

MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
VIA REMOTE CONFERENCE
6:00 PM MONDAY, AUGUST 17, 2020

Approved October 19, 2020.

Board Members Present: Stan Bradeen, Chair; Denise Smith, Vice-Chair; Michael Gawne; Luke Richter; Amy Paradis; Zac Nuse, Alternate

Staff Members Present: Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning Development;

Public Present: None.

- 1. Open Meeting – Chair Stan Bradeen opened the meeting at 6:03 PM.**
 - a. Introduction of attendees – None.
 - b. Public Comment on issues not on agenda – None.
 - c. Discuss additions or deletions to agenda – None.

2. Approval of Minutes - Chair Bradeen requested more paragraph breaks in the future.

Motion by M.Gawne to approve the minutes of June 15, 2020, as presented. Second by D.Smith and approved with all in favor, except for A.Paradis abstaining.

Motion by M.Gawne to approve the minutes of July 20, 2020, as presented. Second by A.Paradis and approved with all in favor, except for L.Richter and D.Smith abstaining.

Motion by D.Smith to approve the minutes of August 3, 2020, as edited. Second by M.Gawne and approved with all in favor, except for A.Paradis abstaining.

3. Regular Business
 - a. Planning & Development update – There were no questions or comments.

 - b. Update on State housing legislation – Mr. Sawyer sent out the proposed amendment. The Chair of the House Committee on General Affairs and Housing stated that they would swing by for testimony when they consider the bill. The Vermont Planners Assoc understands that S237 is flawed and does not carry out the idea of planning. They are worried that the idea to strike out the section 2 completely would not pass the committee. They would like to soften the pre-emptions to make them more amenable to communities. Chair Bradeen remains concerned that the message of, the Commission is not opposed to increasing density but is opposed to the way it is being done, is not being sufficiently emphasized. Vice-Chair Smith felt that Senator Brock was dismissive given the multiple communities that VLCT and Vermont Planners Association represents.

Mr. Sawyer stated that it is quantity versus quality when comes to testifying before the committee.

Chair Bradeen asked if St. Albans needed to contact other communities. Mr. Sawyer has contacted everyone affected in Franklin County. Chair Bradeen asked if communities outside of Franklin County needed to be contacted. Member Gawne had a resource that listed all communities with municipal water and sewer.

Member Richter asked if a grant system had been explored versus a mandate. Mr. Sawyer states that there were plenty of other options besides land use. Member Gawne asked how much capacity the City of St. Albans had before it was maxed out. Mr. Sawyer was not concerned with being maxed out. Member Richter was concerned with the predatory landlords. This section makes it easy to create slums so they will be created. They will have to be prepared for the race to the bottom.

- c. Update on equity/inclusion training – Mr. Sawyer stated that this will be more of a City wide effort. Chair Bradeen stated that we would like the City to be sure that this was not a token gesture. Vice-Chair Smith asked if other cities and towns we also doing this. Mr. Sawyer thought that the major communities in Vermont were looking into it.

Member Nuse asked what the goal of the training was. He stated that there are two very different approaches to this – educational versus behavioral. Mr. Sawyer stated that the first priority was general awareness of implicit bias then an analysis of how the City typically does its business including public processes and regulations and programs. There may be changes proposed in how the City operates. Member Nuse stated that whatever is done there should be a public outreach component that clearly allows people know what's being done; efforts being taken; efforts to address this concern; is there a missed opportunity with City Council meetings; what conversations are being had; more outreach having meetings going to particular neighborhoods generate more publicity than going to City Hall or going on-line how people respond to invitation and whether it is for them. Historically held by a certain genre of people Chair - implicit bias that everyone is bias. People nod and tune it out. We need to be far more considerate / sensitive of each other. Language needs to be considered. Member Richter does good to be insulted. Not ethnic diversity but diversity of background race is a slippery term. Inclusive of where we all come from. Start categorizing we lose the ability to learn from each other's past.

- d. Next meeting date – September 21, 2020 Mr. Sawyer stated that the City is still working on how to accomplish a hybrid meeting successfully for the various Boards / Commissions.
- e. Other – None.

