

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.**