

Montpelier Planning Commission
November 29, 2004
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: David Borgendale, Chair; Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; Anne Campbell; Curt McCormack; Richard Sedano
Staff: Valerie Capels, Planning & Community Development Director

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Borgendale.

Minutes

Mr. Sedano made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 8, November 12, November 15 and November 16, 2004 meetings. Ms. Grodinsky seconded the motion. Mr. Borgendale had a correction to the November 8 minutes. He said that his statement in the third paragraph of the discussion of the Sabin's Pasture rezoning should state that there were substantive disagreements rather than agreements. The Commission voted 5-0 to approve the minutes with the corrections.

Agenda

Ms. Grodinsky proposed adding a discussion of the process for public input on the zoning proposal to the agenda. She said that she wanted to discuss ways to conduct the public meetings to improve the process.

Master Plan Draft Topic Goals and Policies Review

Mr. Borgendale noted the first two Master Plan topics listed on the agenda had been discussed at previous meetings. He said Ms. Power was not present to present the parking topic and the education and cultural topics were not yet ready for discussion. Mr. McCormack asked whether follow-up discussions should be scheduled for the topics that were revised in response to the initial discussions. Ms. Capels said she thought the Planning Commission decided to have the topic authors make the revisions and send the revised topics to the staff for posting on the Web site. Mr. Borgendale agreed. He asked Ms. Capels to provide the Commission with a list of the topics that she had received.

Ms. Campbell said she wanted to discuss the Cultural and Recreational topic. Although she never agreed to take on this topic, she went over the forum tapes and put together a two-page outline. Mr. Borgendale asked Ms. Campbell to send the outline to the Commission members again. She said she would with the proviso that she is not in agreement that she would draft the entire chapter.

Land Use Workshop

Mr. Borgendale said the Planning Commission needed to discuss when and how to have a land use workshop. Ms. Grodinsky suggested that someone put together a proposal for discussion by the whole group. Ms. Capels said it would help to have maps and information available to describe the existing land use and environmental conditions. She had also been gathering images showing patterns of development that could be put into a PowerPoint presentation and other materials. Mr. Borgendale said he would like to have a map showing existing densities.

PR Initiatives

Ms. Grodinsky reviewed the public participation initiatives that had been previously decided upon. She said Ms. Power was going to work on a poster showing the top ten reasons for the public to participate in the Master Plan. The Commission also agreed to work on putting sidebars into the City's page in the

“Bridge.” The Commission needs to make an effort to get information out. She would try to draft something for the Bridge and would speak to Ms. Power about the poster.

Discussion of Public Hearing Process for Sabin’s Pasture Zoning

Mr. Sedano said he would like to have an opportunity to ask questions of the commentators. Mr. Borgendale said he understood Mr. Sedano to be endorsing the idea that the Planning Commission ask questions of the public including what aspects of the proposal they do like and what suggestions they have for resolving the issues. Mr. Sedano said the Commission could explain at the outset that they would like to hear what the public likes as well as what they do not like. Ms. Campbell said the Commission will need to set time parameters for the comments. Mr. Sedano suggested using a sign-in sheet so that the commentators could be taken in order. The list could give the Commission an idea of how many wanted to speak and how to allocate time. Ms. Campbell said she had attended a hearing where people were asked to avoid repeating comments that had already been made. Mr. Sedano said some people may wish to repeat in order to state their position publicly. Ms. Campbell said the Commission could ask that those people to just say that they agree with the prior comments. Ms. Grodinsky said that she would like to encourage the public to express their ideas. It would be helpful to put out questions like “What do you like about it?” and “What would you change?” Ms. Campbell said she was concerned that there be limits so that a few people do not monopolize the time. Mr. Borgendale said the Commission could start by giving each person five minutes.

Mr. Borgendale said he was concerned that the current draft is not in a form that could be adopted as an ordinance. Mr. Sedano said that should be addressed before the second hearing. Mr. Borgendale said he did not want the Commission to spend a lot of time getting public feedback on parts of the proposal that will not be included in the adopted legislation.

Mr. McCormack asked the Commission members to keep in mind that, even in contentious situations, the public sometimes provides useful insights. He suggested they avoid engaging in debates while asking questions to get clarifications. Mr. Borgendale said the sign-up sheet will help to limit the speakers to one at a time. Ms. Grodinsky said the important part of the hearing is to find the common denominators and asking questions would help to provide this information. She was advocating a process to get the public involved. Mr. Sedano said he agreed with the concept, but suggested that it might require a more interactive process than a public hearing. Ms. Grodinsky said she had been saying that the Commission needs a public meeting that is a little different from what has been done. This was needed to engage the public and to find common denominators. Mr. Sedano said those ideas had merit, but must be accomplished in a way that meets the Planning Commission’s objectives for the two public hearings. Ms. Campbell suggested stating at the outset that the Commission wants to hear the public’s concerns, what works and what recommendations there are for changes. Ms. Grodinsky agreed. It should be explained that it is important for the Commission to understand the commonalities.

