

**MINUTES**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET**  
**5:30 PM MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2022**

*Approved January 16, 2023*

**Commission Members Present:** Lauren Dees-Erickson, Vice Chair; (Via Zoom) Michael Gawne; Denise Smith, Chair; Carl Watkins, Alternate; Courtney Seale, Alternate (Via Zoom).

**Commission Members Absent:** Amy Burlison; Zac Nuse.

**City Staff present:** Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning and Development; Paul Clapps, Minute Taker

**Members of the public present:** Emily Klofft and Catherine Dimitruk, Northwest Regional Planning Commission.

1. **Begin Recording and Open Meeting. *D. Smith calls the meeting to order at 5:36.***
  - a. Introduction of attendees. Members of the public introduced.
  - b. Public Comment on issues not on agenda. None.
  - c. Discuss additions or deletions to agenda. M. Gawne adds that there will be a discussion about definitions. C. Sawyer adds that the city was going to discontinue Deal Street, and that something planning-related will show up in the legislative session in Montpelier.
  - d. Assignment of Alternates. C. Watkins and C. Seale would be participating fully tonight as official members.
  
2. **Discontinuation of Deal Street.**
  - a. C. Sawyer begins by saying that Deal Street used to go in the middle of the old creamery property. The street does not exist anymore. It was previously thought of as a private drive but further information has revealed that it was once a public street. The city will hold a hearing about the street being discontinued.
  - b. C. Sawyer continues stating that it's not being plowed or maintained. It's owned and has been developed by the creamery, but the city just lost track of it.
  - c. M. Gawne mentions that the street will just be returned to the former property owner.
  - d. No further discussion needed.
  
3. **Warned amendment to Land Development Regulations concerning Veterinary Hospitals.**
  - a. C. Sawyer starts by saying that the initial proposal would be an amendment to 303 and 304 to include Veterinary Hospitals in the B1 District. There can be a conditional approval while the details (like parking and design) are discussed.

- i. The DRB, through conditional use, can take each application case by case with conditions included. For instance, the requirement of “dog bathroom bags” in the area, can be a condition included.
- b. M. Gawne asks if soundproofing could be included in this. C. Sawyer says they can but the conditions will have to be specific otherwise they can be appealed.
- c. D. Smith asks if anyone has any questions or concerns with the proposal. M. Gawne specifies that he wants to make sure it’s not used for kenneling, and it’s specific to veterinary care. C. Sawyer says he thinks they have the tools they need to make sure that doesn’t happen.
- d. D. Smith asks for next steps.
- e. C. Sawyer says that a public hearing can be held, and it can be approved and sent to the city council.
- f. D. Smith opens a public hearing on the veterinary hospital inclusion to the B1 central business district. She asks for comments, revisions, additions. There is none.
- g. **D. Smith closes the hearing.**

**C.Watkins Motions to approve the amendment as presented and refer it to the City Council. C.Seale seconds it, and All vote in Favor.**

**4. City planning consultation with Northwest Regional Planning Commission.**

- a. D. Smith moves onto the consultation.
- b. C. Sawyer starts off the consultation with context.
  - i. The NRPC goes to the community twice in the 8-year planning cycle to plan. It’s required by state statute. This is required to be regionally approved, for the acceptance of grants and other benefits.
  - ii. Typically, the NRPC also helps the city design the maps for specific projects. This includes areas that are marked for preservation. M. Gawne specifies that Aldis Hill is going to be reserved for preservation and shouldn’t be in the residential district.
- c. Strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities section of the city plan are discussed.
  - i. The “character of the area” is pointed out as a weakness of the city plan.
  - ii. C. Sawyer mentions that “character of the area” can be brought up but it requires certain standards and shouldn’t just rely on amorphous ideas of an area’s character.
  - iii. D. Smith asserts that the zoning should reinforce the character that we strive for.
  - iv. C. Sawyer responds by saying anyone can bring up that a project “doesn’t preserve the character of the area,” and in court, that’s been overturned because the “character of the area” isn’t strictly defined. When it’s clearly defined, an applicant knows what to do to meet the letter of the law.
  - v. C. Sawyer also mentions that “Character of the Area” can be an avenue for discrimination, when not clearly defined.
- d. D. Smith is curious about towns who have access to water and wastewater, because that’s an indicator that growth can be housed.

- i. There won't be specific data about growth on a town-to-town basis, but there will be guidelines and discussions about recommendations from the NRPC.
- e. C. Sawyer mentions that a joint meeting between St. Albans City and Town Planning Commissions needs to have a clear purpose and needs to avoid it looking like the City is just "getting into their business." As long as there are no critical issues, it might not be necessary. Though, sometimes there are zoning decisions made about what might lie across a town or city border.
  - i. L. Dees-Erickson mentions that it doesn't seem out of the norm to at least engage with Saint Albans Town if there is anything coming up in the planning along those boundaries. D. Smith agrees with this and that some of these projects interact with the region. The City Plan is a good place to have an informal conversation with the town. The NRPC could be a helpful presence as well. The city plan is not zoning, it's conceptual, so it could be a good opportunity to collaborate.
- f. The NRPC continues on with the consultation.
- g. C. Sawyer proposes starting next month to give the commission two years tackling two chapters at a time.
- h. D. Smith liked the approach from the NRPC, especially targeting weaknesses of the city plan.
- i. L. Dees-Erickson has a question about what plan characteristics do a good job in other city plans. She feels like many city plans have a lot of ideas and things to accomplish, but there's rarely a section that takes a look at successful accomplishments.
- j. M. Gawne mentions that there were years where there was a plan with successful accomplishments in certain sections. C. Sawyer thinks the city should do that. The NRPC has seen certain things like that before. Also, having a section on the city's "goal" might be a good thing to have as well.
- k. D. Smith mentions that this is why we allow for public engagement, we want input from the community.
- l. L. Dees-Erickson wants the document to be easy to utilize so the city council can act on it easily. C. Sawyer thinks that the plan does encompass everything that the city wants to do primarily for grants and to say that something "was discussed."
- m. D. Smith has another question--what will the future relationship between the commission and the NRPC be like?
  - i. The NRPC does not have an active role in the city plan unless it's required. (Like helping for maps, as C. Sawyer mentioned earlier) The city has two representatives on the NRPC that meets once a month. C. Watkins asks if the board meetings are open, and the NRPC says yes.
  - ii. The NRPC can also provide training. D. Smith recalls that there was some training in Montpelier before the pandemic that used to be once a year. Also, there can be a consultant hired to do city-wide training work if it's in the budget.
- n. Overview of new initiatives at the NRPC.
  - i. Specific housing commissions for certain residential areas.
  - ii. Clean water service provider project. (Prioritize phosphorus reduction)

