

MINUTES
ST. ALBANS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET
5:30 PM MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2022

Approved January 16, 2023

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

Commission Members Absent: Amy Burlison; Zac Nuse.

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

Members of the public present: Janis Appel

1. Begin Recording and Open Meeting.

- Introduction of attendees. *D. Smith called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm.*
 - Public comment on issues not on agenda.
 - J. Appel recently submitted an application to be a part of the board. She also wants to make public comments.
 - C. Watkins wants to be considered for a full seat. C. Seale does not want to take a full seat, she wants an alternate seat. C. Sawyer mentions that we currently have more seats than applicants. The City can increase the size of the board up to 9 members if need be.
 - C.Sawyer mentions that if you increase the size of the board past an odd-number, you increase the number of quorum by one.
 - D. Smith mentions that this is a January decision. C. Sawyer says the city can extend a member's seat for two months, so they don't need to decide right now.
 - Both C. Watkins and C. Seale will be voting members tonight.

2. Warned amendments to Land Development Regulations concerning the Residential Professional District and related changes.

- D. Smith begins the topic.
- C. Sawyer goes over the Residential-Professional proposal. C. Sawyer reads point for point the proposal, covering all of the definition changes as well as the new outline for the Residential-Professional district.

- C. Sawyer addresses the amendments one by one.
 - M. Gawne asks a question about how a corporation can be an LLC.
Depending on who is acting as an agent of the LLC, a corporation might be treated differently from a partnership.
 - C. Sawyer proposes changing the verbiage of amendment 1 to “one or two individuals that form a corporation.” or “A sole proprietor, partnership, or liability, for which no member is a corporation.” This would address the issue.
 - M. Gawne would like to go on to other topics.
 - D. Smith agrees that “for which no member is a corporation,” is a good phrase.
 - C. Sawyer continues to go over the amendments. Amendment 4 is the outline of the Residential-Professional District (RP) for the City Regulations.
 - With Amendment 14, (All buildings in the Residential-Professional district must look like a house) there was a bit of debate over what looks like a house. C. Sawyer mentions that there’s a section of the rules of the Business Transition District that details the description of a house that abides by applicable house codes. C. Sawyer continues that there are various pages of information on how to determine if a building is a house. It’s meant to be used as a guideline. If there’s something that doesn’t fit the purpose of the Residential-Professional district, then the PC can make exceptions.
 - D. Smith mentions that the purpose of this new district was to preserve the older homes and the way it looks without stopping businesses or cooperatives from being able to take place there.
 - J. Appel points to the porch guidelines. J. Appel mentions that a ramp might not be necessary for the people who are living or working there. While a porch might allow for accessibility, it might still not be effective for people who are handicapped. J. Appel mentions that someone with crutches had a hard time accessing the building to vote a few weeks ago. A ramp can still be very difficult to use, which is a bigger issue to address.
 - L. Dees-Erickson had a question. As people get more interested in non-traditional homes or non-standard homes, how do they fit in the Residential-Professional guidelines on what “is” a home. C. Sawyer adds that there’s a “prominent entrance” rule city-wide that enforces a stoop, porch, or entrance that looks special.
 - C. Sawyer shows the map and the “green-outlined” Residential-Professional district. That finishes the overview of the Amendments for the Residential-Professional district.
- PC discussion and revisions.

- M. Gawne asks C. Sawyer to make the amendment for LLCs. “Of which no member is a corporation.”
 - Consider approval and referral to the City Council.
 - **M. Gawne motions to vote on referring this to the City Council.**
 - **C. Watkins seconded.**
 - **The vote is unanimous on referring this to the City Council.**

3. Review Workplan and other amendment proposals.

- C. Sawyer brings up the PC Workplan. The items labeled in green have just been referred to the City Council. The two additional highlighted points have been referred to the Planning Commission for discussion as **items 26 and 27**. Specifically mentioning the Fonda Site, C. Sawyer recommends it should be rezoned to B2. Also, the USCIS building is going to be difficult for commercial zoning, so the recommendation might be the same. The USCIS building is vacant now.
 - C. Sawyer proposes three zoning changes that are listed in the Workplan. This is specifically to allow multifamily housing to have access to the mainline and not be surrounded by industrial-service buildings.
 - L. Dees-Erickson brings up the parking space change. The proposal would allow for 1 parking space for each dwelling unit. L. Dees-Erickson states that this underestimates how many cars the average Vermont family has. C. Sawyer proposes a discussion about the parking standards of St. Albans. C. Sawyer believes that the PC should set a floor (1 space per dwelling) and if the developer wants to go beyond that, they can. L. Dees-Erickson adds that very few families have less than two cars.
 - D. Smith states that we need to have a conversation about alternative transportation, like biking and public transit, before we can talk about parking space requirements. D. Smith continues that multifamily housing and multi-use industrial are exactly what the city needs.
 - J. Appel mentions the assisted living and nursing home needs should be focused on giving elderly community members the ability to stay in their homes as long as they want before they need to leave.
 - D. Smith mentions that sometimes that leads to them going to the hospital and patient flow issues as well as issues with a home they need to return to. Both of these can be addressed at the same time.
 - C. Sawyer mentions that the city needs housing of all kinds, not just one or the other.
- D. Smith wants a straw poll for allowing multi-use housing in the service industrial district.
 - C. Watkins, D. Smith, M. Gawne, and L. Dees-Erickson are in favor of it as long as the details are discussed with it potentially being an apartment

building or condos. Developers often underestimate that Vermonters have cars. L. Dees-Erickson wants to address parking needs as well.

