

Montpelier Planning Commission
September 24, 2007
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Ken Jones, Chair; David Borgendale, Claire Benedict, and Chris Paterson.
Staff: Gwendolyn Hallsmith, Director, Planning and Community Development.

Call to Order:
Ken Jones, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Review of Minutes:
There were August 13, 2007, August 27, 2007, and September 10, 2007 minutes of the Planning Commission were submitted for approval. There was not a quorum of members present at the August 27, 2007 and September 10, 2007 minutes to approve. The August 13, 2007 minutes had a quorum.

Mr. Borgendale moved approval of the August 13th minutes, with Ms. Benedict seconding the motion. The minutes of the August 13, 2007 minutes were approved unanimously 4-0.

Public Appearances:
None.

All Board Meeting:
Ms. Hallsmith said they asked people if November 1st or 8th would work and most people have said fine to both dates. However, November 8th is the regular meeting of the Montpelier Conservation Commission. She reported that the Mayor, City Manager Fraser, Ken and she were having a meeting on Tuesday morning to discuss what the agenda for the All Board meeting. Mr. Jones circulated to members of the Planning Commission a list of possible topics. They are:

1. Budget priorities: Starting in November City Council develops its budget. This could be an opportunity to bring in perspectives of different boards for topics they may want to consider for priorities for budget.
2. Managing large scale developments. The fact that issues such as energy, parking, and transit gets pretty big tend to be issues which our public reacts to significantly. If there was a way in which the different committees and City Council could think about and work with the developers so those large developments have more than just the legal review process but also opportunities for input so those big developments work better.
3. Working with the State of Vermont. There are a couple of issues coming up with the State of Vermont. Is there a mechanism to strengthen the communication between Buildings and Grounds and other state agencies that may be influencing what the state is considering for its development in the city of Montpelier? Act 200 is a law that is supposed to be facilitating the communication between the state and the city. We need to develop some Act 200 approaches, especially as they move forward on the triangle development.
4. Insuring the linkage between vision and action. For example, the ideas for Stone Cutters Way to establish a vision that a lot of people who were interested formed how that could be but then the individual development decisions that followed after the city took its first big step didn't seem to make those connections. Is there a way we can do a better job with different commissions and boards?

Mr. Paterson said one of the criteria he would use in selecting one of the topics is what is the easiest way to build relationships and trusts among the various boards? He would be concerned that it would be easy for some of the boards or commissions if something was said the wrong way that they could be defensive or go into an official business mode. Budget priorities are a simple one because they are all telling City Council what to do.

Mr. Jones said concerning the budget priorities the one body that may actually have specific priorities is something like the Conservation Commission. The Development Review Board doesn't have anything to do with the budget.

Ms. Hallsmith said it should be an item on another agenda in case there are suggestions.

Mr. Borgendale said it is probably the Planning Commission that has the greatest interest in the whole budgetary process. When we had originally talked about providing input to the City Council on the budgetary process, it really gets to the other topic which is making individual decisions consistent. What clearly happened with the last Master Plan is that the City Council doesn't look at any of the tasks, priorities and schedules in the action plan for implementing the Master Plan. He isn't sure it is an appropriate topic for an All Board meeting. He would rather have the Planning Commission meet with the City Council on it independently as opposed to an All Board meeting.

Mr. Jones asked what about taking Chris' thought that perhaps the budget topic is one that does not immediately lead to confrontation. What about just having a part of the agenda be people talking about some money ideas. They wouldn't even have to wear their institutional hats.

Mr. Borgendale said he had been thinking about the topic of making action consistent with vision. This is a great topic to discuss at some point, but it's too early to do that now. He is thinking about the enVision process and governance which ought to be coming up with processes for doing exactly that.

Ms. Hallsmith said they could do something substantive and fun and have a holiday gathering. They could give out some type of award at the holiday gathering. The goal of the All Board meeting is to get the boards talking to each other more and getting to know each other, as well as respect each other's mandates, because that has been part of the problem in the past. The boards have been working independently, and when there is a joint effort, such as zoning or master planning, it hasn't worked very well.

Ms. Benedict said last meeting they were talking about Act 200 and that seemed like a good topic to discuss with other boards.

Mt. Paterson asked, what is the relationship between all of the boards and commissions and the state as the state develops in our community? How do we work with each other to improve that relationship and communication?

Mr. Jones said the state is the "common enemy." We should hear what the DRB's members' relationship is with the state? When the state comes in with a proposal, do they treat the state any different than anybody else? How do they view that relationship? Clearly, the State of Vermont is a huge player in the future of the community. Wouldn't it be nice to talk with each other as to how we manage that relationship so it is an effective one? We could do that for half of the meeting.

