

**Montpelier Planning Commission**  
**April 17, 2003**  
**City Council Chambers, City Hall**

***Subject to Review and Approval***

**Present:** Chair David Borgendale, Members Bryan Mitofsky, Carolyn Grodinsky, Curt McCormack, Irene Facciolo, Anne Campbell, Planning Director Valerie Capels.

**Call to Order**

Mr. Borgendale called the meeting to order at \_\_\_\_\_ p.m.

**draft**

**Review of Agenda**

Mr. Borgendale reviewed that there were basically one item on the agenda which was a continued public hearing on the March 7, 2003 Petition for Zoning Amendment on Barre Street in the area known as Sabin's Pasture..

**Comments from the Chair**

Mr. Borgendale reviewed that one of the major tasks of the Planning Commission is to rewrite the Master Plan of the City of Montpelier. The Commission has to have it completed by 2005, and are committed to spending about half of their time on that task. The Commission has identified 11 areas they plan to investigate in detail. For the remainder of the year, one of their two monthly meetings will be devoted to one of eight areas. Then, the three remaining areas they will address in meetings in early 2004. The first of those meetings is going to focus on issues of parking, which will include discussion of the Carr Lot proposals. That meeting is scheduled for May 12, 2003. Mr. Borgendale encouraged people to check the City's website and the local newspaper for more information about this meeting and encouraged people to participate in their discussions.

**March 7, 2003 Petition for Zoning Amendment - Public Hearing**

Mr. Borgendale opened the public hearing.

Michael Hoffman, Sabin Street, provided a 5-page handout, the cover included a photograph of the view of Sabin's Pasture from Wheelock Street. With the Master Plan in mind and with a base of GIS data provided by the City, he visited the area. The first image of his handout is a photograph taken about 600' above sea level, about the level of the lowest house on Sabin/Sibley corner. That line drawn across the Sabin's Pasture meadow is about halfway up. The marking on the photo which says "500' from Barre St centerline" is about 950' from Barre Street to the little plateau at the top. The second page is a map showing the petition zoning boundaries of Medium Density Residential (MDR), Low Density Residential (LDR), General Business (GB). He also has drawn the Academic Institution Planned Unit Development (AI-PUD) boundary of Vermont College. On the map is the Petitioners' 200-foot line (from the Barre Street centerline) for the edge of the General Business district. He had also added a 300-foot and a 500-foot line to the map for reference. The 500-foot line corresponds to the one on the photograph.

These are the base for the third page of his handout which shows buildable area. Without knowing the lay of the land, the zoning district lines are less than meaningful. From the topography, he drew the buildable areas on that property. He also performed an analysis of the housing density of the surrounding neighborhoods. The results are:

Sabin Street area = 3.4 houses per acre

East State Street area = 3.2 houses per acre  
McKinley Street area = 2.2 houses per acre  
Towne Hill Road area (the denser section) = 1.5 houses per acre.

These are the settlement patterns of the neighborhoods around this site. It appeared that at the previous hearing, there was general agreement that there should be some conservation of the upper pasture. He then focused a buildable analysis on the lower portion of the site. The last page of his handout included calculations of the housing densities allowed by current zoning. The last two items on the page were the key ones for him. If they build based on the density of the Sabin Street neighborhood (which had the highest housing density of the surrounding neighborhoods) with a density of 3.4 houses per acre, they should build no more than 40 houses in the lower buildable area. The zoning, even the proposed zoning, allows for a higher housing density. If they are trying to maintain a housing pattern or character, the zoning is out of whack, even the proposed zoning. His point was that any housing density that is higher than 40 houses per acre in the lower pasture is much higher than the surrounding neighborhood. If they look at the Petitioners' proposal with the 200-foot section, they are looking at about 160 units over the whole site. If Petitioners keep the upper pasture undeveloped, it means they are going to be putting 160 units in the lower section which is roughly 4 times the density of the surrounding neighborhoods. Another way to compare would be to take the Sabin Street area and place it in the lower area, it is about the same size as the lower section. To place 160 units in the lower section would be to take the Sabin Street, East State Street, McKinley Street, Towne Hill Road, plus more and put it in the same area. You are looking at 4 times the density which means you are looking at large buildings.

