

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**REGULAR MEETING VIA TELECONFERENCING**  
**6:00 PM MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2020**

*Approved August 17, 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:** None.

- 1. Open Meeting – Chair Bradeen called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.**
  - a. Introduction of Public Attendees – None**
  - b. Public Comment on issues not on the agenda – None**
  - c. Discuss additions or deletions to the agenda –** Member Gawne stated that he would like to discuss Section 414. Vice-Chair Smith stated that she would like to add a discussion on inclusivity and diversity.
  
- 2. Approval of Minutes:**
  - a. May 18, 2020 Meeting Minutes – Member Gawne made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Member Richter seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**
  
- 3. Other Business –**
  - a. Planning & Development update -** \$6,700 of Downtown dollars are out in the field. Member Richter asked if this program resembles a program that they had in Ithica, NY. Mr. Sawyer stated that Ithica was one of the first to run a program like this. Vice-Chair Smith asked how often businesses were reimbursed. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was once a month.
  - b. Update on State Housing Legislation –** Mr. Sawyer stated that Bill S237 went to Senate Environmental and Natural Resources. VT League of Cities and Towns and Vt Planners were present for the meeting. All stated that this was a heavy handed approach to City Planning. Due to the input, the committee stripped out many of the mandates over the weekend. S237 goes to Senate Economic Development next. If SED agrees approves, it will go to a summer program. The general consensus of the City Planners and League was if you give us target, we will plan to meet them but don't set the limits. Two of the mandates were left in the bill which Mr. Sawyer did not see a large problem with them. One of them is that any district where there is multi-unit housing you need to allow 4 unit housing regardless of the character of the neighborhood. Without the rest of the mandates, the City will have more control over the implementation of that mandate. Chair asked if the City would get a chance to testify in front of the Senate Economic Development Committee. Mr. Sawyer stated that there wouldn't be an opportunity to

testify in front of the Senate again. Chair Bradeen encouraged everybody on the Commission to open the original bill and review it. It is not an affordable / subsidized Housing Bill. The focus of the original bill was gap housing. Member Richter stated that this seems like a mandate that allows for slums. It will discourage the things that the Planning Commission is doing. You will get a lot of chopped up old houses. The Commission discussed the support they received from Representatives Brock and Parent. Representative Parent enabled them to testify. Mr. Sawyer stated that the Planning Community ended up in a bait and switch. They were told that the Governor would not support a mandate. They stopped tracking the bill when they were informed of that. It was written as a mandate which is when they started tracking it and fighting it.

- c. **Next Meeting Date** – July 20, 2020 6:00 p.m. The Commission discussed whether it would be in person or remotely. Mr. Sawyer stated that there hadn't been a discussion yet as to when the meetings would be held in person. The Commission agreed to keep this meeting date.
- d. **Other** –
  - i. **Diversity and Inclusion** – Vice-Chair Smith suggested discussions and training for the Boards and Commission. She stated that it was important for the Communities to be allies. She thought that training should be mandatory. Chair Bradeen stated that he did not object to training sessions. He was concerned that trainings would be considered sufficient. He would like to see a lot less training and a lot more action. He suggested reaching out Ms. Wilkenson, who has attended meetings and is active in the Community, to see if she would like to join a Board or Commission. Vice-Chair Smith stated that training would at least be a starting point. Mr. Sawyer stated that they can take anyone on the Boards at any time as an alternate. Chair Bradeen mentioned that they are many diverse members of our community that could be included in our Boards and Commissions. Vice-Chair Smith stated that she thought the letter that the City Council sent out showed true leadership and she wanted that appreciation expressed to the Council.
  - ii. **Section 414** – Member Gawne reviewed the memo that he sent to the members that outlined other towns regulations. He liked the Swanton regulations the best due to the approach of anything not listed as permitted or conditional is prohibited. He suggested two different approaches in his memo. Mr. Sawyer stated that we need to enable to ourselves to solve problems and, if we go to the model of all uses that are not specified are prohibited until they are approved, it might become problematic. He would like to consult a lawyer on behalf of the City. Member Gawne stated that he spoke with Meagan Manahan, who was the Chair of the Development Review Board for many years, and she preferred the Swanton approach. Chair Bradeen stated that he would like to leave it until Mr. Sawyer has the opportunity to look into it further.

#### 4. Discuss proposals for Land Development Regulations –

- a. **Dwelling Unit Bonus Program for Neighborhood Rehabilitation** – The focus of the program is to allow for a density of units over what would be normally allowed if it can be shown that it would be financially beneficial. Mr. Sawyer reviewed the outline of the program. Mr. Sawyer stated that the City has an interest in getting this program moving due to 99 High Street. There are four primary phases to this program:
- i. **Phase 1 Financial and Feasibility Analysis**– The City will vet the proposal first. They have certain criteria and can analyze whether the proposal meets the criteria
  - ii. **Phase 2 Design Review** – The proposal would go to the Design Review Board. They would have thirty days to review the proposal. The DAB is an advisory Board to the Development Review Board.
  - iii. **Phase 3 Development Review** – It would go to the Development Review Board for a Conditional Use Review. The DRB would have to concur with the City on the financials and the feasibility. Once it is public, there would be 30 days for any public issues to be brought before the Board.
  - iv. **Phase 4 Implementation and Jurisdiction** – All the design pieces would need to be maintained in perpetuity until sometime that the regulations may be changed.

Mr. Sawyer used the example of 99 High Street to show what would need to be done to be eligible for this program. He also reviewed 65 Congress Street. Chair Bradeen stated some of the concerns. He stated:

1. The interior layout needed to be reviewed for quality and accessibility
2. It would need to be brought up to utility standards / codes.
3. Strike the word historic from the Design Review section as this is not just for historic homes.
4. There should be a definition of decrepit. There should be objective criteria.
5. Parking should be key to the number of bedrooms or square footage.
6. He stated that this begs the question of building standards.

Member Gawne stated that the listers and City appraisers do assign functional and economic obsolescence and physical deterioration to properties. It might be used to help the definition. Vice-Chair Smith asked if a mansion that was originally designed for a large family would be considered functionally obsolete. Member Gawne stated that it might. Member Richter asked about codes for utilities. Member Gawne stated that public standard codes apply to any structure that is not a single-family home. Member Richter stated that he would like to see this for all old homes not just the historic. Vice-Chair Smith stated that she lives next to a multi-unit house. There can be issues but it depends on who you rent to. It needs to be done in congruence with the neighborhood. She wants it to add value to the community not deterioration. The partnership between the owner and the City will help with that. Mr. Sawyer stated that most of the problem properties, in the City, are rental properties. Mr. Sawyer suggested that there should be some screening for a gathering area. He stated that the issues that repeatedly come up

is reduction of setbacks, parking and density. Chair Bradeen asked about a condominium situation so that the people have more of a stake in the community. Mr. Sawyer state that there could be an owner-occupied condition. Member Gawne stated that there might be an issue with constitutionality on their financial ability to purchase a home; can you discriminate against someone who is from out of town. Member Richter stated that he didn't see the discrimination. Chair Bradeen stated that he didn't want to discount the idea of having a developer renovate the home for sale. The City would give you three units if it is owner occupied and only two if it isn't owner occupied. Member Gawne stated that he believes that Champlain Housing Trust has something like that. Chair Bradeen stated that they wanted to encourage reinvestment in our communities. Member Richter stated that this was a good start.

## **5. Adjourn**

**Vice-Chair Smith made a motion to adjourn at 8:07 pm. Member Richter seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.**