

City of Barre, Vermont

"Granite Center of the World"

Agenda for the Planning Commission

Meeting held on Thursday, January 27, 2022 ~ 5:30 PM

Hybrid Meeting (in-person and Virtual)

Council Chambers in City Hall and Zoom Virtual meeting

Join Zoom Meeting

https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86361584630?pwd=R0MxRytMWG1nemJDZTZ6WU9KTjR3QT09

Meeting ID: 863 6158 4630 Passcode: 482262

Phone: 1 (929) 205-6099 US (New York – Long distance rates will apply)

- 1. Call to Order
- 2. Adjustments to the Agenda
- 3. Public Comment (for something that is not on the agenda)
- 4. Old Business:
 - a. Approve meeting minutes from December 9, 2021
 - b. Zoning regulations Signage discussion and action
 - c. Housing Task Force update
 - d. Keys to Barre Housing Task Force Plan
- 5. New Business
 - a. CVRPC February 24, 2022 Municipal Plan Check-in meeting
 - b. Next Focus discussion
- 6. Staff Updates
- 7. Roundtable
- 8. Adjourn

Planning Commission meetings are open to the public.

For questions about accessibility or to request accommodation, please call (802) 477-1465.

Barre City Planning Commission

December 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Present: David Sichel (Chair), Jackie Calder (Vice Chair), Michael Hellein (Secretary),

Amanda Gustin, Thomas Lauzon

Absent: None

Staff: Janet Shatney (Director of Planning, Permitting & Assessing)

Visitors: Stefano Coppola

1. Call to Order

6:30pm

2. Adjustments to the Agenda

Sichel added item 5.B to discuss the Diversity and Equity Committee's tool

3. Public Comment

No public comment.

- 4. Old business
 - A. Approve meeting minutes of October 28, 2021

Motion: Lauzon, second Gustin, unanimous vote to approve.

B. Zoning regulations - Signage discussion

Sichel noted that the proposed changes loosen restrictions significantly. Shatney said her suggestions take into account freedom of speech and business needs, and are based on a consideration of other municipalities existing ordinances. Shatney measured all of the window signs along Main Street downtown and found many out of compliance. Shatney observed many window flyers and chose to recommend not restricting temporary signs other than the overall window coverage limit.

Visitor Stefano Coppola observed that Pearl Street Pizza has been denied signs because the primary business at the location exceeds the permitted sign area, and the Pearl Street door was also denied a sign.

Lauzon provided some history for the sign variance granted for that location's facade. He stated that there have not been complaints about the number of signs. He proposed limiting window signs to 50% of window area with a clear background.

Calder pointed out that the reason for a signs ordinance came about because of a large number of requests for signage in the past. Calder noted that the process for changing the ordinance takes time.

Sichel asked Commissioners to consider whether Shatney's changes would be something they would consider. Shatney reviewed the process for changing the ordinance.

Hellein asked why the glass door on Pearl Street should not be a candidate under the current ordinance for a window sign allowing up to 20% coverage. Shatney said that the reason it was denied was that the section on window signs does not contain the word door.

Lauzon said the current ordinance is too onerous for businesses, and when it comes to this regulation less is more. Lauzon stated that violations are not being currently enforced.

Sichel asked if the material of vinyl as the problem, Shatney agreed. Hellein pointed out that he has raised previously that the window signs section does not prohibit all vinyl signs. Gustin agreed that the language is vague and we should make it clearer. There was some discussion, leading to Shatney.

Motion, Gustin, Second Calder: The Planning Commission believes that the interpretation of the ordinance for window signs (Figure 3-11, Miscellaneous) applies only to pre-cut lettering, and custom vinyl signage is permitted. The Planning Commission will revise the language in the future to make it more clear. Unanimous vote in favor, motion passed.

Sichel suggested tackling more of the questions around the Signs section of the Unified Development Ordinance when we have had more time to review it.

Lauzon had to leave the meeting.

5. New Business

A. Future meetings schedule discussion

Sichel mentioned that it may make sense to reduce to one meeting a month.

Gustin said 4th Thursdays are good for her.

Hellein said meeting later happened because of his old commute, and Shatney said going back to 5:30pm would be nice.

Motion Gustin, Second Calder: Meet once monthly on 4th Thursdays at 5:30pm beginning in January. Unanimous vote in favor, motion passed.