Ms. Capels suggested noting that while the draft focuses only on Sabin’s Pasture, the intention is for the zoning is to have broader applicability. Mr. Borgendale said that the map will only address Sabin’s Pasture. Nancy Sheridan suggested that it would be useful if the map showed the physical limitations of the site including the topography and the railroad. Ms. Campbell said it would be useful to display the natural resource map that shows slopes, wetlands and other sensitive areas.

Mr. Borgendale said he has heard a suggestion about a round table discussion. It is a good idea, but not appropriate for a public hearing. The Planning Commission could change the timetable if it wished to

allow for such a public process. Ms. Grodinsky suggested waiting until after the December 1 hearing to get a feeling of public opinion before making any decision on the timetable. Ms. Campbell said she had real concerns about changing the timetable after so much time, effort, and money have been expended. She did not want to end back at square one after March 1. Mr. Borgendale said a new City Council could change the direction even if the Commission maintains the timetable. Mr. Sedano said it would be possible to insert an intense public process into the timeline. He agreed that the Commission should wait until after December 1 to decide on the timetable. Mr. Borgendale said that it is important to have a public process, but noted that this is the most difficult time of year to generate involvement.

Ms. Sheridan suggested that the Planning Commission put together its own draft proposal based upon all of its work and the public input that is received. Mr. Sedano said that is what the Commission planned to do. After December 13, the Commission will issue a draft for public notice. The Commission should decide on Friday whether it wants to insert an interactive public process into the timeline. They did not need to work out the details, just to decide if they want to do it. Mr. Borgendale and Ms. Campbell agreed.

Ms. Capels asked whether the Commissioners thought that it was appropriate to ask someone from the zoning committee to do a presentation since the proposal is their draft. Ms. Campbell suggested that Ms. Facciolo might be willing to do a brief presentation. Mr. Borgendale said the presentation must be brief. Ms. Campbell said there are a lot of misconceptions in the community. She asked whether the Commissioners could correct any misconceptions or incorrect information. Mr. Borgendale said he did not want to turn the hearing into a debate. Ms. Grodinsky said the Commissioners could ask for clarifications, but should allow the public to say whatever they want to say without correcting them. Mr. Borgendale said that he would ask Ms. Facciolo to do a brief introduction similar to the one she provided at the previous meeting.

Sabin's Pasture Rezoning Update and Schedule Review

November 16 SmartCode presentation

Ms. Grodinsky said that, after hearing about the T-1 zone, she felt that a conservation overlay was something that the Commission would want to look at. Ms. Campbell said Mike was clear that the T-1 zone does the same things as a conservation overlay and that they are interchangeable. Ms. Capels said Mr. Watkins described T-1 as an area where nothing gets built. Mr. Borgendale said Mr. Watkins spoke about reserve areas and preserve areas. Ms. Capels said that she looked into some of the examples that Mike had mentioned. The Onondaga initiative was a county wide application of a plan. The Sarasota plan was a downtown plan, but noted that the downtown is a huge, sprawling area the size of Washington County. Ms. Campbell said she found the issues relating to TDRs to be the most challenging. Mr. Borgendale said the key issue with TDRs is that the by-right densities have to be set low enough that the use of TDRs to increase density will be attractive.

Mr. Borgendale said the Commission would need to have criteria as a basis for preserve areas. The Open Space Advisory Committee has indicated it has had problems getting access to properties, but State statutes give the Planning Commission the ability to access land. The Commission needs to think about whether it wants to exercise that power. Ms. Campbell asked whether the Commission could make a decision subject to getting that information. Mr. Borgendale said the Commission could adopt a set of criteria for the T-1 zone. The ordinance could say that, if a parcel meets those criteria, it would automatically become a T-1 zone.

Upcoming Schedule

Ms. Capels went over the schedule and noted that Steve Stitzel would be available for the December 6 meeting, if the Planning Commission would prefer to hear from him then. Mr. Borgendale said the Commission would plan on hearing from him then.

Mr. Sedano said he wondered how the Commission expects the December 13 meeting to go. Some thought needs to be put into how to make that meeting work. Ms. Campbell noted the Commission needs to address the outstanding issues sometime between now and then. Mr. Borgendale agreed and said the issues include the question of criteria. He felt that the Zoning Committee glossed over the public policy issues.

Adjournment

Ms. Campbell made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Grodinsky. The motion was approved 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Capels

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.

Transcribed by Kathleen Swigon