

**MEETING MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING VIA TELECONFERENCING
6:00 PM MONDAY, MAY 18, 2020**

Approved June 15, 2020

Board Members Present: Stan Bradeen, Chair; Denise Smith, Vice-Chair; Michael Gawne; Luke Richter

Board Members Absent: Amy Paradis

Staff Members Present: Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning Development; Wendy Coy, Minute Taker

Public Present: Winnie Wilkinson

- 1. Open Meeting – Chair Bradeen called the meeting to order at 6:18 pm.**
 - a. Introduction of Public Attendees – Winnie Wilkinson**
 - b. Public Comment on issues not on the agenda – None**
 - c. Discuss additions or deletions to the agenda – See Other section**

- 2. Approval of Minutes:**
 - a. April 27, 2020 Meeting Minutes – Member Gawne made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Vice-Chair Smith seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor, except one abstention by Member Richter.**

- 3. Other Business –**
 - a. Planning & Development update –** Mr. Sawyer reviewed the state of the Downtown businesses. All projects are going on as planned. Vice-Chair Smith asked if there were any businesses that were not opening. Mr. Sawyer stated that What A Yarn moved to the owner’s house. The Old Foundry closed and the Frozen Ogre is moving to Kingman street. The City no longer owns Maiden Lane. The closing happened last week.
 - b. Update on State Housing Legislation –** Chair Bradeen stated that he did not finish the letter that he is working on for the State Legislature. Mr. Sawyer stated that the State Committee would be reading testimonies on Wednesday May 20, 2020. Chair Bradeen had read the testimony that Mr. Sawyer prepared and felt that it might be not forceful enough. Mr. Sawyer stated that there is a lot in the bill that the City likes. He wanted the State Finance Committee to consider the house bill that had all of the things that the City likes without the preemptions. The State should have told the City that they wanted more housing in the city without putting in preemptions. The City doesn’t mind having more housing in the city but wants the City itself to be able to decide how to plan it. Member Gawne asked what percentage of the housing in the cities should be low income housing. Mr. Sawyer stated that the numbers have never been figured out by the State and they seem to be leaping over the answer to that question and just regulating the increased housing density. Chair Bradeen stated that this proposal shows that the City is not getting credit for the things the City is already doing. The State is

mandating a solution that doesn't address the underlying problem. If the State wants the person at the gas station to afford the housing, double the minimum wage so people can have better housing. Mr. Sawyer stated that this breaks the City's relationship with the State. He would like to keep the relationship that works - the State sets goals and communities plan how to accomplish those goals. Chair Bradeen asked that the testimony being sent have a couple of sentences up front that acknowledges the good things and the bad things. Chair Bradeen stated that, if this were approved, there would be some who would immediately come in and start adding apartments to lots. Member Gawne stated that this would be the broken glass syndrome. If the neighborhood starts going downhill, people will start selling the larger houses and the people who buy them will turn them into four or five unit unattractive apartments. Spending the money on small square footage new housing stock is not going to improve the older housing stock. It would not be putting money back into the older houses but simply creating new housing stock. Vice-Chair Smith stated that this completely ignores all the work that the local Planning Commissions have done on this issue already. Chair Bradeen stated that this is a land-based solution and it should not be. Member Richter stated that this is an urban solution applied to a rural area and it doesn't work. He felt that the regulations are death to the rural town. Ms. Wilkinson stated there is an opportunity for mixed use.

- c. **Next Meeting Date** – June 15, 2020 6:00 p.m. The Commission agreed to keep this meeting date.
- d. **Other** –
 - i. **Use Definitions** - Member Gawne wanted to be sure that the issues with the definitions that were brought up at the last meeting were still on the agenda for the Planning Commission. Mr. Sawyer stated that they were.
 - ii. **Section 414** – Member Gawne felt that this section was too vague and sent a memo to the Commission. Per the Vermont Supreme Court, if the regulations are too vague with no standards you may as well have nothing at all. The decision would not be in favor of the municipality. Mr. Sawyer stated that most of the municipalities have the ability for the Development Review Board to have some leeway so that when a use is presented to them that was not previously thought of they can make a decision. Member Gawne stated that if there is something that occurs that is not a use that was not previously thought of it should come back to the Planning Commission so that the Commission can consider whether that use is what is wanted in the area. Member Richter asked if a process could be installed. Mr. Sawyer stated that a process could be installed. He suggested that the Commission start by comparing our Section 414 with other municipalities and have a legal review of it. The City Council approves the regulations and the Development Review Board is the entity that has to make the decision. The Development Review Board is trusted by the City Council to make good decisions. The Commission can't remove the need for interpretation from the DRB.

- iii. Historical Residences - Vice-Chair Smith asked if the City was still going to look at the historical residences in the Districts. Mr. Sawyer stated that they need to look at having a historic home be allowed to have different density rules.

4. Discuss proposals for Land Development Regulations – Mr. Sawyer started with the current status of the proposal.

- a. **Updated Light Green Boundaries** – Mr. Sawyer stated that he still needs to develop the transverse boundary rule. Chair Bradeen asked if the density rules had been changed as the Commission discussed. There should be an intermediate between 70% and another density percentage. Mr. Sawyer stated that he didn't want to have grandfathered properties. Member Gawne stated that the set back requirements and the parking requirements would keep the buildings where they are. The Commission reviewed each page of the proposal. Chair Bradeen stated that he felt the boundaries on Lake Street should encompass more of the backyards. Member Richter asked if this would be considered a sneaky way of regulating what people can do with their backyards. Mr. Sawyer stated that, on Lake Street, this would be upzoning. They can do more with their lots than they could before. Member Richter asked if the same thing was being done to Federal and North Main. Mr. Sawyer stated that Federal and North Main was limiting what could be done on those properties, because they are already in the B2 District. Mr. Gawne stated that the Commission should look at the lots and see what could be developed on the yards. There is not much that could be done with them. Chair Bradeen accepted it as is. He discussed the Commission's walk through on Spruce Street and that many of the residents were unhappy with the businesses encroaching into the residential. He wanted to make sure that the Commission did their due diligence. The Commission felt that they had.
- b. **The Dimensional Standards have been moved into a single comparison table** – Mr. Sawyer reviewed the new table. He still needed to augment the Design Review section and access management. It will be done by next month.
- c. **Proposal for Use Definitions** - Mr. Sawyer stated that he did definitions for the allowed uses in the proposed Res-Prof District that had no definitions. He used one definition for recreation and suggested that the use table have further restrictions. The catch is that most of the City's parks are located in the Low Density Residential District and they are actually not allowed in the Low Density Residential District. Chair Bradeen asked Member Gawne if these definitions took care of his concerns with the definitions. Member Gawne stated that it was a good beginning but that he would like to sit down with Mr. Sawyer and go over all of the uses that were still undefined.
- d. **South Main Street** – Mr. Sawyer stated that he was not done with South Main Street. It is not the same flavor as North Main Street. The properties do not all have the same look and feel. He stated that the City could use the Design Review rules to maintain the flavor of the neighborhood without settling the uses as well. Chair Bradeen stated that he wanted to have a Professional – Residential district between Stowell and Upper Gilman but leave the other uses as they were. Member Gawne stated that he felt that the residential housing around the Industrial Park would eventually fade away. Mr. Sawyer stated that the City could stay the course and have this corridor be a gateway

commercial district with a focus on commercial strip controls. Vice-Chair Smith stated that she sees a lot of people walking in that area. Member Gawne stated that he felt the City should work with the Town to figure out how to make Greater St. Albans a better place.

5. Adjourn

Member Gawne made a motion to adjourn at 8:07 pm. Member Richter seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.