

WATERBURY PLANNING COMMISSION
Unapproved Minutes
Monday, June 28, 2021

Planning Commission: Alyssa Johnson (Chair); Martha Staskus; Mary Koen; Steve Karcher.

Staff: Steve Lotspeich (Community Planner).

Alyssa Johnson (Chair), opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. at the Steele Community Room, 28 N. Main St. The Planning Commission (PC) members and staff participated in person and the meeting was also available via Zoom. No members of the public were in attendance.

AGENDA REVIEW AND MODIFICATIONS

The agenda was reviewed and approved as drafted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC

There were no members of the public attending to make comments and no announcements were made.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

MOTION:

Mary Koen moved and Steve Karcher seconded the motion to approve the minutes of June 14, 2021, as amended.

VOTE: The motion was approved 4 - 0.

CONSULTATION WITH CLARE ROCK, SENIOR PLANNER WITH THE CVRPC

Clare Rock with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) attended remotely and introduced herself. The Planning Commission members also introduced themselves. Clare has been with CVRPC since 2017. She worked previously as the Planner for the Town of Richmond, VT, and as the Zoning Administrator for the Town of Waterbury, just after Tropical Storm Irene occurred in 2011. She has a master's degree in sustainable landscape design and planning.

Clare presented the following information:

- The last consultation that CVRPC did with the Town of Waterbury was in 2017. The draft 2018 Waterbury Municipal Plan was reviewed by CVRPC and comments were provided to the Planning Commission. After the Plan was adopted by the Waterbury Select Board, the CVRPC Board of Commissioners approved the Plan along with Waterbury's planning process, and provided a certification of energy compliance. Municipal Plan approval allows municipalities to apply for municipal planning funds, as well as obtain the Downtown and Village Designations that Waterbury has.
- CVRPC is a political subdivision of the State of Vermont. CVRPC represents all the municipalities in Washington Co. plus the towns of Washington, Orange, and Williamstown that are located in Orange Co. The CVRPC Board of Commissioners meets on the second Tuesday of each month.
- The CVRPC Regional Plan is dated 2016 and expires in 2024. A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region is currently being worked on.

- The services provided by CVRPC include assistance with writing municipal plans, municipal planning studies, trails plans, transportation studies, and updates to zoning and subdivision bylaws. An example of these services is that Moretown is currently interested in examining the north Moretown area in the vicinity of the intersection of Routes 2 and 100. Since this is considered a “gateway” area for Waterbury, Clare asked if the Planning Commission would be interested in participating in the study. The PC members expressed interest in being involved in the study
- Some of the other programs of CVRPC are transportation planning, watershed planning, stormwater management planning, and emergency preparedness and response including developing Local Hazard Mitigation and Preparedness Plans.
- CVRPC will be a Clean Water Service Provider. In that role, they will help identify projects that will further the State of Vermont’s clean water targets.
- CVRPC coordinates their economic development planning work with the Central Vermont and Barre Area Development Corporations.
- CVRPC provides geographic information system (GIS) mapping services to the member municipalities. CVRPC staff also conduct various inventories for municipal roads and other infrastructure.
- The CVRPC training program includes providing roundtables for municipal road foremen, and planners and zoning administrators. The available training topics for planning commissions include the essentials of land use planning that can be broad or specific to the particular interests of the PC.

A question and answer period followed:

- Mary asked about the Regional Plan update process. It has been amended twice since 2016 including the addition of the regional Energy Plan. When the Regional Plan is updated, notice is sent to all the member municipalities. The work on the next Regional Plan comprehensive update, which must be approved in 2024, will start with outreach to the member municipalities this coming fall, 2021.
- Martha asked about the relationship between the Regional Plan and the state Climate Action Plan. The current work on the West Central Vt. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) may include outreach on energy issues. Alyssa said that she has provided input on the West Central CEDS.
- Mary commented that she encourages more effective communication between CVRPC and municipal planning commissions. Clare commented that CVRPC sends their weekly news blasts via e-mail to planning commission chairs. Clare will see if these weekly e-mail updates can go to all planning commission members. That will help improve communication.
- Alyssa asked how CVRPC can assist municipalities in gaining more local capacity to get planning projects accomplished. Some municipalities such as Middlesex dedicate municipal funds to hire consulting services for projects such as zoning bylaw updates. In Middlesex, the Camp Meade partnership is a private entity that helps with applying for grants related to planning. East Montpelier seeks CVRPC staff assistance on a fee for service basis. They also offer a stipend to their planning commission members. There is a growing movement to compensate community volunteers such as planning commission members. Some municipalities such as Montpelier invest in staff capacity through budgeting more funds annually. Montpelier has four planning and zoning staff in contrast to Barre City, a municipality of approximately the same population, that has only two planning and zoning staff funded.