Shatney mentioned that membership of the Planning Commission was increased from 5 to 7 while the 2014 Plan was underway and suggested Commission membership could be reduced to 5 again. Sichel said it could be added to a future agenda.

B. Diversity and Equity Committee assessment tool

Gustin suggested sending the Signs section of the development ordinance, with Gustin writing an introduction to be sent to Shatney by Monday.

6. Staff Updates

Shatney provided a written update report in the packet.

Two recent Development Review Board decisions were recorded wrongly: the Board moved in one way and the recorded decision was the opposite. Too much time has passed to file an appeal with the Environmental Review Board, and Shatney is looking into the legal ramifications of these recording errors.

A building on North Main Street has applied a facade material differing from the design presented to the Development Review Board, and Shatney is determining what the next steps are.

Gustin asked if the Ward 5 School residential project in the written update was moving forward. Shatney answered that looking for funding was moving forward.

7. Roundtable

Gustin reminded the Commission that we had a previous unfinished conversation about zoning's impact on housing availability.

8. Adjourn

7:59pm, Motion Calder, Second Gustin, unanimous vote to adjourn.

- (g) The sign message must not change more than once every 15 minutes.
- (h) Electronic message signs that will be illuminated after dark must have their brightness adjust in response to ambient light levels. The total light output of the sign must not exceed 20 lumens per square foot of sign area after dark. The Development Review Board may further limit the intensity of the sign's illumination as deemed necessary to achieve the purposes of this section and protect the character of the neighborhood.
- (3) **Internally Illuminated Signs.** Internally illuminated signs where allowed must conform to the following unless otherwise specified in this section:
 - (a) There must not be more than one internally illuminated sign per lot.
 - (b) The total light output of fixtures illuminating the sign must not exceed 10 lumens per square foot of sign area.
 - (c) The sign must not be illuminated when the business is closed.
 - (d) Internally illuminated pole, monument, projecting or hanging signs must not exceed 12 square feet in area, or the maximum sign area specified in <u>Figure 3-9</u> through Figure 3-20 as applicable.
 - (e) Internally illuminated blade signs must not exceed 20 square feet in area.
 - (f) Internally illuminated wall signs must be designed as channel letter signs.
 - (g) Internally illuminated signs must be constructed with either: an opaque background and translucent text and symbols; or a colored background that is darker than the text and symbols
 - (h) Internally illuminated signs must not flash, brighten, dim, change color or otherwise be animated.
 - (i) Not more than 30% of the area of an internally illuminated sign may be used for advertising a product(s) available on the premises.
- 3107.H **Temporary Signs.** Temporary signs are allowed to advertise <u>limited period of time</u> openings, sales or special events, <u>or for informational purposes supplementary to the business</u>, <u>or temporary signs advertising a business while a permanent sign is being prepared. There are different standards for temporary window and door window signs and all other temporary signs, in accordance with the following:</u>
 - (1) Property or business owners may purchase a permit to display temporary signs in accordance with Figure 3-8. Temporary signs, including temporary window and/or door window signs, may provide information regarding product names, logos, prices, and names and/or logos of financial sponsors.

- (2) The Zoning Administrator may only issue one permit per lot, or one per business for lots with multiple uses. Temporary signs may not be placed in a public right-ofway or as stated in 3107.D..
- (3) No permit is necessary for the posting of temporary window signs that do not, cumulatively exceed 20% of the total window area; are each less than four (4) square feet each in size, and are posted not earlier than two (2) weeks prior to the event and are removed within three (3) days after the event. The permit for a temporary sign authorizes the holder to display one or more signs provided that the total sign area does not exceed 36 square feet.
- (4) Grand Opening Banners. Any business opening a new business or in a new location may place one (1) banner on the property where the business is situated for a period of up to thirty (30) days, provided the banner does not exceed twenty-four (24) square feet.
- (4) The permit holder Temporary signage must:
 - (a) Securely attach a temporary sign to a <u>window, door,</u> building or a permanent ground-mounted sign.
 - (b) Not install permanent footings, posts or similar structures to support a temporary sign.
 - (c) Not illuminate a temporary sign.
- (5) Barre City will consider temporary signs that <u>do not meet the above, and</u> are not readily movable to be permanent signs subject to all applicable provisions of this section <u>and require a permit</u>.