Mr. Hoffman continued that this brought them back to his first photograph. If they do hold to the 500-foot from Barre Street district edge, they still will lose the view of the pasture because it will be obscured by the 4-5 story buildings. He urged the Planning Commission to be cognizant of what the Master Plan asks for which is protection of ridgelines and vistas, to consider the existing patterns of development. The Sabin Street area is not new development, some of those houses go back to the 1800's, it is a historical and traditional pattern of development within the city. Sabin's Pasture is unique because of its openness and in the longevity of its openness.

Mr. Mitofsky asked where the quarry was on the topographical map. Mr. Hoffman explained where it was on the map and that it was out of the buildable area. Mr. Mitofsky asked if Mr. Hoffman was using both sides of the lower hill buildable area (as shown on page three of the handout) in his analysis of the 160 units. Mr. Hoffman replied yes. Mr. Mitofsky asked about the item that looked like a road. Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Borgendale replied that there was an existing path/farm road there.

Ms. Campbell asked when Mr. Hoffman was referring to 4 times the density was he referring to 160 units over the whole site? Mr. Hoffman replied that he was referring to 160 units in the lower field area. Ms. Campbell commented that she noticed on his topographical map with the buildable areas on it, the southwestern buildable area, that's assuming that the area to the west would be made MDR as opposed to leaving it HDR. Would it make more sense to you to maintain the HDR over to the other boundary line, the current HDR? Mr. Hoffman referred to the Petition Zoning Boundaries in his handout and noted that it was General Business and then Low Density Residential takes up the remaining area. Ms. Campbell noted that he did not include any buildable area to the west. Mr. Hoffman clarified where the property line was for Sabin's Pasture/Zorzi and noted that the MDR district did not go into the property at all.

Mr. Mitofsky: in their request for amendment from the Housing Task Force, do you have any calculations that correlate to this HDR area. Mr. Hoffman referred to the Housing Unit Calculations / revised zoning proposals sheet in his handout. Under the listing "Housing Adv Proposal" (Housing Advocate Proposal)

was based on what they drew. Since he didn't have access to their data files, he interpolated. All the numbers should be accurate plus or minus a few percentage points. According to their proposal, the zoning that they suggest would have a buildout of around 300 units. Mr. Hoffman referred to the listing on that sheet labeled "Housing Adv Proposal - switch MDR to HDR" and stated that having High Density Residential that far up the hill was inappropriate. He did a "what-if", what if they make that middle zone MDR instead of HDR, that yields a buildout of around 177 units. An HDR in that zone allows almost 140 units. MDR in that same zone allows 21 units. Mr. Mitofsky asked what elevation line the 160 units Mr. Hoffman proposed went up to. Mr. Hoffman replied that the 160 units involved the entire property. The numbers refer to what the zoning over the entire property would allow, independent of where the houses would be. Mr. Mitofsky confirmed that Mr. Hoffman was recommending that the buildable space be confined to the 500-foot elevation and below. Mr. Hoffman replied that that would be highly desirable. Mr. Mitofsky asked what that number would be in terms of housing. Mr. Hoffman replied that it meant that the density of units goes up. It would be the same number of units, but they would be closer together. That is where the 4 times the standard density starts to show up.

Ms. Campbell: if you take the 160 units that would be allowed over the entire property and clustered them below the 500-foot elevation, you would have 4 times the current density. Mr. Hoffman replied that it would be even denser than that. He referred to the Buildable Area map in his handout, the lower hill buildable area goes up to just below the ridgeline, to about 650 feet elevation. Ms. Campbell: you have not included any of the area to the east as buildable, is that because of the grade? Mr. Hoffman replied that is very steep, that is where the rock cut was made when the new bridge approach was re-aligned. It is essentially unbuildable.

