

MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET
5:30 PM MONDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2021

Approved November 15, 2021

Board Members Present: Denise Smith, Chair; Stan Bradeen, Vice-Chair; Zac Nuse; Amy Burleson; Michael Gawne; Lauren Dees-Erickson, Alternate.

Board Members Absent: Luke Richter, Alternate.

Staff Members Present: Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning Development; Angela Bernard, Minute Taker.

Public Present: Mark Houle; Brandy Saxton; Jeremiah LaCross

AGENDA

1. Open Meeting. **Chair D. Smith opened the meeting at 5:33 PM.**
 - a. Introduction of attendees. Introductions were made in person and on Zoom.
 - b. Public Comment on issues not on agenda. None
 - c. Discuss additions or deletions to agenda. S. Bradeen suggested adding his pending retirement from the commission to the agenda. **His retirement, effective in either November or December, was added under General Business - Other.** C. Sawyer explained there would be an official process for appointing someone for the vacant spot left on the commission.

2. Approval of Minutes.

Requests for changes or clarification to the minutes were made by members of the commission.

Z. Nuse made a request for change regarding minutes for September 2021. On page 2, he requested for mentions of "Global Change #1" to be further clarified and summarized more clearly in a revised set of minutes.

S. Bradeen requested a change to the minutes regarding "Global Change #3," seeking for his position on Global Change #3 to also be clarified and fleshed out to portray his opinion and feelings more accurately on the matter.

M. Gawne expressed concern regarding a typo on page 2 of the minutes.

A. Burleson made a motion to approve the minutes of September 20, 2021, with the corrections suggested by the commission. Second by L. Dees-Erickson. Approved with all in favor at 5:45 PM.

3. Update on Residential Data Tool project.

C. Sawyer introduced Brandy Saxton, AICP, of PlaceSense, via Zoom.

B. Saxton presented the commission with a summary of her Re-Zoning Recommendations for the Low-Density Residential District memo.

Using the Residential GIS Data Tool, B. Saxton drafted an analysis for future zoning choices in the city, using four main zones. The memo presented to the commission walks through discussion of multi-unit housing, what current standards in the city are, and how the Vermont Act 179 for the promotion of affordable housing affects the city.

S. Bradeen explained that this commission had been notably vocal in analyzing Act 179 when it was in discussion and being voted on. B. Saxton explained that even things that were not a part of the original Act may still come up in the future and to be aware that it is an evolving situation. Those subjects not in the Act now have not been discarded, just set aside and the commission should be aware if they come up again.

After explaining that new regulations allow for duplex-style buildings on smaller lots than previously and detailing parts of the memo regarding splitting the low residency areas into four zones, with a range of housing density spread between the zones, B. Saxton shared her screen on Zoom and showed the commission charts from the memo.

C. Sawyer explained to the commission that this presentation serves only as an introduction to where change might happen but that it is not set in stone as the path forward.

Takeaways from this portion of the presentation include:

- The consultant offered that a focus on lot coverage is a place to make most impact on housing and on the question of neighborhood character and that lot coverage is an effective stand-in for character of the area. S.Bradeen stated that he felt that lot coverage was one of many aspects of character of the area.
- It is possible to allow for an increase in building height. State regulations allow for buildings to go taller than what is permitted right now. If new buildings come in, there's a possibility of letting them go up one more floor up. Z. Nuse asked if there was a reason why new buildings don't already go high. B. Saxton explained city height restrictions are lower than the rest of the state. S. Bradeen explained there's a lot more to it than that.
- There are many standards that could be applied for residential properties that can address neighborhood character through zoning, beyond the recommendations set

forth in this analysis. Examples include fire escapes, exterior cladding, driveways, privacy, parking, laundry facilities, storage, and outdoor space. B. Saxton recommends the city think through the concerns that people in the community might have, and craft regulations that address concerns but also allow for necessary housing.

B. Saxton pointed out an error in line three of the second chart on page seven. C. Sawyer asked for a corrected version. B. Saxton said she would send the commission a corrected version later.

D. Smith questioned numbers on the charts, particularly one noted for zone 8, and wanted to know how the "proposed infill" number was reached. B. Saxton explained the chart's math using regulations, number of existing units, and number of units allowed under new regulations, and told the commission that the "proposed infill" number is a maximum number of possible units that could exist but explained that the maximum is rarely ever reached.

C. Sawyer explained that this is an analysis that's part of the process in creating future plans.

S. Bradeen said it's a benchmark but doesn't take into consideration how the buildings are constructed and called it data minus other factors.

C. Sawyer said this tool is good if the city has to communicate to the state how they increased density.

S. Bradeen said there are a number of lots in the city that are narrow but have deep backyards and present issues and restrictions to development. He explained that current houses and driveways take up the width of the lots and make getting to the back to develop them difficult. There would need to be access to that land provided. S. Bradeen said he believes there are models regarding that in existence somewhere.

B. Saxton then shared her screen with pictures of homes from around the city that serve as examples of parcels that are meeting dimensional standards currently. Several homes from different neighborhoods were highlighted.

