

**MEETING MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
6:00 PM MONDAY AUGUST 20, 2018
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NO. MAIN STREET**

Approved September 17, 2018

Board Members Present: Amy Paradis, Vice-Chair; Jackie DesLauriers; Michael Gawne; Stan Bradeen; Luke Richter

Board Members Absent: David Barber, Chair

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

Public Present: None.

1. **Open Meeting – Vice Chair Paradis called the meeting to order at 6:08 pm.**
 - a. **Discuss additions or deletions to the agenda – None**

2. **Approval of Minutes – Member Gawne submitted changes to the July 16, 2018 minutes. Member Gawne made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Vice-Chair Paradis seconded the motion. It passed unanimously**

3. **Discuss Municipal Planning Grant Application for Historic Structure Inventory –** Mr. Sawyer reviewed the memo that he had submitted to the Commission. In 2010, the City was designated as a growth center. When the City was originally designated, there was going to be a historic survey but it never happened. It was apparent that the City didn't know about the neighborhood streets survey done in the 1980's. Mr. Sawyer stated that he thinks a survey of what the City has in terms of historic buildings and archeological hotspots would be a good idea. The grant would be a good funding source. Member Bradeen suggested that a group of volunteers would be able to help with the grunt work.

Member Gawne made a motion that the application resolution be signed by the Planning Commission Chair, David Barber, and that the application be forwarded the City Council for review. Member Richter seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

4. **Discuss Land Development Regulations**
 - a. **Design standards in neighborhoods and business districts –** Mr. Sawyer reviewed the current design standards that apply to the Design districts. Mr. Sawyer stated that he would like to see the rules around accessory structures cleaned up as they have built up over the years. Mr. Sawyer reviewed the form based codes that are used in the Business-Neighborhood Transition (BNT) District. Member Gawne asked where the Business-Neighborhood Transition district was as he didn't see it on the map. Mr. Sawyer stated that the BNT was a land-use district not a design district and showed the Commission the buildings that are in the BNT. Mr. Sawyer stated that the Commission is

going to have to decide if the DAB would work as a way to keep the design of the neighborhoods consistent. He felt that the Commission was going towards the form based standards being the first design standard for home owners. If the home owner didn't deviate from the form based code, the Zoning Administrator could approve it and work with the home owner. If the home owner wanted to deviate from the form based standards, the design would have to go in front of the DAB who would fall back on the form based codes. Member Bradeen asked about the proposed Design Review Districts for 08.20.2018. The red would be the historic Downtown Design Review. This would include the Historic District and some buildings that are considered historic but are not in the Downtown Historic District. The purple would be the Downtown Neighborhood Design Review. These buildings need to be in this district as they make up the Downtown area. The blue is the Gateway Design Review. Many of these parcels are extremely deep but the idea was that only the part of the parcel that is viewed by the road would be subject to the design review. Member Bradeen asked if we should have a view shed survey done to see what is visible from the road and draw the line there. Mr. Sawyer stated that the Commission would have to be careful in how the line was drawn if the entire lot wasn't included. The idea was that the whole parcel be included in the District but enforce the design review where the parcel is visible from the road. Mr. Sawyer stated that he thinks that there is starting to be overreach in the regulations that make it difficult and daunting to the homeowner to do improvements on their property and homes. Member Bradeen asked if we really want a strip of commercial properties when coming into the City. Member Gawne stated that, Route 7 being what it is with the truck traffic and the industrial park, it is not a prime residential district. Mr. Sawyer stated that the way to limit the strip feel is with curb cuts and to put the parking lots in the back of the buildings. Member Bradeen stated that it is hard not to have a strip feel when it is a strip leading into the City. Mr. Sawyer suggested that the form based codes be used to make the strip look more residential. Member Gawne stated that the view that the Commission is looking at is very specific. If the St. Albans Town districts were also added, it would not look so much like a strip. He believed that the Commission should talk to the Town and tell them what they are planning so that there can be a more cohesive look. He asked Mr. Sawyer to approach the Town Planning Director to see if he would like to attend a meeting and give his input on the Gateway into the City. Mr. Sawyer wants to make sure that the time spent on that conversation accomplishes what the Commission wants to accomplish. Member DesLauriers stated that it would be in the Town's best interest to have a nice looking Gateway as well. Member Richter stated that we want to avoid the abandoned gas stations but we don't want to make it so restrictive that it is cost prohibitive for development. Mr. Sawyer stated that the City needs to have its design districts set before it asks the Town to do anything. He stated that step 1 was to decide what our gateway district was to look like. Step 2 would be to go to the town and talk about how the City would like their part of the District to look. There should be a defined start to the City. Member Bradeen stated that he doesn't like the Gateway concept. He associates Gateway with strip. He believes that the district should be residential on the east side of Route 7 and on the West side could be a more commercial look as that seems to be the trend now. Mr.

Sawyer stated that Gateway Design District is not a land use district. It is a design district that defines the amount of scrutiny that a design would receive. Member Gawne suggested that there be sub districts inside the Gateway district. Member Bradeen was agreeable to that suggestion. Mr. Sawyer reviewed the City Neighborhood Design District showing that it is the largest design district proposed. Member Bradeen suggested that form based codes be used for the City Neighborhood Design Review instead of going before the DAB every time. Mr. Sawyer stated that to have a form based code for the City Neighborhood Design Review District would necessitate a form based code design for each individual street as there is a large variety of designs in the City Neighborhoods Design Review. Member Richter clarified that going before the DAB would only be for new buildings and not existing ones so there would be a very small portion buildings going before the DAB. The Commission discussed what kind of changes existing homes needed to be undergoing before the DAB got involved. Member Bradeen stated that we need to separate substantial changes to existing structures from notification of changes. Vice-Chair Paradis stated that it will be tough to define what constituted a substantial or major change. She stated that there had to have been other cities that have defined major changes and that the Commission could look at those regulations. Mr. Sawyer agreed.

- b. **Other** – Member Gawne suggested another walking tour of a district before winter comes in. Member Bradeen would like to look at North Main or South Main Street. The Commission decided to do the Gateway districts.

5. Other Business –

- a. **Updates on Route 7 Livability Connection Project** – Member Bradeen commented that he would like to see an emphasis continue to be made on a separate bike path instead of a bike lane along the side of the street. Member Gawne stated that he would like to see the bike lane go down to Federal Street and utilize the rail siding that is already there. It would give a protected bike lane and it would bring the Rail Trail directly into Downtown St. Albans. Mr. Sawyer stated that the plan would depend on what happens with Fonda.
- b. **Planning & Development Update** – Member Gawne thanked Mr. Sawyer for the email that gave a good update.
- c. **Other** – Vice-Chair Paradis mentioned that she sent a letter to the mayor asking that she be allowed to stay on the Commission even though she is moving to Sheldon. Member Richter mentioned that he might also be moving. Mr. Sawyer stated that the Commissioner terms for Vice-Chair Paradis, Member Bradeen and Member DesLauriers would be expiring at the end of the year.

6. Public Comment – None

Member Gawne made a motion to adjourn at 7:56. Member Bradeen seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.