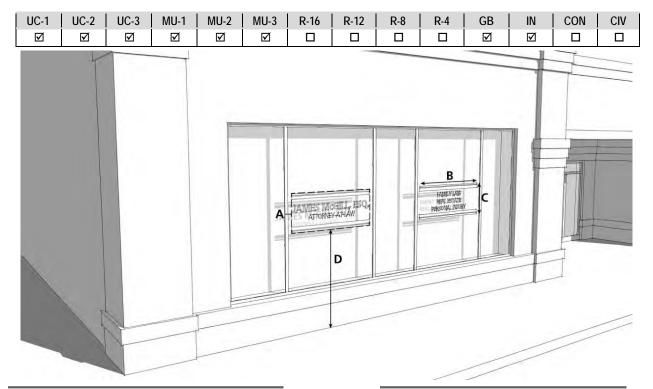
Figure 3-8: Temporary Sign Table

1 – 30 days in any 12-month period	See Fee Schedule
31 – 180 days in any 12-month period ¹	See Fee Schedule

¹ Any temporary sign in place after 180 days shall be considered a permanent sign and a new sign zoning permit must be obtained or violations shall be issued.

- 3107.I **Sign Area**. Sign area will be determined in accordance with the following:
 - (1) The sign area will include all the elements that serve primarily to communicate the sign's message and not the structural elements supporting or serving as a background for the sign. If the support structure will be visually prominent, designed to attract attention, or otherwise integral to communicating the sign's message, it will be included in the calculation of sign area.
 - (2) The area of a sign will be calculated by drawing a rectangle around all the elements that serve to communicate the sign's message. The area of signs that consist of multiple elements may be calculated by drawing a separate rectangle around each element and totaling the area.
 - (3) Sign area will only include one side of a double-sided sign. The Zoning Administrator

Figure 3- 101011: Window Sign DRAFT REVIEW for 12-09-2101-27-22 PC Mtg



Description

The window sign type is often professionally painted or applied directly on the inside of the window consisting of individual letters and designs. Window signs offer a high level of craftsmanship and visibility, and are often used for small professional offices.

Size

SIGNABLE AREA

Α	Area per shopfront window	20% max
В	Width	5 ft max
С	Height	36 inch max

Location

D Height above ground 5-3 ft min Window signs must be applied directly to the inside of the window or door glass.

Miscellaneous

Applied plastic or vinyl cut letters are strongly discouraged and are prohibited in the DRO district.

Window signs must have a clear background.

Window signs must not be illuminated.

Keys to Barre City

An American Rescue Plan Act proposal to meet housing needs and sustainably grow the City's grand list

Lucas Herring, Mayor | Samn Stockwell, Ward 3 | Jake Hemmerick, Ward 1

December 29, 2021

Introduction

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) offers Barre City an unprecedented opportunity to put people first by investing in homes and grand list growth to sustain vital community services and offer a vibrant and desirable quality of life. Of the many investments the City can make with these funds, few have the direct and ongoing payback that housing does. It is a direct investment in people and the grand list, and supports productive and healthy lives. It is a direct investment in the city's economic development with a measurable payback for the city' future. Now is the time.

Background

Barre City is a convenient, walkable, amenity-filled and comparably affordable community, but too many people are finding it hard to rent, purchase, or maintain a home here. This is straining our community's economy and finances: from individual households, to businesses looking for workers, to essential public services. Community leaders must make time to identify and confront the greatest challenges facing our city, including population loss, declining ability to sustain public services, and growing inequity.

Now is the time for Barre City to commit to policies that:

- 1) grow population and households in the city,
- 2) grow the city's grand list to deliver cost-effective services for a high quality of life, and
- 3) ease the inequities of poverty, discrimination, and housing insecurity.

We know that safe, accessible, and decent housing is the foundation for a successful and productive life, but too many of our friends, neighbors, aging parents, relocating workers, and young people cannot find a home that meets their needs at a price they can afford -- and too many are struggling to maintain the home they have. Today, Barre City faces a housing crisis with needs that are quite different than Washington County or the State as a whole.