Mr. Borgendale was unclear about the density numbers and asked: If you take the acreage you've outlined on the second to the last page of your exhibit (Buildable Area with Topo) identified as the Lower Hill Buildable Area, does your density calculation come from placing your 160 units within that area and not over the overall property? Mr. Hoffman replied that that was correct. If you pull them further down the hill to the 600-foot elevation or below, the density increases.

Mr. Mitofsky: and that qualifies as HDR, to put 160 units in that Lower Hill Buildable Area you have defined here? Mr. Hoffman replied that he had no HDR in his proposal. This was just a simple analysis based on sketchy information from the housing advocacy proposal showing what the total units the zoning would allow. He made no claim as to where the units would be on the site. Mr. Mitofsky: that wasn't what I was asking. In your acreage calculation that you've defined for lower hill, 160 units does or does not fit in there according to HDR standards? Mr. Hoffman replied that he would have to go back to the model and extract the area for the calculation. Mr. Mitofsky confirmed that it was not part of the calculation. Mr. Hoffman agreed that it was not a part of the calculation because they also have a General Business district which goes back 250 feet, so really you are talking about an area of land that is 250-feet deep by the width. So at that point they are talking about 139 units in that area. According to the area and the density that the zoning regulations allow, nearly 140 units could go into that swath of land. I was not implying that it was engineeringly possible, or that the topography would allow it, but just what zoning would allow. Mr. Mitofsky: rather than use the standardization of HDR, if the buildable area in the Lower Hill Buildable Area you've outlined, below the 500-foot elevation, if that was to become General Business to incorporate housing and general business, do you have any gut feeling how the Friends of Sabin's Pasture would feel? Mr. Hoffman: replied that 500 feet was pretty far up the hill. Mr. Mitofsky asked Mr. Hoffman to show him on the map where it would be. Mr. Hoffman showed him on the map.

Mr. Borgendale confirmed that the area identified as the Lower Hill Buildable Area did not follow the property boundary lines. Mr. Hoffman replied that that area was based upon a fairly quick analysis of topography, rather than existing zoning.

Mr. McCormack: your calculation for up to 160 units, that's for the zoning proposal or the Housing Task Force proposal. Mr. Hoffman replied that the zoning proposal the PC had would allow for about 160 units. The GB district would allow 64 units, the LDR area would allow 94 units or so. There are 8 in the little sliver of MDR that runs along the northwestern part of the property, but there was no way to effectively get a road in there. He referred to his Housing Unit Calculations and pointed out that under the "FSF Petition" listings he identified those 8 units separately. The numbers on this page were meant to illustrate order of magnitude concepts rather than to be a pure unit count.

Mr. Borgendale on the LDR piece, you are assuming that it would go in as a PRD, and whatever the agreement was is that we would use up the whole piece of property, cluster the houses in this area instead of following the general zoning regulations for LDR. Mr. Hoffman replied that he did not assume that. The numbers are based on an overall analysis on what the zoning on the whole site would allow. Mr. Borgendale replied that LDR requires a 1-acre lot. Mr. Hoffman replied that the intention and hope was that people would do a PUD, of course, then there would be density bonuses which would increase the numbers. These numbers are really the lowest numbers possible. Density bonuses and other accommodations in the code would allow for higher densities.

