

MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET
5:30 PM MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2021

Approved January 17, 2022

Board Members Present: Denise Smith, Chair; Stan Bradeen; Amy Burlison; Lauren Dees-Erickson, Alternate; Michael Gawne (left at 7:37 PM).

Board Members Absent: Zachary Nuse.

City Staff Present: Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning & Development; Angela Bernard, Minute Taker

Members of the Public Present: Jeremiah LaCross (via Zoom, joined at 6:09 PM).

1. Open Meeting. **D. Smith called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM.**
 1. Introduction of attendees. No introductions necessary.
 2. Public Comment on issues not on agenda. None.
 3. Discuss additions or deletions to agenda. None.

2. Approval of Minutes.

S. Bradeen requested clarification and corrections on pages 2 and page 3.

Motion by M. Gawne to approve the minutes of November 15, 2021, as edited. Second by A. Burlison. Minutes approved with all in favor at 5:39 PM.

3. Public Hearings on proposed amendments to Land Development Regulations.

C. Sawyer explained the process for Planning Commission approving proposed amendments.

Concerning Properties Listed on Historic Registers.

- i. Presentation of proposed amendments.

C. Sawyer detailed the amendment for properties on the historic register. He explained to the commission that the way the rule was written, any proposed changes or updates to a property on the historic register would automatically trigger a design review hearing, which may be unnecessary. C. Sawyer told the commission that the historic registry list should be considered an inventory of city properties that shouldn't be forgotten, but that it was never intended to be something that triggers local regulation. As written, property owners may be afraid that having their property

registered as historic might trigger extra regulations or legislation. The proposed amendment would help limit the number of concerns a property owner might have. The city's historic property consultants have advised the amendment in order to both preserve historic properties and for the city to create their own rules regarding historic structures. Additionally, a building only needs to be 50 years old in order to qualify for the historic preservation list, which means that as every year goes by, the likelihood that a building could be listed goes up and could result in a lot of unnecessary regulation every time a property owner wants to change windows, etc.

S. Bradeen gave a brief historical recap of why this rule was put in place in the first place.

C. Sawyer said that the state historic register for the city is listed as "St. Albans City Streets," which means that practically half the houses in the city are now included on the historic register that was put together in the 1980s. He explained that these current rules were written without knowing that half the city is on the list.

M. Gawne explained that much his neighborhood is historic and included in this rule. He explained that the number of properties that would be subject to this would be commercial or multi family. He said many buildings should be designated historic but not worthy of heightened protection on the state registry.

C. Sawyer said article 7 includes regulations that dictate DAB review on anything a homeowner wants to do (for example, putting in a new widow, installing a pool, etc.).

M. Gawne pointed out a typo in the amendment for article 7 that says "site plan review" should be "design review."

D. Smith requested clarification on a porch project for her own house and C. Sawyer said, without the amendment, she would have had to bring every project before the DAB.

M. Gawne asked if the reviews would be interior and exterior. C. Sawyer said exterior only.

D. Smith asked if the city should be removed from the register. C. Sawyer said no, but suggested that correcting the rule with this amendment would remove the trigger that requires an automatic review.

S. Bradeen asked what protections would there be left to prevent people from removing architectural aesthetics on historic buildings and cutting corners on projects, such as throwing up something that offers no care or thought to building's value (i.e. gingerbread molding, exterior staircases, etc.). He explained that he supports the amendment and wants to see it passed, but also wants to know if there will be a remaining protection. C. Sawyer said the planning commission could

explore rules in the future. He said the city has several rules already in place, such as the prominent front entrance rule and rules about where people can park.

D. Smith asked if the Historic Preservation Committee is considering this. C. Sawyer said they're talking about materials not regulations. They're mission is more into the inventorying of historic buildings. He said creating a city rule would mean more regulatory burden. It's not impossible but it could be put onto a list of things to look at down the road.

L. Dees-Erickson said with increasing housing and changes to the city, it would be a good idea to move forward with a plan in mind to retain the historic qualities that make it a unique place to live. She suggested striking a balance between what they want to city to look like in 10 years and the goal of adding affordable housing without adding a burden to the city.

C. Sawyer agreed there are some easy rules that can be applied. D. Smith suggested checking the regulations in Takoma Park, MD as an example of how the city could go forward. She said they strike a good balance between regulation and development there.

- ii. Public Hearing. There was no public comment.
- iii. Consider revisions to amendments. None
- iv. Consider motion to refer proposed amendments to City Council.

M. Gawne made motion to refer the proposed amendment to City Council for approval. Second by S. Bradeen. Voted with all in favor at 6:14 PM.

Concerning Planned Unit Developments.

- i. Presentation of proposed amendments.

C. Sawyer presented an amendment that combined previously warned changes to the text of the Planned Unit Development rule with suggestions made by the planning commission at the previous meeting.

C. Sawyer indicated on the proposed amendment where the changes are that were previously proposed by the commission.

S. Bradeen stated for the record that he believes the PUD needs to be open to residential districts. He said he also understands what is being accomplished here. M. Gawne agreed and said he believes it should say PUDs are allowed throughout the city regardless.

