

**Montpelier Planning Commission**  
**April 25, 2011**  
**City Council Chambers, City Hall**

*Subject to Review and Approval*

**Present:** Jesse Moorman, Chair; Alan Goldman, Jon Anderson, Tina Ruth, Kimberly Cheney, and Megan Wingate.

Staff: Gwen Hallsmith, Director, Planning & Community Development

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Jesse Moorman, Chair, at 7:00 P.M.

Ms. Hallsmith reported that Jesse Moorman did point out that on May 25<sup>th</sup> the Planning Commission will be providing the City Council with an update on the rezoning process and he invited all the Planning Commission Members to attend.

**Review of April 12, 2011 Meeting:**

At least 50 people attended and it was fairly well distributed in terms of the neighborhoods. The town and county neighborhood is blank although there was one fairly prominent attendee from that neighborhood, David Putter. Several other neighborhoods didn't have anybody there. A lot of work was done on several of the neighborhoods, which was great. Our consultants from the Regional Planning Commission were there to explain how they derived the different neighborhoods.

Mr. Moorman said he is cognizant of one of the overarching themes of the process which is to try to achieve a more simplified user friendly code of regulations for zoning. There are 28 different neighborhoods, and that seems like it is a little more complex.

Ms. Hallsmith said one of the things they could talk about tonight is what the categories of neighborhoods are. There are 5 or 6 general categories of neighborhoods that most of them fall into. These categories of neighborhoods will have largely the same underlying zoning that exists there now and will be more specific around some of the particular dimensional requirements because that is where they get into a lot of variances. There are several neighborhoods they are classifying as rural that are very similar and right now in the current zoning they are all LDR – Low Density Residential. There are a couple of different kinds of low density residential areas. One is the areas that typically have fallen in the highlands so you have Pembroke Heights, western rural, eastern rural and highland rural. All of those are likely to stay the same as they are today, low density residential rural areas. But when you look up at the Wrightsville rural area, those are rural areas that are along major rivers or transportation corridors, there might be some differences between that rural area in terms of the kinds of uses that they might feel are appropriate and the types of dimensional requirements that might be good in particular areas from the top of North Street. There is a difference between Elm Street as you move up Route 12 and the top of North Street. Elevation is one; access to adequate transportation corridors is another; historical uses of the corridor. It is worth at least exploring if there are some minor differences that could make that a unique district.

Mr. Cheney asked Gwen if she could give him a hypothesis of what minor differences there might be.

Ms. Hallsmith replied that one of the things the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission asked is whether it would make sense to have in the Wrightsville area where there is already a cluster of fairly high density residential, even potentially mixed use, that it might be a little mixed rural area that would benefit from clustering and density bonuses to bring it together to a little village center whereas you wouldn't have that up at the top of North Street.

Mr. Cheney asked what a density bonus was.

Ms. Hallsmith replied that a density bonus is where the underlying zoning is for fairly large lots of 5 acres and 2 acres but if you cluster the development and preserve some of the resource areas that need to be protected you get additional units that might be able to be built in that little cluster of homes. We have it currently in our existing zoning where you can get up to a 25 percent density bonus if you are clustering if you are clustering in areas that avoid what are defined in our existing zoning as conservation lands. Those rural areas can be looked at as a group and think about their zoning as a group. It is the same with some of the other settled areas in the community. Park West and Berlin Street are fairly similar in terms of their existing underlying zoning being Medium Density Residential so they might want to consider all of the MDR areas where they have talked about increasing the density. The zoning will be quite similar in all of those areas but just minor changes in terms of the underlying dimensional requirements and uses and maybe some design issues. Instead of having a required a setback you have a place on the streetscape where the buildings are expected to touch so the streetscape develops in a coherent way in accordance with the surrounding existing uses and structures. If we go that route we need to look at what is actually there in the neighborhoods and how it works, and it might be slightly different for different areas but the general underlying zoning will largely be the same. There would be neighborhood development standards so we have standards for the neighborhoods that fit the neighborhood while we have overall city goals that met in other ways, either through the three large overlays we have described in the Master Plan, resource protection areas that are already described in the zoning.

Mr. Anderson said he wasn't sure he articulated the problems with the current ordinance but there is a use table and then dimensional tables, and then you have footnotes. What many towns do is say in this district the following uses are allowed and here are the dimensional requirements in 2 pages. He knows as a lawyer what difficulty it is to interpret what you can do in Montpelier. He can imagine what it is like for people who are not lawyers to figure that out.

Ms. Hallsmith responded by saying that the charts have led to some of the anomalies we have in districts. There are some errors in our zoning like not allowing wholesale and warehouses in the General Business District. That encompasses so much of what General Business is about where we have had problems where people want to start a wholesale business and it is a prohibited use. Her other favorite example is the Elks Club which is a prohibited use in its district. If you are looking at that district and see that clubs are prohibited but meanwhile that is one of the main uses there. It is changing it so it is better organized and easier to understand and we get rid of some of the dysfunctional elements and errors and an ordinance that is easier to use. We will have an ordinance where the neighborhoods will understand what they want and allow so you don't end up with people by taken by surprise when there is a development proposed in their communities because they have had a voice in what is described there without giving them a key to lock the door.

Isaac said they put together a summary of the formal public input. He explained the results of the survey to the Planning Commission. A copy is available in the Planning Office.

Mr. Anderson said he would like to see the rural areas where they can't get water and sewer as a separate area from the undeveloped areas where there is water and sewer. He would love to see the suburban areas discussed as a unit. The suburban areas he would think of as being characterized today with a lot of single family housing where you cannot walk to downtown in 20 minutes or less. The residential areas should be discussed together.

Ms. Hallsmith said the one last question they have with this, is there an order that makes sense to walk through all of the zones in the coming meetings? They have been given them an outline of what the upcoming meetings and proposed a process for coming to each of the meetings and suggestions and work

done. At the next meeting they are proposing an adjusted boundary draft for the Planning Commission's approval based on the feedback they have heard today. On the June 13<sup>th</sup> meeting they would present a tentative outline of neighborhood development standards in general. Then they would discuss the clusters of different zones. Next meeting they will come back with revised boundaries.

**District Energy Meeting:**

Ms. Hallsmith said they are having a public meeting/workshop/open house this Saturday about the various energy projects moving along in the city.

**REACH Project:**

The city has issued an RFP in the REACH Care Bank Project for a new partner on that project. They are looking for organizations that are interested in taking that program under their wing and the applications are due May 31<sup>st</sup>.

**District Heat Plant:**

The Senate Institutions Committee cut a big chunk of their funding out of the allocation in the Capital Bill. They moved it back to \$1.9 million from \$7 million and it is now going to Conference Committee and they are optimistic about it being restored in Conference Committee. They took \$5.1 million out of the project. If that passes the full Legislature the

project is dead. They are hoping it gets restored in the Conference Committee and goes to the full Legislature for a vote.

The HUD/DOT grant has been resurrected again this year. City Council voted to apply for it last year and she is hoping they resubmit it again this year. There have been some new developments in some of those areas that are exciting but she is constrained about telling the Planning Commission at the moment. But there is some exciting news to come for the city around the downtown redevelopment. They are hoping the grant and the new developments will lead to an improved Barre Street intersection area.

**Carr Lot:**

The Carr Lot is ready to have the Fonzi issued finally for all of the work that needs to be done and then we need to move into acquisition. We are beyond the flood issue.

**Adjournment:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jon Anderson and Alan Goldman the Planning Commission adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen Hallsmith, Director  
Planning & Community Development

Transcribed by: Joan Clack