Mr. Jones said they need to not only choose the topic areas but also the approach so they use the time effectively. He is hearing that the state issues are worth talking about.

Members expressed interest in an award to be presented at the All Board meeting. Mr. Paterson asked if there was someone who had served for many years and is no longer serving but you would like to recognize for historical service. There could be three or four. Ms. Hallsmith said they could recognize Phil Zalinger and Margot George who have served for 20 plus years. It is very objective and no selection required. Time served, such as 10 or 15 years, would be a good recognition.

Mr. Borgendale said regarding the state/city relationship, it would be good to solicit people for an inventory of issues that come up where there is some work needed with city/state relationships. Ask the various board members to identify various kinds of situations where there is some kind of process for managing state/city relationships. There are a whole range of issues. That would be something very helpful when you have that many people involved in city government in the same room.

Ms. Hallsmith said there is a \$40 million plus project being proposed and they are saying they don't have to pay the development review fees, for example.

Mr. Paterson asked if they couldn't invite the Parks Commission to the All Board meeting. Mr. Jones said it was a good idea. It is mainly relating to development. The Historic Commission and the Parks Commission wasn't involved. It was more the decision-making boards about land use and development.

Mr. Jones said there was a sentiment communicated from City Council and the City Manager's Office that we have to draw a line somewhere. He suggested that members draft an agenda for the All Board meeting for the Planning Commission to review at their next meeting. Mr. Paterson said he would do that.

enVision Montpelier:

Mr. Jones asked Gwen to review the current status of the October 9th meeting. Ms. Hallsmith said they would be holding the meeting in Noble Lounge instead of the Chapel at Vermont College. She has a schedule of all of the upcoming stakeholder meetings and where they are located from now until next November. One of the suggestions put forth for the October 9, 2007 meeting is that they get George Malek to come and give a presentation he has prepared on residential and commercial development's impact on tax base. The Economic Committee suggested it. At the last meeting they decided to rotate facilitation of the meetings among the different committees so that would suggest the Economics Committee would be the first to take on that rotating responsibility.

Ms. Hallsmith said she thinks having an agenda which includes new information with a presentation by an outside expert as part of each meeting is a good way to go. She doesn't want a repeat of the committees breaking apart each time. She needs to be with the committees when they are meeting.

Mr. Borgendale said they had either a \$15,000 or \$25,000 planning grant a couple of years ago to produce a really excellent study on growth.

Ms. Hallsmith said Michael Crane is coming in tomorrow and she has asked him to do our next work on a planning grant as well because he has the background to do it. They made that available to the Infrastructure Committee. Mr. Borgendale said it is of interest to more than the Infrastructure Committee.

Mr. Jones said if makes sense if a community grows it helps your tax base and therefore relieves tax burden. The fact is that in most communities that is not the case, but in Montpelier it may be the case. Mr. Borgendale said in some senses the city's infrastructure is really over built for what we own.

Mr. Paterson said the idea of bringing in outside experts or speakers to the various stakeholder meetings; do we want to continue to attract new people in the process? Ms. Hallsmith said perhaps they could get the new people to sign up for committees.

Ms. Benedict said she wasn't sure what the role of the committees. Ms. Hallsmith said the goals of all of the committees are to produce the goals for the plan, and the goals that are being produced are goals for how human needs will be met for a long time in the future. The hope is that the goals will be formulated sometime early next year. In the meantime during the committee meetings, each committee will identify learning objectives and do an asset inventory, which is what the Natural Environment Committee started working with.

Mr. Jones asked where the vision statement comes in.

Ms. Hallsmith said right now there are two processes underway simultaneously. One is the committee studying each of the individual issues, and the other is the public offering their vision. The VISTA volunteers were over at Shaw's getting the public to fill out surveys. As the public participation levels rise they will be compiling information on what people are saying, and then it will be up to the stakeholder group to set up their own subcommittee and task them with drafting the vision statement. The vision is supposed to be short and relatively inspirational, something that school kids could be assigned to memorize. The goals are more detailed, but even

the goals, because they are supposed to be for the long term, have a visionary quality to them when they are finished.

Mr. Jones asked what the relationship between the vision and the goals is.

Ms. Hallsmith said the vision is the broader and all encompassing thing people want to see for the city, and the goals are more like a detailed vision. Under the goals there are specific measurable targets, strategies and actions that move you toward the goal. The stakeholders are the ones who ultimately decide what the vision is.

