

**Meeting Minutes**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**VIA TELECONFERENCE**  
**6:00 PM MONDAY OCTOBER 19, 2020**

*Approved November 16, 2020*

**Board Members Present:** Stan Bradeen, Chair; Denise Smith, Vice-Chair; Michael Gawne; Amy Paradis; Zac Nuse.

**Board Members Absent:** Luke Richter.

**Staff Members Present:** Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning Development; Wendy-Ayn Coy, Minute Taker; Dominic Cloud, City Manager.

**Public Present:** Erika, no last name given.

1. Open Meeting – Chair Bradeen called the meeting to order at 6:07 pm.
  - **Introduction of Attendees** – Erika, no last name given.
  - **Public Comment on issues not on the agenda** – Erika attended the meeting so that she could follow up on a suggestion that she made to City Councilor Jim Pelkey about a crosswalk on Calvary St. She lives on Finn Avenue. There has been an increased number walkers to and from school. With the parking, there is a blind spot and drivers have trouble seeing students. She would like an assessment made, during the busiest times, on putting a crosswalk on that road. She has spoken with the SRO who agreed that it wasn't safe. Mr. Cloud stated that Mr. Pelkey had been in touch with the City and that a crosswalk will be put up as soon as the weather allows. Mr. Cloud asked for the busiest times and gave his email to Erika.
  - **Discuss additions or deletions to the agenda** – None
  
2. **Approval of Minutes** –
  - **August 17, 2020 provisional minutes** - Member Paradis made a motion to approve as presented. Vice-Chair Smith seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously
  - **September 21, 2020 minutes** – Member Gawne made a motion to approve as presented. Vice-Chair Smith seconded the motion. It passed with all in favor, except one abstention by Member Paradis.
  
3. **Public Hearing on proposed amendments to Land Development Regulations** – At 6:18 the public hearing was opened.
  - **Presentation by Staff** – Mr. Sawyer presented the amendment with the recent revisions. The City is tracking seventeen vacant homes at the moment two of which are blighted. They are 99 High Street and 21-23 Lincoln Avenue. They have a vacant permit program that helps the City prevent homes from becoming blighted but blighted homes come up suddenly. Any blighted home is considered a significant issue for the neighborhood.

- **Public Comment** – Mr. Cloud gave several different points to the Commission to consider.
  - A. Simplicity – Is there a way to simplify this. The amendment is well thought out but it might be an overly prescriptive process. He thought that the property owner should be allowed to make their case and perhaps it would inspire the Board.
  - B. Definition of blight is too narrow - In order for the City to be involved it would have to be abandoned. This would prevent some opportunities. Maybe the bar should be lowered and part of the assessment should be talk about the care and appearance of the property.
  - C. Site plan process – The issue comes down to cars. Where are they going to park; what is it going to look like. The tough scenario is corner lots. If all of it needs to be screened, it could cause problems down the road. Today’s nice hedge row is tomorrow’s overgrown nuisance.
  - D. Exempt certain lot sizes – He liked this idea. likes the idea of being able to exempt certain lot sizes; instead of writing for a specific number you might what you need from one additional unit; any number of property owners who he would not want to be part of this program but can’t prevent it.
  - E. Noticing – There should be a provision for noticing the neighbors

- **Commissioner comments and consideration of edits/revisions** –

The Commission took up the conversation about the proposal from where it ended at the September meeting, during which Member Nuse’s written comments were partially discussed. In addition to his comments, the Commission also considered Member Gawne’s written comments presented at this meeting. Many of those comments were adopted in the second draft of the proposed amendment prepared by Mr. Sawyer.

Member Gawne sent a memo that discusses some of the same things Mr. Cloud had concerns with. He used Rugg Street as an example. It started as a walking community but automobiles have become ubiquitous and are a practical necessity. There needs to be some creativity to preserve the neighborhood and still have the automobile. A possibility is one way streets to accommodate cars. In 1790 35.8% of households had 7 or more people in them. In 2006 1% of households has 7 or more people in them. Many of these houses have become single family dwellings in houses that were designed for many more people. He would like homes to be eligible for approval before they become blighted and believes that the Commission will eventually get to that point.

Member Nuse agreed with the screening concerns. If it is mandated it will need to be managed and it could create more of an eyesore. He also agreed with the simplicity and brevity issue. This should be the simplest decision to make based on needs and money. Do want people to improve their homes and/or reuse existing homes.

Member Paradis agreed that the definition of blighted homes is too narrow.

Chair Bradeen stated that the City has an architectural heritage of buildings that need to be adaptively reused. He reminded the Commission of the starting point of this amendment. He posed the question does this amendment too narrow of a scope. If it is, what should we do.

Vice-Chair Smith stated that they were trying to solve a problem for blighted historic homes that need owners. This is supposed to entice redevelopment. Should the Commission take what has been done and broaden it or focus on the way it is drafted this point in time.

Mr. Sawyer responded that that is the question that the Commission needs to answer. Broadening the definition will take a lot of time as each person has a different idea of how it should be broadened and implemented. Each person knows a home that we think should be part of this program but he is not sure each person would agree on each house. Without speculation and without subjectivity there are properties in the City that people would not buy without more units being allowed. He felt that 65 Congress was an outlier and has damaged the conversation.

Chair Bradeen stated that this amendment should be considered because it is defined. The limited definition does not preclude expansion later. The Commission can see how the program goes and expand later. The City has a broader need than this amendment addresses.

Mr. Sawyer believes that this proposal is simpler than the verbosity indicates; The DRB feels more comfortable when everything is spelled out. This amendment should provide simplicity, flexibility and the ability to provide what any given property needs.

- **Section 2 Article 4, Section 418 –**
  - A. Purpose – If owner occupied is favored it will scare off some investors. The feeling being that owner occupied would get the proposal over a developer without really considering the merits of each proposal. The Commission decided against this at the moment.
  - B. Under Section 418 - Two is a duplicate of 1. Does the section need to be mentioned specifically as, if sections are changed, this will need to be changed. It mentions a section of the rules that specifically prevents you from expanding the number of units. Wording was added to clarify.
  - C. None
  - D. Financial and feasibility Analysis – This amendment will run into problem with the City Council if there isn't a way to exclude landlords who consistently do not maintain their properties. There should be a list of items that are needed to be deemed complete. It will be drafted.
  - E. Design Review – The review of the amendment ended with section 2.D
- **Consider motion to close hearing - Member Gawne made a motion to recess the public hearing until 5:30 p.m. on November 16, 2020. Member Paradis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

- **Consideration of motion to refer the amendments and planning commission report to City Council** – No motion was made.
4. **Discuss Statutory / technical updates and corrections to Land Development Regulations** – Not addressed at this meeting
  5. **Regular Business**
    - **Planning and Development Update** - None
    - **Update on equity/inclusion training** – None
    - **2020 City Council Priorities** - None
    - **Next meeting date** – **November 16, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.**
    - **Other** - None
  6. **Adjourn** - Member Gawne made a motion to adjourn at 8:00 PM. Vice-Chair Smith seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.