M. Gawne debated changing certain rules for some areas based on lot size. C. Sawyer said if they allow this rule to cover any residential district, if the PUD is opened up to any property in the city, that means that it technically does away

with the prohibition of anything larger than a duplex in a residential area. C. Sawyer said the PUD is a special situation for preexisting opportunities because of where the property is that is the exception to the rule that allows flexibility.

C. Sawyer said if it's a broad-use rule then it gets into the use table not the PUD. It wouldn't be the PUD because that is a special situation and not something that can be applied throughout.

C. Sawyer said he wanted to write a PUD that takes all of the purposes of the PUD and makes it more reflective of the exact city situation in this area. He proposed proceeding with this as a "phase one" and "phase two." He suggested to commission pass this now and come back later to see what else they want to change or add.

S. Bradeen and D. Smith both agreed it could be a phase one and phase two situation.

C. Sawyer returned to the form and detailed more changes and edits that are included. He explained that he changed the images in the form and updated some of the rules.

M. Gawne suggested a few more edits and said it still needs a little more work before it is sent to the City Council. He suggested taking it line by line for edits on technical aspects. S. Bradeen asked if there were any other structural changes that he would like addressed on this refined PUD rule.

C. Sawyer said he would be happy to go line by line but doesn't think it's necessary. He offered to change parcel to lots in some situations and to capitalize certain words for consistency.

S. Bradeen suggested continuing the presentation.

C. Sawyer continued to present the document and updates / edits.

S. Bradeen suggested this PUD could be considered a useful tool for the city and the DRB for keeping developers to task.

C. Sawyer continued with his review section by section.

S. Bradeen expressed his approval of the document structurally and said he is comfortable passing it along to City Council and asked the board if they agree that it's good enough to pass on. M. Gawne said he would like to make the edits he wants and make it ready for the next meeting to approve and pass on to City Council then. He said even as a phase one and phase two he would like to review it and offer his edits.

S. Bradeen said he is comfortable letting C. Sawyer make minor changes based on M. Gawne's suggestions and passing it onto City Council that way. He suggested the document would only come back to the commission for future passing if there is a major structural change to the document, as opposed to small edits from M. Gawne. This way, it gets through the commission and gets passed to City Council.

D. Smith suggested that if there are significant changes, they could have a brief Zoom special meeting to look at it briefly before the City Council meets in January. D. Smith said she would like to see the final draft of what would be going to the Council. C. Sawyer said he doesn't see that timeline allowing it to make it to the January Council meeting.

S. Bradeen said this document is ok but substantial changes would have to come back for approval.

L. Dees-Erickson asked if they could follow D. Smith's suggestion to review the edit and get it on the City Council agenda.

C. Sawyer said the Planning Commission needs to agree on what they want the result to be in how it works, but not writing styles. S. Bradeen agreed, saying the commission could offer guidance and direction without getting too much into the details of writing the documents. C. Sawyer said city staff is capable of writing it themselves. S. Bradeen said he doesn't see anything that's poorly written or in need of wordsmithing. He is comfortable with city staff judgement and whether to adopt M. Gawne's edits.

ii. Public Hearing.

J. LaCross commented that he agrees with C. Sawyer that it is sound enough to go to City Council without wordsmithing.

iii. Consider revisions to amendments.

iv. Consider motion to refer proposed amendments to City Council.

Motion by S. Bradeen to approve the PUD amendment and send it on to City Council. No second. Motion failed at 7:23 PM.

L. Dees-Erickson expressed a request to see the final document and A. Burleson said she plans to abstain from the vote.

C. Sawyer asked for direction on what to have prepared for the next meeting. M. Gawne asked for a copy of the document that he could offer edits on for a final draft presentation in January.

S. Bradeen expressed the need for the commission to be more of an advisory function and let professional city staff take the reins on crafting documents.

D. Smith said she is comfortable with the document as is but would prefer to see the final draft. L. Dees-Erickson said that she doesn't have any recommendations to the document but would like to have a vote on it. M. Gawne said the vote would be at the January 2022 meeting.

Will be voted on in January and proposed to go to City Council in February 2022.

4. Residential-Professional proposal.
 - a. Discuss virtual tour of Lake Street – No action or discussion.
5. General Business.
 - a. Update on Residential Data Tool project - No action or discussion.
 - b. Expiring PC member terms.

L. Dees-Erickson asked if alternates would be put up for a full position by City Council. C. Sawyer said S. Bradeen and A. Burleson have full seats that are up. Anyone who wants to go for the full seats that are open can request it and the City Council can consider. A. Burleson and S. Bradeen have both put their names in for reconsideration on a new term.

- c. Review next meeting date and format.

D. Smith asked if meetings were moving to Zoom. C. Sawyer said state rules have not changed and require an in-person meeting not Zoom-only.

- d. Other. None.
6. Adjourn.

Motion by S. Bradeein to adjourn. Second by L. Dees-Erickson. Meeting adjourned at 7:41 PM.