- Steve L. asked about other options for training that CVRPC can offer for planning commissions. Clare responded that they can offer the following: Housing – there may be state housing funds that can be used to update zoning bylaws to support the development of housing. Economic Development – training could focus on supporting economic development in downtown areas. Section 248 (the state energy law) – the state Dept. of Public Service has staff that can assist with learning about and navigating the state permitting process for renewable energy generation projects. The state Enabling Better Places Guide – CVRPC followed up on the study with consulting assistance including outreach with a public opinion survey. Middlesex was also a case study town in the development of the guide.
- It was asked if there are funds to assist with drafting the phases for implementing a Unified Development Bylaw? The state Municipal Planning Grant funds are the best source for hiring either the CVRPC or a private consultant to assist with this process. It was commented that there is a need for support and guidance to back up the Planning Commission’s work in areas such as updating dimensional requirements as they relate to promoting higher density housing. CVRPC provides 12 hours per year of GIS services to each of the member municipalities at no charge. Any mapping services beyond the 12 hours requires a fee for the service charged on an hourly basis. Other planning services are handled on a case-by-case basis and each fee proposal by CVRPC is provided based on the scope of the services requested by the municipality.

Clare presented a “snapshot” of housing data for Waterbury and the Central Vermont region that came from the www.housingdata.org website. This website is an excellent source of data at a local/county/state level. The Planning Commission requested the specific source of the data in each of the slides. Clare will provide the PC members with her slides along with the sources of the data. The emerging issues of short-term rental of properties and the impact on long-term housing and affordability was discussed. The Mad River Valley towns are considering establishing a short-term rental registry to assist with providing data to inform discussion of this issue.

Clare said that she is available via e-mail if Planning Commission members have further questions as a follow-up to this consultation. She will be providing a letter to the Planning Commission documenting her presentation this evening.

DISCUSS THE DRAFT UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT BYLAW – PHASE #1

Steve L. gave an overview of the additions he made to the draft Unified Development Bylaw – Phase #1, incorporating the parking and design review overlay district bylaws from the overall Unified Development Bylaw. The draft is now in tracked changes with the edits agreed to at the last Planning Commission meeting shown in tracked changes. Steve L. recommended that the draft Unified Development Bylaw – Phase #1 be kept as Article XVI of the Zoning Regulations and other Articles in the Zoning Regulations such as those including the parking design review overlay district bylaws can also be amended. Ultimately the document will be shown in one tracked changes draft that will include all the current and amended zoning and subdivision bylaws. The ultimate organization of the draft Unified Development Bylaw – Phase #1 will need to be discussed further at a future PC meeting and agreed on.

In order to incorporate changes that the Planning Commission has previously agreed to, Mary, Martha and Steve L. will meet prior to the next PC meeting. The goal of that meeting will be to put all the changes in an updated tracked changes version of the Unified Development Bylaw – Phase #1 to be shared with the PC prior to the next meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Steve L. provided an update on the plan to re-organize the Planning and Zoning Department. The job descriptions for the three new positions, the Planning and Zoning Director, Assistant Planning & Zoning Administrator, and Acting Zoning Administrator were updated to incorporate the PC's comments from the last meeting and sent to the municipal attorney for final comments. The PC would like to make sure that grant writing and grant administration are listed as one of the primary roles of the Planning and Zoning Director. The next step is for Bill Shepeluk and Steve L. to present the reorganization plan and job descriptions to the Select Board at their next meeting on Tuesday, July 6th. PC members are welcome to attend that meeting and participate in the discussion. As long as the Select Board agrees to the reorganization plan, the position of the Assistant Planning & Zoning Administrator will be advertised.
2. Regarding state permitting, Steve L. discussed the fact that Waterbury is a one-acre town for commercial projects that require state Act 250 review. When Waterbury enacted subdivision bylaws as part of amending the Zoning Regulations in 2012, an ordinance was subsequently passed in 2013 that requires all commercial projects on parcels of one-acre or more to go through Act 250. Members of the development and consultant community in Waterbury have been advocating for that ordinance to be rescinded so Waterbury can become a 10-acre town for Act 250 review. Then commercial projects on parcels of ten acres or more will require Act 250 permit review. This change would provide a cost savings for development projects on parcels between one and ten acres. The Select Board's concern in the past has been whether Waterbury's development review process for commercial projects is robust enough to assure quality development on smaller parcels. Steve L. said that there are additional review criteria in the Act 250 permit review process, such as those dealing with traffic and historic preservation issues, that are very limited in our local review criteria for these projects. The issue of possibly rescinding the ordinance will be discussed at an upcoming Select Board meeting.
3. Alyssa reported that she participated in the West Central Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that covers the following four counties: Washington, Chittenden, Addison, and Rutland. With the completion of this CEDS, all counties in Vermont will be covered by one of the CEDS.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular scheduled Planning Commission meeting will be held on Monday, July 12 at 7:00 p.m. This meeting will be a hybrid of in-person, and remote via Zoom.

ADJOURNMENT

The Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 09:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Lotspeich, Acting Secretary