Ms. Hallsmith reported the VISTA volunteers are working on developing a schedule of all of the different organizational meetings that occur in the city. There is a Sustainability Fair scheduled for October. She imagines the VISTA volunteers will be doing some of the research that is needed to bring information to the committees as well.

Ms. Benedict inquired how the Time Dollars meeting went.

Ms. Hallsmith said the meeting was great and there was a lot interest.

Mr. Borgendale asked if this was a barter system.

Ms. Hallsmith said it is very different than bartering in some ways. Barter is taxable; this is not. That is important. Barter is typically a one on one transaction, and this is a group exchange. Barter in the United States is taxable. The man who designed it was a leader in the anti-poverty programs in the Johnson Administration. He invented the whole system, partially because he saw the failure of the anti-poverty programs, and this system addresses some of those failures. The reason it is not taxable is because everybody's time is worth the same. It's out of the market. The Internal Revenue Service said these aren't market transactions. This is volunteerism.

Mr. Jones inquired if it had to be an institution that coordinates the program.

Ms. Hallsmith said there needs to be a coordinator and a central repository. They are working on finding a host organization. It is basically trading hour for hour. The city could host it, or a nonprofit could, or *The Bridge*. They are an important community institution that is worth supporting, and this might add to their portfolio to keep their staff on board.

Mr. Borgendale asked if there was money available to support the administrative costs.

Ms. Hallsmith said the group planning the time dollars is going to submit a grant application to our enVision Montpelier grant program. We need to come up with a match.

Mr. Jones reported that the Energy Team is putting its proposal together for the Coop. Somewhere down the road the way we buy electricity is going to change, whether we want it to happen or not. There has already been the separation of production, transmission and distribution. It may be much harder in the future to have single sources of electricity be contracted out for long periods of time. There is the thought that an energy service utility won't be selling electricity but selling a comfortably heated house. In other words, you give them the square feet of your house and the other dimensions, and depending upon how cold the winter is depends on how much you pay. It would be similar with lighting, refrigeration and appliances. You would no longer buy kilowatt hours but the appliance with its energy needs. The energy coop is a step towards that where you would get a comprehensive set of services introduced. This may very well link to the production of energy, heat and electricity in Montpelier.

Steering Committee Schedule:

October 4th is the only date that works for several people. October 11th at 5:30 was suggested as an alternative date since Mr. Jones couldn't make October 4th. A later date makes more sense for the Steering Committee to make because there might be proposals from the other committees.

Municipal Planning Grant Application:

Ms. Hallsmith sent a draft narrative to the Planning Commission for review. It is completed now. She said she had the current growth projections that go through the year 2020, and for Montpelier it shows a decrease steadily in population. From 1960 to 2020 this population shows a decline of 1,000 people – from a high of 8,700 to a low of 7,700. It is hard to plan for a lot of growth when you are shrinking. It is hard to justify a growth center.

Mr. Jones said this is where the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission comes in. They certainly want to encourage communities, such as Montpelier, to take a greater share of housing growth.

Ms. Hallsmith said the task list covers population projections, infrastructure and public service needs, infill analysis and developing the boundaries and the map of the growth center we would be proposing.

Mr. Jones said the growth designation area includes the current downtown. It is not a boundary adjacent to but including the current downtown. They talk about 80 percent of what you are envisioning future growth to be should be in the current downtown. How much can the current densely settled part of Montpelier accept in terms of additional square footage of commercial space and residential? Sabin's Pasture, for example, would be contiguous to the existing downtown; therefore, it would be part of the growth center designation.

Ms. Hallsmith said she needed a vote from the Planning Commission members saying they are in agreement with the grant application and recommend that to the City Council. The Chair needs to sign a form.

Mr. Borgendale moved the Planning Commission accept the recommendation for the planning grant, with Mr. Paterson seconding the motion. It was voted favorably 4-0.

Ms. Hallsmith said the City Council has to vote on it at its meeting Wednesday.

Other Business:

This included an update from the Regional Planning Commission. What do they want from us with regards to the housing study?

Mr. Borgendale said the meeting was devoted to two things. They had a presentation from the Northern Vermont Resource Conservation Development Council on "Better Back Roads." This is more of an interest to some of the smaller communities than Montpelier. There is a lot of USDA money that is available to help out. One of the big issues is fire protection with fire hydrants. The majority of the meeting was devoted to a review of this rather extensive compilation of statistical information about the Regional Planning Commission area. Their staff did it. It's a compilation of information from the census and the Department of Labor. There is a lot of analysis of housing, crime, educational levels, and employment.