Ms. Facciolo: the basic zoning petition that we are looking at, the General Business district you are saying they can build 64 units, unless they went for a density bonus or something your buildable area isn't really effective, that 64 units is what is going into the lower buildable area. In terms of the zoning proposal we have in front of us, they only want to go 200 feet from the road for General Business. So it would not be 160 units. In other words, you are saying that the worst case scenario is they are allowed to build 160 units in the lower pasture. That is different than the proposal we have in front of us. Mr. Hoffman replied that the zoning would allow up to 64 units in the General Business (GB) district and another 90± units over the rest of the Low Density Residential (LDR) property. The reason that he brought up the lower hill was that generally at the last meeting there was a strongly voiced consensus to not develop the upper field. Therefore the density discussion came out of what happens if you put the allowed number of units into the smaller space. As a practical matter, about 40 acres out of the 97 acres are probably not buildable. You are really talking about 55-60 acres that are flat enough or within a reasonable slope to be buildable.

Mr. Borgendale: suppose we accept your analysis as desirable for purposes of zoning, how would we zone in order to accomplish this map? Mr. Hoffman replied that the PC needed a Conservation district. We need something that would protect the upper pasture and provide some incentive to cluster beyond economic because building a road and providing all the services to that upper field is not going to be inexpensive. He was surprised Montpelier did not have a Conservation district protecting the ridgelines response to the Murray Hill project. Mr. Borgendale replied that he understood that. What would the zoning be down in the lower buildable area. Mr. Hoffman replied that according to the proposal before the PC, it would be 200-feet of GB and the rest would be LDR. Mr. Borgendale: what I am saying is that if they had a Conservation district there, that would not accomplish putting that many houses in there, so what would they zone it in order to put that many houses in it? Mr. Hoffman commented that the issue was not what is the zoning going to allow, but what is a reasonable and prudent thing to build. He thought they could take a number of parts of the zoning to task for what it allows versus what we have and what our intentions are. Since this really is not a discussion of the overall zoning code, but rather about one specific area, he was not sure he could get deeply into it. Mr. Borgendale: I think I am hearing that you are not happy with what the potential outcome is even under the petition. What I am asking is, if you were drawing up the petition, what would you put on it? Mr. Hoffman replied that the petition came out of the limitations of the current code. The PC is charged with rewriting the Master Plan or enhancing it, so he would leave it to the PC's wisdom to come up with something that met the needs of Montpelier.

John Fairbanks, resident of Montpelier and employed by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency which is

the largest funder of affordable housing in Vermont. He also co-ordinates the Vermont Housing Awareness Campaign, a statewide public-private partnership working to educate Vermonters about both the need and benefit of affordable housing. He was not before the PC to specifically address the merits of the either zoning change proposals, but to urge that as the PC proceeds that they think about the key word "density". That is the key to affordability. Without it, prices go up. The PC had a copy of the report *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Housing and Wages in Vermont*. He pointed out that the median home price in Vermont had gone up 36% over the past six years. The average rent of a 2-bedroom apartment had gone up 25% over the past six years. He did not know of anyone whose wages went up that fast. The cost of housing is outstripping the ability of people to pay for a place to live. There is a serious problem where many people in Vermont cannot afford this basic necessity. People are starting to pay 40-50% of their income for housing. The standard affordability is 30% and some people consider that to be high. Washington County, in general, and Montpelier, in particular, are not immune to the problem of escalating housing costs. As part of the report, they calculated a "Housing Wage" which is the amount of money one needed to make per hour to afford the rent on a modest 2-bedroom apartment. In Washington County, it was about \$25,000 per year, or \$12.63 per hour. There are many jobs that pay less than \$25,000 per year.

Mr. Fairbanks continued that the other point he wanted to make was what was largely driving the increase in housing prices and costs was a matter of supply and demand. There is more need than there is stock. There was a study done a couple years ago which covered the six northwest counties of Vermont including Washington County, three years ago there was already a shortage of 7,400 housing units. That is expected to grow to 10,000 units by 2010. The prices are only going to go up. No one is expecting that wages will catch up with those prices. Affordability is uppermost in the housing organizations' minds and he hoped it was also for the PC, and density is the key to affordability. He informed the PC about their housing data website: [www.housingdata.org](http://www.housingdata.org) which contains a lot of information about housing data. He urged the PC to remember during their deliberation that they have a serious housing problem. They cannot do much about wages, but they can do a lot about housing costs. Higher densities can reduce the development costs and therefore reduce the cost of housing overall.