4. Discuss Resolution for Municipal Planning Grant

Mr. Sawyer would like to apply for a grant amount up to \$22,000 to fund the creation of a tool to do an analysis of our neighborhoods which would be used to:

- Reorganize our districts based on existing neighborhoods
- Create new districts based on similar sizes and densities
- Analysis of to what extent The City could do percentage density increases
- Gauge the impact of mandate of section S237 would do to the City.

Mr. Sawyer believes that the Commission has the ability to come up with new residential districts. They don't need help with the language but they need the data to inform that discussion.

Motion by M.Gawne to recommend applying for a Municipal Planning Grant for the purposes of providing tools and information for modernization of the residential districts. Second by D.Smith and approved with all in favor.

5. Discuss proposals for Land Development Regulations

Mr. Sawyer reviewed the latest version of the proposal with the responses to the voiced concerns.

- **Complicated Process** – It is introduced that way but the rest of the program is to cover any triggers in the regulations. This program allows a duplex in the LDR and gives a 50% increase in the normally allowed density.
- **Limited to blighted properties** – There might be other properties but the blighted properties have an immediate need and are easy to identify. Phase two could allow other underutilized properties. Member Gawne mentioned that the City Council could take care of any immediate need with interim zoning. He asked how many blighted properties are there. Mr. Sawyer believed that there were a dozen. Chair Bradeen asked about the implications of interim zoning. Mr. Sawyer stated that interim zoning requires less hearings and has a sunset. He thought that if the Planning Commission had a hearing at their next meeting to adopt this it would be just as quick as interim zoning. Member Gawne preferred to address all of the problems all at the same time. Once the immediate problem is taken care of all the rest will fall off the radar. Vice-Chair Smith stated that something needs to be moved forward. She considered this a pilot program. The program needs to start somewhere. Member Nuse pointed out that this program does not preclude anything in the future.
- **Phase 1 – Financial and Feasibility Analysis:** Member Gawne felt that there should be a time limit on the City's response. Mr. Sawyer put in a time limit that the City has 60 days unless the time is extended by the applicant

- Phase 2 – Design Review:** Chair Bradeen had a concern with the vinyl siding. Member Richter asked if vinyl siding done well was better than clapboard done poorly. Mr. Sawyer stated that it depended on the vapor barrier. Member Nuse pointed out that it wasn't the vinyl siding that was the problem. It was the installation of the siding that caused problems. Chair Bradeen had a concern that a fire inspection is a code review not a layout review. There needs to be a layout review so the design would be adequate for the careful reuse of the building. Vice-Chair Smith concurred. Fire inspector could say need balcony and it is installed without any consideration of the architecture of the home or the effect upon the neighborhood. Mr. Sawyer added wording to reflect those concerns. Member Nuse asked if the DRB includes a review of the facade of the building. Mr. Sawyer stated that both the DRB and the DAB review the exterior façade. Member Nuse emphasized the need for units that are sized correctly versus emphasis on the number of units. Chair Bradeen agreed.
- Phase 3 – Development Review:** Member Gawne had a concern about the applicant might have the ability to handle the financials but how would the City control the selling of the property. Mr. Sawyer stated that that it would be hard to control. Chair Bradeen asked Member Gawne if he knew of a covenant that would help. He did not. He suggested that the building inspector and fire inspector schedule visits on a regular basis. It could be a program solution not a regulatory solution. Member Gawne stated that the application fee should be more than \$100.00. It should be sufficient to monitor compliance. Chair Bradeen wanted to be sure that the language did not imply that this is only for tenants. The wording was changed from tenants to residents. Member Nuse had a concern that development would happen and then sell it.

Chair Bradeen asked for an addition to the intent statement that reflects Member Nuse's views of the quality and size of the space versus the quantity of the space. Vice-Chair Smith asked for an addition to the intent statement that reflects the idea that the buildings are not to be torn down but that they also need to contribute to the continuity of the design of the neighborhood.

Motion by D.Smith to prepare the amendment for the official hearing process at the next PC meeting. Second by L.Richter and approved with all in favor.

6. Adjourn

Motion by M.Gawne to adjourn. Second by L.Richter and approved with all in favor at 7:57 PM.