Our Key Challenges & Common Understandings

- We understand that pandemic related market forces have increased sale prices and rents, and decreased vacancy rates and real estate listings, contributing to a housing crisis in Barre
 - The median price of a home sold in January through June of 2021 in Barre City was 19% higher than in 2020, at a price of \$195,875 (Barre City Housing Needs, VHFA 2021)

- We understand that opportunities for ownership and equity building is more limited in Barre than in other Vermont communities
 - Homeownership in the city, which is closely linked to wealth building and generational wealth transfer, is 35% below the Vermont average. 47% of households own their homes in Barre City compared to 82% for the State as a whole. (Barre City Housing Needs, VHFA 2021)
 - Citizen reports indicate that access to Federally underwritten conventional financing can be unavailable for homes with legacy hazards like knob-and-tube electrical, limiting the pool of potential buyers to investor landlords, and further limiting ownership opportunities in the city.
- We understand that everyone deserves access to safe housing and housing is not affordable to many of the city's residents
 - 44% of the city's households are cost-burdened (spending at least 30% of household income on housing) and 25% are extremely cost burdened (spending at least half of household income on housing) -- this is nearly 30% above the Washington County rates.
 (Barre City Housing Needs, VHFA 2021)
 - It would take an annual household salary of at least \$53,000 to afford the median home in Barre City in 2021, but the median household income in Barre is \$38,142 compared to the \$62,791 in Washington County. (Barre City Housing Needs, VHFA 2021)
- We understand that Barre City is losing population and households, an indicator of economic stress that is not a private problem with a private solution. A strong regional center is the foundation of a strong regional economy.
 - In the last decade, Washington County as a whole, including Barre Town grew households by 0.3%. During the same period Barre city lost 0.5% of its households, having 190 fewer households today than the city did in 2020. (Barre City Housing Needs, VHFA 2021)
- We understand that the City's housing stock is very old, with deferred maintenance and life/safety/ADA and code issues; housing starts have stagnated
 - Barre City has the oldest housing stock in the entire state of Vermont with the exception of Fair Haven. The median construction year of a residential building in Barre City is 1942. (Barre City Housing Needs, VHFA 2021)
- We understand that land use regulations limit the construction of flood-safe, energy-efficient, and decent homes the city needs and residents will support
 - Large areas of the City are limited to large lot, single-family residential development making developments like small patio townhouse condos (popular among downsizing seniors) difficult to build.
- We understand that household and family composition is changing, with higher numbers of single and two-person households
 - o 69% of Barre City households are 1 or 2 person households.
- We understand that jobs are going unfilled because housing is unavailable for hires.
 - BADC has noted that lack of housing is a contributing factor in fulfilling job openings.

Funding Request for a Housing Action & Investment Program

• \$1M of the \$2.5MM in Barre City ARPA funds

- Of the \$1M, a percentage (yet to be determined) is intended to support project
 administration/management to ensure the feasibility of conceptual pathways, recommend
 additional alternatives, and stand-up and administer cost-effective programs that meet the
 Council's Policy Goals and Program Targets listed below. Most of the projects below will also
 require significant legal resources to set up agreements and contracts.
- City Council has discussed funding an Assistant Planner position, from the \$100,000 of ARPA funds tentatively allocated, to assist with administration and management of this program.
- Project management and administration will be determined once City Council has finalized FY22 budget and ARPA allocation discussions; it may take the form of project management hours billed by City staff to ARPA, which would ease upward pressure on the tax rate.
- Allocation of the \$1M will support conceptual strategies below that advance the goals and targets.
- Disclaimer: these items will need to be fully vetted for ARPA eligibility.

City Council Policy Goals & Program Targets

These goals are bold -- some may say too bold -- but more importantly, they say where we want to go. They provide a vision and direction and can be adjusted as we move forward and learn, together.

- Grow the City's grand list by at least \$20,000,000 by April 2027
- Create 100 new homes the next 5 years, 25% of which will be affordable to those earning less
 than 80% of area median income, and the remainder of which should be affordable to those
 earning less than 120% of area median income as reported by the <u>Vermont Housing Finance</u>
 Agency.
- Rehabilitate 25 existing homes in the next 5 years
- Invite private capital off the sidelines and leverage \$20 in additional investment by other
 parties for every \$1 of city funds spent, which may include private funds, state tax credits,
 federal tax credits, community development funds, funding from the Vermont Housing &
 Conservation Board, funding from the Vermont Housing Investment Program, etc.
- Homes built and rehabilitated must meet of variety of housing needs through a balanced and targeted:
 - Mix of housing types, such as single-household dwellings, accessory dwelling units, duplex, triplexes, multi-family, and senior housing;
 - Mix of downtown and neighborhood housing;
 - Mix of dwelling unit sizes, such as one-to-three-bedroom units;
 - Mix of building types, such as townhouses, patio homes, apartments, tiny homes, etc.;
 - Mix of tenancy: including single-family ownership, condominiums, common interest ownership, co-op, and rental;
 - May include the subdivision of land, rehabilitation of vacant or blighted units, the conversion of commercial square footage to residential units, and the unitization of existing buildings.

