mr. Borgendale said he did not think the Commission is in a position to identify specific kinds of businesses and measures. The document should say that a goal of the community should be to generate such a list. Ms. Power said that some enhancements, such as transportation improvements, could be identified as measures to promote desirable businesses. Mr. Sedano said that it sounded as if the Commissioners would like to say that maintaining sound municipal and

transportation infrastructure was a measure to promote appropriate businesses. Mr. Borgendale agreed.

Ms. Power said the Commission may want to say that it encourages the re-use of existing developed sites. Mr. Sedano said he is concerned that the Master Plan say something about using commercial space that does not result in the conversion of residential units.

Energy

Mr. Sedano introduced the topic. Ms. Grodinsky suggested that the section on purchasing should say that the City develop an environmentally preferable purchasing policy. Mr. Borgendale said that there is a need to recognize tradeoffs with the use of historic buildings. Ms. Facciolo said that sustainability should be addressed in terms of architecture, such as encouraging the re-use and retrofitting of buildings. Ms. Power said that energy efficient police cars should be mentioned.

Mr. McCormack asked whether the Master Plan can be more aggressive in stating that the City will do something. Ms. Capels said the Master Plan is a guiding policy document. There is no legal consequence if something is not accomplished, but the plan can establish a sense of commitment if the Council approves the Master Plan with the language in it. Mr. McCormack said that the Master Plan language should be strong. He said that the word “will” should be used wherever possible.

Ms. Facciolo noted that schools are addressed as a separate bullet and asked if that meant that the other bullets do not apply. Mr. Sedano said that everything applies, but that he separated schools out for special attention.

Mr. McCormack said that the “Goal setting” bullet is excellent. A reference to the Energy Star program should be added. Ken Jones said the paragraph seems to be saying that the City should establish an energy plan. He suggested the Commission might want the Master Plan to simply say that.

Mr. McCormack said that the last sentence of the recognition section should be worded more strongly by including “...which might include monetary reward or comp. time.” Ms. Campbell said that the section on municipal collegueship should say the city will incorporate the principals of the Earth Charter that it adopted.

Ms. Facciolo suggested that the “Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled” paragraph should contain a cross reference to the Transportation chapter. Mr. McCormack said that cross references should be used throughout the plan where there are overlaps.

Mr. Sedano referred to the paragraph on building energy standards. He said that there are state building energy standards, but they are not enforced. Ms. Power suggested saying that the City enforce the state standards. Mr. Sedano said the Commission needs to consider the consequences of that statement in terms of staff resources and other issues.

Ms. Campbell said that the section on reducing electric heat should say that the city should take steps to reduce the use of electric heat such as a technical assistance program to aid in conversions. Mr. McCormack suggested banning its use in new buildings. Mr. Sedano said that the reason for that might be to pick up the projects that do not require a review under Act 250.

Ms. Capels said that a term other than “impact fee” should be used in the Design Review paragraph. From a planning and regulatory standpoint, the term has a specific meaning different from the one intended. Ms. Power said that it would be better to require that projects meet the goals rather than to impose a financial cost for not meeting goals. This would avoid the argument that economic development is being strangled. Ms. Campbell said that incentives could be used for high achieving development.

Mr. Sedano said he was interested in the Commission members’ thoughts on requiring burial of electrical lines. Mr. McCormack said that burial of the lines is more expensive and is not as energy efficient as electricity is lost to the ground. Mr. Sedano said that he was not hearing a consensus on this question.

Mr. McCormack said that the goals should specifically state that the City understands its contribution to climate change and that it will take steps to minimize that contribution.

Other

Ms. Capels provided copies of the consultant’s progress report on the Fiscal Impacts of Growth Study.

Ms. Facciolo said that she is ready to give up on the letter to the newspaper on the zoning initiative. She did not think that there is a consensus on the letter and the letter has become out of date. Mr. Borgendale said that he agreed that the letter would no longer be timely. Mr. Sedano said that when the Commission does have a consensus on topics related to SmartCode or Sabin’s Pasture zoning, it would be helpful to get the word out to the community.

Adjournment

Mr. Sedano made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 p.m. Ms. Campbell seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Capels

Transcribed by Kathleen Swigon

These minutes are subject to approval by the Planning Commission. Changes, if any, will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which they were acted upon.