Ms. Campbell asked Mr. Fairbanks to address the level of density for affordability. Mr. Fairbanks did not have the information readily available, but offered to find it, in terms of what would affect affordability in Washington County or Montpelier. As a general rule, the more units one can put in the lower the cost. He clarified that he was not recommending high-rises, he was also aware of the zoning limit of 3-stories or 45 feet building height. He suggested that building for density could be done in such a way that it would not have a negative impact on the character of the area.

Mr. Mitosky asked if Mr. Fairbanks had any specific information about the number of cars the people who need the affordable housing have, the people well under the \$25,000 income level. Is there any proportional data about the affordability of housing and number of vehicles that need parking? His question comes in terms of High Density Residential requiring parking spaces and General Business does not. Mr. Fairbanks did not have an answer ready about the parking question. He commented that for the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, most of the single-family borrowers were at 80% of median income, household incomes of about \$36,000 per year. The median wage statewide is in the mid-\$40,000's. There are people in the median range who are having trouble affording housing. In particular, they are retail clerks, clerical workers, and child care workers.

Mr. Borgendale commented that he was hoping that one of the housing advocates would comment on Art Wolfe's study that was reported today that indicated that affordability has improved significantly. Mr. Fairbanks replied that he had read that and that Mr. Wolfe's report last year had said about the same

thing last year when the Vermont Housing Awareness Campaign produced the first Housing and Wages report. He offered an opinion on Mr. Wolfe's report, but it was based only on the news report and the press release. Mr. Fairbanks stated that he understood that Mr. Wolfe got his wage information by looking at 120,000 income tax returns from last year. What he looked at was income tax returns from people who were married and filing jointly, which is about 40% of the tax returns filed in Vermont. Those tax returns tend to reflect higher income households. Affordability for those people is not the affordability issue for people making \$25,000 per year. Mr. Wolfe states that interest rates are very low and that helps affordability. Mr. Fairbanks commented that interest rates alone are not drivers of affordability. If the housing stock is not available, it does not matter how low the interest rate is.

Mr. Borgendale asked what the impact of property taxes was on affordability. Mr. Fairbanks replied that he had just received a report that day that indicated that housing development may not have as significantly negative impact on taxes as is conventionally believed. He had not had a chance to review it, but was willing to forward it to the Planning Commission. One concern was about increased pressure on the schools, but he would remind the Commission that not every housing unit brings children to it. Mr. Fairbanks added that there was a study done in Maine of three communities that showed that the largest jump in property taxes was in the city that had the least housing development.

Gerry Tarrant, resident of Montpelier, everyone in his family has enjoyed Sabin's Pasture. We don't need to lose Sabin's Pasture. The challenge is to gain support through the City beginning with the Planning Commission and the City Council. He was sympathetic to low-income housing, but there is no decree that low-income housing has to go into Sabin's Pasture. He believed that many people in the community want to see both things happen. They want to see low-income housing and they want to see Sabin's Pasture conserved. The Friends of Sabin's Pasture's petition is not a panacea. He thought the PC will be receiving information that if they allow up to 160 units, there will be massive walls along Barre Street. One will not be able to see Sabin's Pasture. Mr. Tarrant commented that Montpelier can assume and accept a certain amount of growth. I think we are seeing some pretty good growth in Montpelier today. There are a number of developments that are being proposed or are in the works that need to be identified and understood. Sabin's Pasture is a unique and wonderful piece of property. It is very much, but in a different way, like Hubbard Park. Hubbard Park which was preserved years ago in a rural and different Vermont. The people who did that had foresight, and we all enjoy Hubbard Park. Sabin's Pasture is a wonderful piece of property to enjoy with ones children or dogs. The housing group has its mission and he was not unsympathetic to that mission, but it need not target Sabin's Pasture. He asked the Planning Commission to try to meet the challenge of growth, low-income housing, and conservation of land in a way that wasn't the easiest way. The easiest way for the developer would be to develop this property and make his money. The easiest way for the housing advocates would be to say: let's take advantage of this and build several hundred units. That would not be the best way, it is the easiest way. There are many communities in Vermont who would like to have a parcel like Sabin's Pasture. Montpelier does not have to sell it, give it away, or block it. We should do what we can to preserve it so that our children can enjoy it. It will be a challenge to save it in a meaningful way, but if there is any chance to save it, they need the support of the Planning Commission, the next step will be the support of the City Council, and the support of the community. They will need to work with the housing advocates to help them identify other locations for low-income housing. He did not want to see Montpelier broken-up and given away. Mr. Tarrant commented that often development comes in and opposition comes in and people say: well, they are opposed to development and growth. That is not necessarily true. It is because there has not been enough thought as to where that growth should occur. He asked the PC to consider a Conservation district. He knew people said it was not possible because it was not public land, but there are ways to do it.