Keys to Barre City - Strategies

Strategy 1: Support and Coordinate with the Barre Housing Task Force

The All-In-For-Barre Housing Task Force, an outcome of the Vermont Council on Rural Development Visit in the summer of 2021, has broken into the following subcommittees to research, report and make recommendations. These insights will be important and should inform adjustments to this program.

- 1. Conduct Analysis of Current Resources
- 2. Conduct Housing Needs Assessment
- 3. Research Creative Housing Solutions
- 4. Review Current Zoning in Consultation w/ the Planning Commission
- 5. Develop Strategies to Improve Building Trades Skills Within the Community

City Council and staff must partner with this group to soundboard strategies and ensure that the overall approach and funding will be used on lowest cost, highest impact projects.

Strategy 2: Create a Housing Investment Fund

The primary strategy to achieve the Housing Action & Investment Program will be the establishment of a housing investment fund with input and prospective partnership with Downstreet, Capstone Community Action, Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity, and Good Samaritan House.

The allocation will support project management/administration and investment in three potential activity centers:

- A housing reinvestment revolving loan fund;
- A land banking for redevelopment fund; and
- A housing grant fund program.

Program staff will be tasked with identifying the highest impact, lowest cost projects that best implement the policy goals above – as well as administer approved projects. Key considerations of all funding should be:

- The advancement of the policy goals and program targets above.
- Addressing funding gaps and avoiding the duplication with existing funding sources;
- Strategies resulting in a reimbursement and cost recovery for reinvestment;
- Promoting equity and ownership opportunities;
- Strategies that address homelessness;
- Supporting owner-occupied multi-unit dwellings; and
- Leveraging additional investments.

HOUSING RE-INVESTMENT REVOLVING LOANS

The housing re-investment revolving loan fund may be used conceptual investment like:

- Bridge loans to assist in access to state reimbursement grant programs
- Low-interest loans for essential life/safety/health code/energy efficiency repairs, such as:
 - Lead Abatement
 - Asbestos Abatement
 - Mold/Moisture

- Knob & Tube Wiring
- Weatherization
- Permitting
- Low-interest loans for cash-strapped, low-equity accessory dwelling unit/duplex/multi-family conversions for owner-occupant landlords (e.g. Brattleboro model)
- Short-term loans for the rehabilitation of an unoccupied home prior to re-sale to reinvest in neighborhoods.

LAND BANKING FOR REDEVELOPMENT

The land banking for redevelopment fund may be used for conceptual investments like:

- Reviewing city-owned and vacant property registered properties for site control, remediation, sale and redevelopment with an agreement and guaranteed assessment (e.g. Rutland City model)
- The purchase of real estate by the city for below-market sale and redevelopment with an agreement and guaranteed assessment
- The subdivision and acquisition of unbuilt developable lots for re-sale and near-term housing development
- Supporting the marketability and 'clean slate' of properties acquire through tax sale
- Redevelopment of TIF-acquired properties

HOUSING GRANTS

The **housing grant fund** may be used for conceptual investments like:

- Constructing donation boxes for homelessness support services under this fund (e.g. Burlington)
- Winter warming shelter (funding already committed)
- First-time homebuyer down payment assistance grant reimbursed upon sale (e.g. Montpelier Task Force model)
- The establishment of a housing cooperative
- Grants in support of perpetually affordable and supportive housing

Strategy 3: Special Assessment District for Sustainable Infrastructure

No ARPA cost. \$5-10k in staff or consultant hours.

Establish a program to build water/sewer/streets/curbing/stormwater/streetlamps/sidewalks under the bonding capacity of the city paid back by future homeowners with special improvement revenues that pay off the initial capital investment and support development patterns that can sustain the ongoing operational/maintenance expense and depreciated lifecycle replacement cost.

Strategy 4: Survey Infill Opportunities, Update the Unified Development Regulations, Fees & Related Ordinances, and Apply for Neighborhood Development Area Designation \$15-25k in staff or consultant hours by a bylaw planning professional.