- iii. Transportation planning, emergency planning, mapping...etc. There's a climate and energy specialist onboard as well.
- iv. Route 105 safety audit.
- o. D. Smith asks if there's an "energy" or "climate change" related commission or part of the city plan. She also wants the idea of poverty and food insecurity to be targeted in the case of an emergency.
- p. The commission thanks the NRPC for coming.

## 5. Review workplan and other amendment proposals.

- a. The commission moves on. C. Sawyer asks if they should warn for the official hearing of the Fonda change just to keep it moving but continue the conversation at the hearing next month. The PC should spend the rest of today on the definitions.
  - i. M. Gawne wants to rezone Fonda to B2 instead of service residential. He wants to ensure there's space for a playground or play area. C. Sawyer thinks it's an interesting concern and deserves discussion. The City Council wants to redevelop the Fonda Site now.
  - ii. D. Smith likes this idea, since it takes each site on its own instead of "blanketing" many sites at once without looking at individual points. She's in favor of moving it to a public hearing next month to have a conversation. Housing is such an issue right now that the more we can do to help, the better.
  - iii. M. Gawne's concern is that the housing development on South Main Street in the Town has a bad reputation, and that the Fonda Site will get the same bad reputation.
  - iv. C. Seale has a big concern about traffic if this is going to go forward. It's treacherous already, and if you put 90 units in a building at this site, then traffic is going to need an overhaul. C. Sawyer specifies that this would be decided at the DRB level. D. Smith mentions that it's not their job to figure that out.
  - v. C. Watkins wants to make sure that it's being discussed next week as opposed to this week. He asks if the PC can attend the review of the project, so they can voice their intent?
  - vi. D. Smith looks for a motion to warn the official hearing for the January meeting.
  - vii. **C. Watkins makes a motion to warn the Fonda Project for an official hearing next month. C. Seale seconds it. All vote in Favor.**
- b. D. Smith wants to confirm that this public hearing will center on the Fonda Site with the B2 revisions. There will be a discussion before the public is allowed to speak. C. Sawyer specifies that there will be a presentation and then a discussion with the public. M. Gawne wants to make sure that the public nearby is notified of the construction or change in view.
- c. No further questions.

## 6. Definitions Discussion.

- a. The three definitions that the PC is looking at are Bed and Breakfast, Residential Building, and Cemetery. M. Gawne sent a document to the PC with his thoughts compared to what C. Sawyer has proposed.
  - i. Starting with the “bed and breakfast,” C. Sawyer believes that the owner should live there. There’s discussion about the difference between a Lodging House and a Bed and Breakfast, and what changes should be codified.
  - ii. C. Sawyer mentions that Bed and Breakfast is a touristy thing you can run out of your house. A Lodging House is a commercial establishment that may or may not fit into a low-density residential district. M. Gawne’s issue is that a Lodging House should **not** be allowed in the low-density residential district.
  - iii. D. Smith reminds the PC that they are deciding on the definitions tonight, they can have a further discussion on lodging houses in another meeting.
  - iv. C. Sawyer agrees with M. Gawne’s definition change for Bed and Breakfast on the “dwelling unit” part.
  - v. M. Gawne also doesn’t like the term “rooming unit,” it goes from 6 overnight guests to 6 rooming units, which could consist of 2-4 rooms, which could have 6 beds each, basically turning into a much larger space.
  - vi. C. Sawyer says that the PC could change the definition of a rooming unit.
  - vii. L. Dees-Erickson asks C. Sawyer about the proposed changes.
  - viii. C. Sawyer is happy to make inn and bed and breakfast synonymous.
  - ix. **C. Watkins makes a straw motion to make adjustments noted to bed and breakfast, but not to combine bed and breakfast and inn. C. Seale seconds that. C. Watkins, C. Seale, M. Gawne, and D. Smith all vote in Favor.**
- b. **Residential Building.** M. Gawne gives an outline of the changes he proposed for the residential building category.
  - i. “A building used as a home for one or more individuals.” is an agreed upon definition that the PC agrees to.
  - ii. **D. Smith makes a straw motion to pass the proposed changes, all vote in Favor.**
- c. **Cemetery.**
  - i. D. Smith reads the proposal.
  - ii. **D. Smith makes a straw motion to pass C. Sawyer’s proposed changes. All vote in Favor.**

**7. General Business.**

- a. Approval of Minutes. **Tabled until the next meeting.**
- b. No other general business is discussed.

**8. Meeting Adjourned by D. Smith at 7:39.**