

MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET
5:30 PM WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2024

Approved January 21, 2025

Commission Members Present: Denise Smith, Chair; Carl Watkins, Vice Chair (Via Zoom); Michael Gawne, Alternate; Dan Rohrbach; Ray Stahl;

Commission Members Absent: Janis Appel;

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

Members of the public present: Mary Harbaugh

1. D. Smith began the meeting at 5:34 PM.

- The members introduced themselves.
- No Public Comment
- No agenda changes. M. Gawne was assigned as a voting member for the evening.

2. M. Harbaugh began the discussion of geothermal energy as a representative of the Climate & Energy Committee.

- The Climate and Energy Committee had been interested in geothermal infrastructure within the city. She proposed a joint meeting between the Planning Commission and the Climate and Energy Committee to invite experts to discuss geothermal energy and the benefits of how it could be used to impact the local community.
- M. Harbaugh gave a brief overview on how geothermal energy works and the unique benefits it proposes over solar panels and other energy sources.
- D. Smith brought up the City Plan and how this could be good input for this plan. M. Gawne mentioned that someone from further away can join the meeting via Zoom so it's not pressing that they travel.
- C. Sawyer suggested having a broad joint meeting of various topics for input on the City Plan, and to have a geothermal-specific meeting in the future. The Planning Commission was in agreement on this. There was discussion on the priorities of the Planning Commission before mid-summer 2025 to explain why a joint meeting before then might be difficult to schedule.

- **M. Harbaugh left the meeting at 6:07.**
3. C. Sawyer gave an update on the City Hazard Mitigation Plan
 - He mentioned how C. Watkins was involved as a member of the BEI Cmte. and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as Jim Stiles from the Climate and Energy Committee.
 - C. Sawyer would run a draft through the Planning Commission in the future for revision and input, especially for use in the City Plan.
 4. D. Smith began the discussion on the range of residential uses in City Regulations
 - C. Sawyer wanted to discuss and review the different residential uses in the city. There was a conversation about moving away from using the term “single-family dwelling” since the state is not interested in regulating the definition of a “family” in a dwelling unit.
 - M. Gawne was worried that some uses would lead to conditional uses created with no limits. He wanted congregate housing removed from certain zones. He had no problems with the other definitions or even the Community Housing definition, but he believed removing Congregate Housing would be an effective solution.
 - R. Stahl wanted to keep the definition but tighten it.
 - C. Watkins asked for more specifics about what would be the harm in keeping these definitions. He also wanted to be cognizant of who should be making the decision on what types of housing should be appropriate or approved and what shouldn’t. He leaned more toward removing the definition entirely.
 - C. Sawyer argued for keeping the definitions because they gave the city more opportunity to regulate things (like parking) to be more realistic, otherwise they would be argued in front of the DRB or in court. Congregate Housing gives the city a way to have conditional use in the zoning.
 - D. Rohrbach asked about who applies for Congregate Housing and how that might affect them. C. Sawyer described the last time Congregate Housing was used. D. Rohrbach specified that the Planning Commission didn’t have to make a decision tonight.
 - **D. Smith decided to table this discussion, but advised the PC to think about it for another night.**
 5. C. Sawyer presented the City Plan update and regulatory revisions.
 - He went through the included memorandum to discuss the changes one by one.
 - There was a conversation about whether it would be better to take the state guidelines for where homeless shelters can be allowed, or to use local verbiage for this classification.

- D. Smith agreed with C. Sawyer's plan on adding or being able to add this type of building to more than just the B1 Central Business District. C. Sawyer discussed the hardship local business are enduring due to homelessness, and why there needs to be more space to help with giving resources to the homeless.
 - C. Watkins asked about where the city could recommend homeless shelters instead of just limiting them. The Planning Commission generally disagreed with this idea since it might restrict or contain the homeless population to a certain area of the city. But the PC was in favor of adding conditional review when plans are made for a homeless shelter.
 - D. Smith asked to table this discussion for the next meeting.
6. Approval of Minutes
- **R. Stahl motioned to approve all three sets of minutes (September, October, and November), as presented. Seconded by C. Watkins. M. Gawne abstained from the vote because he wasn't there for September and November meetings, but he voted for the minutes from October. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**
7. Review of next meeting date/time.
- D. Smith believed that meeting dates should not fall on holidays since city staff would be off.
 - The next meeting would be January 21, 2025.
 - The meeting after that would be February 18, 2025.
8. C. Sawyer discussed the City Council's reaction to the Smoke Shop Ordinance. He discussed the various ways the Planning Commission could define what a Smoke Shop is and how to regulate it.
- D. Smith believed that there should be some kind of regulation on tobacco and alcohol advertisements when in close proximity to a school.
 - D. Smith asked the Planning Commission if they wanted to regulate the definition of Smoke Shops. C. Sawyer also believed this could be another use of the creation of a Historic District, which would prevent the proliferation of additional Smoke Shops. The City Council asked for this. C. Sawyer would add this to a future agenda.
 - C. Watkins wanted to look into licensed liquor stores at the same time so these products can be regulated together. D. Smith specified that she mentioned this at an earlier meeting.

9. **M. Gawne motioned for C. Sawyer to add this to the next meeting agenda and to adjourn. Seconded by R. Stahl. The motion passed with all in favor. No additional discussion.**