Mr. Borgendale said he did find out the question in terms of what the methodology was for assigning the amount of housing growth in the draft. Based on population projections and other trends, they figured out how much additional housing is going to be needed within the area covered by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, which is predominantly Washington County. They took each town in the region and looked at what their five-year housing growth rate has been, basically on permit applications or septic permits, and projected them out. Then, they decided there were certain communities, Montpelier being one of them, that where the growth rate was so low it was ridiculous. They assumed that any community that was growing at less than the average growth rate in the region would grow at those rates and adjusted the growth rates accordingly. It was basically projecting current trends except for slow growth places.

East Montpelier has about the same allocation of housing growth as Montpelier.

One of the reasons he is interested in regional planning is that what he is troubled by in terms of our own city planning is if we do it in isolation we may win the battle but lose the war in terms of quality of life.

Mr. Jones said assuming the outlying communities continue to grow at the current rate is not the message in the text of the report. The text is saying you need to change the pattern. One message is to not just assume outlying towns should continue to grow at the same rate. The second message is, what are you going to do about it?

Mr. Borgendale said there was a lot of discussion about the trend towards an increasingly aging population. This is an amazing educated population in all of Central Vermont. Although what was unclear was how it compares to Vermont and the United States.

With regard to the floodplain regulations, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission said they could do a GIS analysis and show all of the properties that are affected.

Ms. Hallsmith said the Planning Department just discovered that the GIS data the city was provided was not reliable. The floodplain maps that were provided for digital use were not good and not even close. These were provided by FEMA. She said most of the floodplains in Montpelier have shrunk rather than grown. Mr. Jones asked what caused them to shrink.

Ms. Hallsmith said more accurate survey work, some of the river dynamics, and it could also speak to the inaccuracy of the old maps. Once the review and appeal process is completed on the floodplain maps, the city is under a time deadline to pass revised floodplain regulations to come into compliance with the national standards. The Regional Planning Commission has already drafted the language we need to use.

Mr. Jones asked Gwen Hallsmith if she was comfortable the review process is sufficient. Is she comfortable that all of the affected residents are given the opportunity to participate in the review process?

Ms. Hallsmith said in addition to the notification that the state has been making, she sent out an early notice to the flood list, which probably hits a lot of people who are property owners in the area. There is one little parcel way up on the North Branch where it is in the floodplain now and it wasn't, but there isn't a big change for the most part. The only thing the staff would like to do as the floodplain changes move forward is to use it as an opportunity to fix a few of the things in the current zoning that don't work. One is related to parking requirements. If you are building a single family house you are required to have 1.5 parking spaces per unit. She wants to get out of the half parking space business. Either make it 1 or 2. For example, Montpelier is trying to promote accessory apartments in the downtown. We have a person with a single family house with two parking spaces, which is plenty for his house and the accessory apartment in a very tight neighborhood up on Cliff Street where there is no room to put more parking. But because of the .5 assigned for a single family house, the parking requirement for his house and the apartment is 2.5 spaces, which means if he doesn't have 3 spaces he can't build the accessory apartment.

Growth Summary from the Stakeholder's Meeting:

It seemed that two-thirds of the people were more supportive of growth and one-third less supportive of growth. If there is more housing growth and we can address issues like automobile congestion, parking and open space, does that reduce peoples' concerns about growth? When there is a proposal to develop Sabin's Pasture, and Sabin's Pasture has elements to address automobiles and parking and open space, will people still be in opposition and make it hard for the public process to go forward? If there is a restriction on housing but we can address tax base, diversity and commercial issues, would that make people more amenable to restricting housing?

Mr. Borgendale said that one of the growth benefits not listed is that as the community grows the cultural richness grows. It also helps keep younger people here in Montpelier.

Next Planning Commission Meeting:

There will not be a regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting on October 9th. The next Planning Commission meeting will be on October 22nd. Mr. Jones said the web site for the City of Montpelier had the dates listed for the meetings of the Planning Commission for 2006. It doesn't for 2007. The Planning Commission meetings aren't necessarily warned but are regularly scheduled meetings, so there does need to be a

mechanism to communicate to the public when they are having a meeting. Ms. Hallsmith said they warn and post them. They are posted in City Hall.

Mr. Paterson moved that the Planning Commission's next formal meeting be on October 22nd. The motion was favorably voted 4-0.

Adjournment:

Mr. Borgendale moved adjournment, with Ms. Benedict seconding the motion. Planning Commission adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen Hallsmith, Director
Planning and Community Development

Transcribed and prepared by:
Joan Clack, City Clerk's Office