- M. Gawne mentions that we need to figure out how much of a long-term problem this is. M. Gawne asks if Service-Industrial should be allowed for housing, in which case, it probably will never return to commercial use.
- C. Watkins mentions that it is for conditional use. M. Gawne states that it does have to be conditional, but once it's approved, it's much more difficult to change it to service industrial uses. M. Gawne is still open to it.
- C. Sawyer says that we might need to turn Fonda to B2, consider turning USCIS B2 (and parking would be grandfathered). He asks what people think of it.
- D. Smith wonders if there are additional sites that might need the switch to B2.
- C. Sawyer mentions talking to real-estate consultants so the city can build out to have more service-industrial since everything else is being used. C. Watkins mentions that service-industrial is useless if the people aren't here. Housing should likely come first. C. Seale agrees with him.
- C. Sawyer mentions that we need to decide how much we want to grow.
 - D. Smith agrees that the USCIS building is good for housing since it's close to the park and retail, but she's not sure about the other service-industrial locations or turning the rest of service-industrial to housing. Perhaps the city can make changes to the service-industrial areas in between neighborhoods.
 - L. Dees-Erickson agrees with C. Sawyer that we need to talk about how big we want St. Albans to be. J. Appel also wants to recognize that a large part of the community is struggling with affordable housing. There is a need to find a way to build up a portion of the community that's struggling which isn't going to leave. The city should start with the Fonda site for new housing.
 - C. Sawyer is going to discuss this and come back to the PC with more information. M. Gawne wants input from the City Council about what they feel is needed. It won't pass if they don't like it.
- L. Dees-Erickson asks about what we do for the public when they want to make a change to the city plan.
 - C. Sawyer states that every month we introduce 1 or 2 topics, then the PC lets the public know we're talking about them so we get some public input on them. The input can vary depending on when the topic is implemented. There will be time to reflect on what was accomplished in the last plan.
 - C. Sawyer mentions that when a plan is under approval it can't be worked on or changed, so the earlier it's discussed the better.
- D. Smith wants to continue the discussion on **items 26 and 27** after C. Sawyer brings

- more information. She also wants clarification for the **veterinary hospital change for B1**. It's specifically not a kennel, only short term stays for patient-animals. D. Smith wants to know about the unintended impacts, and C. Sawyer responds with the dogs "doing their business" on the property, but otherwise the association with a kennel and barking is the only other issue. The definition will specifically mention "no kennel." There might need to be conditions added for soundproofing too.
- No PC members have a problem with it. M. Gawne makes note that city vets might require some parking and that it should go through the DRB. C. Sawyer adds that just because they don't require parking doesn't mean that the developer won't add parking. C. Sawyer asks if they should do a warning for an official hearing.
 - D. Smith says they should, C. Watkins agrees. Everyone else agrees.
 - C. Sawyer says there's consent for a warn for an official hearing in December. Where are the pets going, how are they going to get there, where do they "relieve themselves."
- D. Smith brings up the changes to definitions. She asks if the PC should discuss it now or next week. M. Gawne believes it should be a longer conversation. He could spend a lot of time on several definitions. He mentions "AirBnB" or short-term rentals as one thing to consider.
 - D. Smith states there are 11 changes. There is discussion on when to review them.
 - D. Smith continues that they can look at the first three definitions and discuss those in December. C. Sawyer agrees, mentions if people read further then they can discuss additional definitions.
 - M. Gawne adds that there may be discussions about what constitutes a cemetery as opposed to someone being buried on their own property. C. Sawyer mentions that there are state guidelines to adhere to.

4. General Business.

- C. Sawyer discusses a few things that will be mentioned next meeting. Fences will be one of the topics that need to be discussed since there are no city regulations on fencing. He reads the new rules for **Item #25** on proposed Fencing Regulations.
 - D. Smith wants to know what the PC's role is in this decision. C. Sawyer mentions that there's a bit of a dispute now and they're looking to the PC to denote some of the rules.
 - The PC will continue the conversation on it.
- Approval of Minutes
 - D. Smith asks about the approval of minutes.
 - Looks for a motion to approve the minutes.

- **Motion by M.Gawne to approve the minutes of October 17, 2022, as presented. Second by L. Dees-Erickson and approved with all in favor, except for C. Watkins abstaining.**
- **Motion by M.Gawne to approve the minutes of September 19, 2022, as presented. Second by L. Dees-Erickson and approved with all in favor.**
- **Motion by M.Gawne to contingently approve the minutes of May 16, 2022, as presented, with two members who attended the meeting present. Second by D.Smith and approved by M.Gawne and D.Smith.**

5. Adjourn.

D.Smith Adjourned the meeting at 7:33 PM.