Although zoning is just one of many factors affecting housing development -- including lending, labor, materials -- the mismatch between housing needs and housing stock can be exacerbated by bylaws that inadvertently drive-up development costs and do not improve housing quality, such as large minimum lot sizes, large minimum frontages at setbacks, large building setbacks, low dwelling unit densities, residential use or building type limitations, excessive parking requirements, overly wide streets, unclear or inconsistent building code requirements, and extended reviews and appeal.

This project should survey existing and future opportunities for infill development by considering reforms to promote housing starts in ways that strengthen the livability and appeal of the city's neighborhoods and build resident confidence that what gets built honors the city's architectural heritage, is compatible with the neighborhood character, and is well-operated.

Such reforms should consider the merits of increased dwelling unit densities, density bonuses for perpetually affordable dwelling units, smaller minimum lot sizes throughout the city, reductions in minimum lot width along street frontages, greater lot coverage, allowing new streets to be narrower, allowing cottage cluster and tiny home developments, appropriate waivers for parking requirements, community-rating system compliance updates to reduce flood hazard insurance, expedited administrative review of low-impact, priority projects, fee relief for priority projects, integrated permits (one-stop), and design standards for multi-family that enhance compatibility, long-term value, neighborhood aesthetic (such as disallowing unscreened garbage containers, haphazard front setback parking, unscreened utilities). The project should further consider recommended reforms in Vermont's Zoning for Great Neighborhoods Guide and prepare the City to apply (in 2023) for a Neighborhood Development Area Designation, which would exempt the area from land gains tax, cap State water/wastewater fees at \$50, offer a 50% reduction for any Act 250 application, exempt mixed-income priority housing projects from Act 250 (allowing a faster local review), and qualify the City for more State granting priority.

Where immediate amendments are necessary to address the housing crisis, interim zoning bylaws should be considered.

Strategy 5: Amend the City's Tax Stabilization Policy for More Housing Investment

No additional funding or additional project management needed. Administrative support to prepare a complete application will be provided by the Town Clerk/Treasurer.

The City's Tax Stabilization Policy currently forgoes future tax revenues (carried by the taxpayers as a whole) for projects that: 1) create or retain jobs, 2) create new or improve multi-family residential housing units, 3) eliminate blight, 4) improve aesthetics, and preserves a historic structure, 5) remove environmental hazards, 6) impact municipal services, and 6) be consistent with the municipal plan.

This strategy would amend the policy to be able to stabilize taxes to underwrite other housing types not meeting the definition of multi-family: including accessory dwelling units, affordable single-family homes, and duplexes -- the development of which would not occur without stabilization. This policy should be applied with caution in the TIF District since any stabilization within this district can negatively affect the general taxpayer's liability to pay back TIF Bonds, which are otherwise paid back through incremental increases to properties within the district.

Strategy 6: Convene the developers, lenders, and nonprofits to share the City's housing goals

Following this up with a survey to the community (to see who else not at the meeting would be interested in the program) is also great. Council would get community input, potential participants, while also averting a cost for someone creating an inventory and reaching out individually.

Staff Updates between December 10, 2021 and January 21, 2022:

- 1. Masks continue to be required to enter any city building.
 - 2. The Assessing Clerk processed 19 PTTR's (Property Transfer Tax Returns) for the month of December 2021 (see https://www.barrecity.org/assessment.html for the most updated Property Sales Reports for FY22).
- 3. There have been no development applications for the Development Review Board.
- 4. Ulysse "Pete" Fournier, was appointed to a seat on the DRB he was a former member serving multiple years, and was the Chair prior to resigning in December of 2017 to tackle some projects on his house and property.
- 5. Permitting is very slow at this point.
- 6. No word yet on the success of the ERSA (Enhancement of Recreation Stewardship and Access) Trail Grant application for \$50,600 in trail improvements, on behalf of the Cow Pasture Committee.
- 7. There have been no responses to date on the Assessor solicitation that has been out in the public for almost a year.
- 8. The Turning Point Center grant application with ACCD was officially awarded \$300,000 in grant funds, they continue to work on their Environmental site review and finding the additional \$200,000 needed for the project.
- 9. Completed writing reports for the Annual Report book (Energy Committee, entire Department write up, DRB) and received final approved Planning Commission annual report from Chair after sending an outline.
- 10. As time permits, assisting Code Enforcement with a Vacant Building database in their software and creating a separate inspection form for vacant buildings.