Ms. Campbell asked Mr. Tarrant: when you talk about taking the easy way out and careful consideration

about where growth should be located, have you given any thought to counter-proposals, other solutions to the problem of housing? Mr. Tarrant replied that he had in a generic way. He had looked at other proposed developments around Montpelier, he knew there are proposals off Berlin Street, Elm Street, and throughout Montpelier. He thought the number of units that were in the pipeline approached about 200 units. What he saw in terms of Montpelier was they have seen developments with 10-20 units go in. We have seen development in Montpelier, it has not turned its back on growth. What we are seeing here is a large number of units in a sensitive location. We need to look at other alternatives. He did not have specific ideas and recommendations. He was not suggesting that the developer should go to the other side of the city, but he knew there was other pieces of property to develop. He thought there was property near the skating rink which could be for sale and available for development. He was not suggesting that it should go there, he was just saying there is land available around Montpelier. He was also suggesting that development should not necessarily happen in Montpelier. He suggested that the housing advocates should look at other towns and cities in Washington County.

Aaron Brondyke, Edwards Street, was there to testify on behalf of his dog and unborn children. He moved to Montpelier three years ago because he loved Montpelier. He liked the high density residential neighborhoods, the walkable community. He liked that he could walk to downtown. He likes that he can get around without a car, and he likes the parks. His dog, Maggie, really likes the parks, too. They do not have a park on their end of town. He lives two blocks from Sabin's Pasture. Maggie and he use it often. They are really lucky that the landowner had allowed people to use it for walking. He thought a portion of Sabin's Pasture should be a city park, but he was not sure that was something that could be solved through zoning. He thought they needed a Conservation zone. He understood that this was not the time to request that, but that it should happen through the Master Plan process. He thought they needed it because Low Density Residential zoning is not conservation. In his opinion, it was suburban zoning. He thought there should be some high density development down along Barre Street and that it should go further up the slope than what was shown on the petition proposal. He thought the upper area should be conserved. He did not know how it should be done. He would rely on the Planning Commission to brainstorm better ideas for conserving it. He would think that any proposal that leaves the door open for any amount of one-acre, low density development on this site was something he would be uncomfortable with. He had not heard anything that suggested that it was not just as economically feasible for this developer to build mansions with views up on the rim of Sabin's Pasture with magnificent views. We would not be able to walk on the property. His concern was not the number of units that were put on the property, but the type of development that would occur. He would like it to look like Sabin-Liberty-Loomis Streets, residential and fairly dense.

Gordon Hall, resident of Montpelier, commented that the staff report was very helpful and he appreciated it. He handed out a letter which addressed the concerns expressed at the April 14, 2003 Planning Commission meeting. He read aloud from his letter.