D. Smith put questions to the floor.

C. Sawyer asked what next steps are. B. Saxton explained that equivalent studies are still coming for other blocks in the low-density area. She is planning a wrap-up presentation for this project and a packet of organized info for the commission at a later date.

D. Smith asked if the neighborhoods are set or can they be played with. C. Sawyer said they are not set and are flexible, can be manipulated and played with using the new tool and adding in other details.

S. Bradeen said mathematically it makes sense but in context it's not attainable. He called it mathematically workable but not practically workable.

Z. Nuse asked if there any examples where regulations were put into work that demonstrate areas of success or failure.

C. Sawyer said other parts of the regulation will come into play, but this analysis and these new dimensional standards are building blocks. Other standards will come into play afterward so that the total buildout number is almost never reached because of all the other things projects need to comply with. This is one set of control. All other criteria come in and change the reality of what can actually be achieved.

S. Bradeen expressed concern that the commission is not asking the right questions of the project and might be standing in their own way despite best intentions.

Pending no further questions, the agenda was moved on.

4. Discuss neighborhood visit meeting.

Discussion was made regarding whether or not the commission wanted to schedule a walkthrough of city neighborhoods.

D. Smith asked if they should schedule it for the next meeting but push the meeting up earlier in the day to 4:00 or 5:30 to get it in before dark.

S. Bradeen suggested that if the walkthrough is for personal reasons, commission members could do it when it works best for their individual schedules. Conversely, the group could plan a commission meeting to be held at a location in the neighborhood and combine a walkthrough with a meeting involving people from the neighborhood. It could prove to be a very effective outreach.

M. Gawne said it suggested a Saturday or to wait until the springtime for daylight. He also suggested the Fairfield Street neighborhood and to do it before city council meetings regarding the Residential-Professional proposal.

C. Sawyer suggested the walkthrough should be held during a regular planning commission meeting, and that the neighbors can provide their feedback at a later time.

A. Burluson and Z. Nuse said they can't commit to hours outside of regular meetings. D. Smith said she can sometimes be there earlier. L. Dees-Erickson and M. Gawne said they're flexible.

C. Sawyer suggested waiting until spring and do a Google images street tour to hold the commission over in the meantime. M. Gawne suggested a wait until April for an in-person tour. D. Smith then suggested the Fairfield Street neighborhood as a virtual Google images tour for the November 2021 meeting.

S. Bradeen suggested Lake Street. An informal straw poll was taken. It was determined that a virtual tour of Lake Street would be held in November, with a walking tour of Fairfield Street to be held in person in the spring of 2022.

5. Regulatory proposals.

- a. Continue discussion on planned unit developments / zoning at No. Elm and Lake.

C. Sawyer presented the commission with background surrounding the ongoing conversation regarding development of a property at 12 North Elm Street.

The proposed development would require rezoning, or spot zoning, the property or changing the rules to allow the property owners to add onto an historic structure (previously a school building) and increase housing units by 8 through new construction.

C. Sawyer drafted an alternative to the Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulation to reflect the way it could work better in the city. C. Sawyer presented his draft as a high-level item in order to get feedback from the commission. He explained that the revised rules could be used in this instance and would only apply to certain situations, such as historic buildings on a large lot, mobile home parks, or a development on a lot that borders commercial and residential zones.

D. Smith raised concern about setbacks on properties that border residential and commercial zones. C. Sawyer explained the regulation would apply to the portion of the building that borders the business district.

S. Bradeen expressed approval for the proposed changes, explaining it would be a useful tool throughout the city and said he liked that it's not overly complicated.

D. Smith and S. Bradeen expressed interest about how it could be used elsewhere in the city to affect other historic buildings.

C. Sawyer explained that the best way to save an historic building is to use it. Z. Nuse questioned whether the emphasis of this would be to retain the current zoning or allow for where it can go, explaining that growth has to happen.

L. Dees-Erickson expressed that the state says the city needs to add more housing and this helps limit where and how to allow for expansion.

S. Bradeen explained that he would prefer to change the rule with these proposed updates, as opposed to spot zoning the property.

D. Smith called a vote to accept the draft of new rules and regulations proposed by C. Sawyer and to strike out the existing PUD. A straw poll vote was taken and passed with all in favor.

Further discussion was made about the differences in definition between historic and unique.

Z. Nuse said the city should be encouraging people to rehabilitate historic buildings.

M. Gawne made a formal motion to give C. Sawyer authority to redraft something to replace the existing PUD for the November 2021 meeting. Second by L. Dees-Erickson. The motion was voted with all in favor at 7:32 PM. A. Burleson abstained.

- b. Discuss Residential-Professional proposal. This item was not discussed and was pushed back to a later meeting.
 - c. Other. None.
6. General Business.
- a. Next Planning Commission priorities check-in. This item was not discussed
 - b. Review next meeting date and format. **Next meeting is scheduled for November 15, 2021 at 5:30 PM.**
 - c. Other. L. Richter has resigned as an alternate from the commission; A. Burleson and S. Bradeen have terms that are expiring; S. Bradeen announced his retirement from the commission.
7. Adjourn.
- M. Gawne made a motion to adjourn. Second L. Dees-Erickson. Approved with all in favor at 7:34 PM.**