

Barre City Planning Commission

November 9, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Present: David Sichel (Chair), Becky Wigg (Vice Chair), Joe Reil (Secretary), Caitlin Corkins, Raylene Meunier

Absent: Rosemary Averill

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

Visitors: Representative Peter Anthony, Mayor Jake Hemmerick, Councilor Michael Deering II, Councilor Samn Stockwell, and Councilor Teddy Waszazak.

1. Call to Order.

5:30pm.

2. Adjustments to the Agenda.

None.

3. Approval of Minutes.

- a. October 12, 2023, regular meeting.

Corkins moves to approve, Wigg seconds, unanimous in favor.

- b. October 26, 2023, special meeting.

Meunier moves to approve, Wigg seconds, unanimous in favor.

4. Public comment (for something not on the agenda).

None.

5. Old Business.

- a. Interim Zoning Changes discussion.

Discussion started with an explanation of Interim Zoning Changes, shorter-term changes that can be made more quickly without going through the full hearing process, if there is a need due to an emergency. There is a need for this due to the flooding earlier this year.

Density, Set-backs, Commercial vs. Residential Zoning. Some discussion around how lot sizes could allow certain types of construction, and street widths, could help address density indirectly.

There were discussions around these topics:

Building size/Construction materials: There was a suggestion to look at minimum sizes and construction materials, to help with faster construction. Tiny homes are currently an option (minimum is 200 square feet). Shatney suggested that building materials aren't controlled by zoning but it may be a building code issue.

Bylaw Modernization Grant: Work on this grant is still pending, Interim Zoning should focus on 'low hanging fruit' and saving more serious or indepth changes for the full review once we get a consultant.

Commercial vs. Residential Zoning: Question about the possibility to adjust zoning regulations to allow some commercial spaces within areas zoned for residential use? There was some pushback against allowing commercial use in residential zoning previously, but may be worth revisiting, especially if care is taken about defining what is allowed.

Demolition requirements: Discussion around adding additional guardrails against demolition to avoid demolishing buildings that may be usable. There are already protections for some situations, for safety reasons or buildings in the Design Review District.

Density requirements: These were added to the 2019 Zoning Ordinance, did not exist previously. Suggestion that these requirements are holding back apartment units being added to existing buildings or creation of new buildings. There is a suggestion that this could be an immediately effective change as several building owners have expressed an interest in increasing the number of units in their buildings.

Parking requirements: Parking can be looked at, a challenge right now due to winter parking regulations (and moving to a model similar to Montpelier's may help) but reducing requirements could be considered. Representative Anthony strongly agrees with removing parking minimums.

Setbacks: Question about how setback regulations may have changed over the years. Prior to 2019 the largest setback was 8-feet (front, sides, or rear), currently this varies by district, but residential setbacks are as high as 16-feet. The main context for this is single-family houses on quarter-acre lots and current State statutes are now disallowing this type of regulation.

Consensus was that density, lot sizes, and setbacks are the main 'low-hanging fruit' for consideration. Parking and demolition are also worth looking at in more detail.

Shatney volunteered to draft some changes to the existing ordinances with these adjustments for discussion and approval in the next Planning Commission meeting.

b. Site Visit Follow-up discussion.

vhb has not yet gotten back with information or a draft Contract since the recent site visit (on October 26), and Shatney will be following-up with them to get this information.

6. New Business.

a. Commercial-to-Residential Conversion: Housing Supply Action Plan

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/cea/written-materials/2023/10/27/commercial-to-residential-conversion-addressing-office-vacancies/>

There was some preliminary discussion around these Federal Plans that may help facilitate converting under-utilized office space into housing. There are some spaces in Barre that may be good candidates and a suggestion that grants may help developers to make these conversions.

7. Confirm Date of Next Meeting.

a. December 14, 2023.

8. Staff Updates.

a. None.

9. Round Table.

Councilor Deering thanks the Planning Commission for its efforts.

Sichel says that this was a productive meeting and that the Housing Task Force is also working on housing opportunities.

Wigg mentions an Infill Housing Study organized by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission that Commissioners may want to attend, to be held on Wednesday, November 15th from 5-6:30 at The Church of the Good Shepherd at 39 Washington Street in Barre.

10. Adjourn.

6:44pm, **Reil moves to adjourn, Corkins seconds, unanimous in favor.**