Jim Abrams, McKinley Street, commented that he was one of a number of people who live close to Sabin's Pasture and who walked in Sabin's Pasture. He carried around some of the petitions to ask for support to protect the land. Rather than just go around the Sabin's Pasture area, he also went to the neighborhoods west of the State House, in the Bailey Avenue area, and across the Winooski River into the Berlin Street area. What he found when he talked with people was a great deal of interest and concern about taxes, the vitality of downtown, the need for growth and quality jobs in Montpelier, but he did not find was an interest in growing the population of Montpelier. Most people were not interested in having Montpelier be 25%, 50%, or 100% larger. He suggested that the issue had to do with the character of Montpelier and the quality of life. He referred to the concept of "Tragedy of the Commons" which is the idea that if when certain things become popular, they become destroyed because of their popularity. He suggested that they face that in Montpelier. We have a character of town that is and will

continue to be popular. If they allow access to that quality of life, it will diminish. He stated that he was an urban refugee, he moved to Montpelier by choice from an urban area. He used to live in a beautiful place north of San Francisco with a lot of open hilltop vistas and areas, but wrestled with the issue of whether they should allow everything to be built over because everyone wanted to live there, or whether they should conserve those spaces which would make it somewhat of an exclusive area to live. He suggested that they have the same challenge in Montpelier. He agreed that their biggest challenge was to maintain the quality of this city, even in the face of the demand of the folks wishing to live here. He was sympathetic with the need for low-income housing because they do want a mix of population in this city. But, in the end, they should look for other places to provide some of that mix of housing that the city needs.

Christine Zachai, resident of Montpelier, stated that she was on the Conservation Commission but she was not representing that commission that evening, she was there as an individual. She was also involved with the Conservation Fund, but was not speaking on their behalf. She lives near Sabin's Pasture and has learned to treasure it. She comes from a conservation background. Because she comes from a conservation background, she was interested in seeing a combination of conservation on the upper slope and more intense development on the lower slope. As was testified earlier, Montpelier needs housing. As someone who was new to Montpelier, she understood the problem of not being able to find housing in this city. Montpelier is an urban center. In talking about where to build, she thought they should be talking about building in the urban centers. Growth is going to happen, people are going to continue to multiply, and we need to make space for them. She did not think that space should be in East Montpelier or Calais, for examples, which would mean there would be more people driving downtown and needing to park. The space for housing should be in the urban center. She thought they could replicate some of the great housing style we have in Montpelier along the lower pasture where it would be appropriate. She thought they need the housing. She also thought the Conservation district was a good idea, but she emphasized that one-acre lots was not conservation. If one were allowed to build one-acre lots, a developer would look upon that as an invitation to build huge houses with wonderful views of Camel's Hump that would sell in a heartbeat. If that were to happen, access would be permanently restricted for everyone except the few people who had the one-acre lots. She urged the Planning Commission to look at the tools that are available and to look at the idea of the Conservation district. We don't have good tools to address this issue. She thought they were using a hammer to solve a problem they need a screwdriver for.

Ms. Grodinsky asked if Ms. Zachai thought the PC shouldn't even be looking at changing the zoning and should be looking at other tools, or did she think there should be a change made to the current zoning. Ms. Zachai replied that the General Business zone was a little "goofy" in the way that it goes up in to the triangle. If Sabin's Pasture was going to be developed, she would rather see more intense development. If the whole pasture was going to be developed and nothing was conserved, she would rather see more intense development and end up with more housing than low density mansions on one-acre lots with great views. Zachai added that she did not think that the Low Density Residential zoning proposal made sense. If the goal was conservation of part of Sabin's Pasture, one-acre lots was not conservation, so she did not think that proposal made sense. Even the General Business zone did not make sense the way it was right now. She thought they did not have the right tool right now to change the zoning to something that did make sense. She thought they needed to look into creating a Conservation zoning district.

Brian Abbott, Hebert Road, commented that communities in most regions of the United States are growing. This should not be surprising considering that the population of our country has been growing at more than 2 million people per year. This rate of growth is expected to continue for at least the next several decades. This means, for example, that in 25 years there will be more than 50 million additional Americans. They will all need places to live. He urged the Planning Commission to keep in view the

present and future need for housing. There are times when most of us might prefer a view of open space instead of a view of another house, but this preference cannot alter our collective obligation to see that there will be housing available for the coming generations. The problems arising from population growth are many and present difficult challenges for Montpelier. However, bolting Montpelier's door by resisting housing does not solve these problems, but simply forces them onto other communities already working to manage their own growth. The problems of growth are not insurmountable as long as we work together with patience and without fear.

Roberta Tracy, Kent Street, commented that at the previous meeting on April 14, 2003, the PC had specifically asked for information about how the petition dovetailed with the Master Plan. She thought Montpelier had a unique opportunity to do many things. She thought there was an opportunity for Montpelier to set the standard and be the model. The zoning petition works with the Master Plan in the Visions for the Future part of the Master Plan. The Master Plan talks about promoting development that enhances the small scale, intimate character of the city, and then goes on to talk about protecting ridgelines from development and preserving the city's natural features. These features are distinguishing for Montpelier. Housing development that preserves natural, key areas. In the Conservation Commission's Views and Vistas report, this is also mentioned. In the section on Parks in the Master Plan, it talks about the need to continue to pursue opportunities to develop recreational space in an urban core wherever possible. On page 18 of the Master Plan, it recommended that the Conservation Commission develop a report preserving the City's natural features. The Conservation Commission has done that. The only thing that has not happen is that report has not been adopted. The Master Plan talks about clustering development and using other "Smart Growth" tools for achieving goals that are set forth in the Master Plan. The proposed zoning petition, although it does not answer all the questions and provide all the solutions, it would promote cluster development. In Chapter 11 of the Master Plan, it talks about land use and development. her understanding was that the General Business (GB) zone was for automobile-related and -dependent activities. She did not understand how GB got so far up into the pasture. Having the GB district did make sense down along Barre Street because of what it would promote and allow for growth.

Ms. Tracy continued that the Views and Vistas study in Appendix A singled out Sabin's Pasture as one of the few areas of discrepancy with the Master Plan. Then it goes on to cite a number of ways the Master Plan can be changed, or the zoning in the pasture can be changed to bring it in line with the recommendations of the Master Plan. She encouraged the Planning Commission to move slowly, thoughtfully, to ask many questions, and to seek input.

Mr. Mitofsky asked if Ms. Tracy thought that having the GB district stretched along Barre Street promoted sprawl. Ms. Tracy replied that she did not understand why GB was every put in that area. She thought the PC could change it to anything they wanted that made sense. Just because it says that one can put up to x number of units per acre, did not mean that one had to do that. It just gives an idea of what one could work up to.

Barbara Ripley, College Street, responded to Mr. Mitofsky's question by commenting that in her opinion sprawl meant uncontrolled growth. What Friends of Sabin's Pasture is proposing is the opposite of that. It is controlled growth, concentrated in an area, and behind it conserved. If the zoning were left the way it is now, it could be filled in with residential growth which looks like sprawl, like Williston. She added that she did not think that there needed to be a division between the need for housing and the need for conservation. She encouraged the Planning Commission to take the proposals before them and look to find a way to meet the dual goals. If the Commission takes the first step to change the zoning along these lines, that allows the community the opportunity to take next step, to find a way to fund a conservation project for the upper pasture that will allow the Zorzis a fair return on their investment. That will allow the

developer to put together a project that is economically feasible for housing along Barre Street.

Matt Brittenham, Marvin Street, wanted Sabin's Pasture preserved but also supported the effort to create affordable housing. He lived for seven years in a one-bedroom apartment in Montpelier with his wife and two children because they could not find a better place in Montpelier to live, while wanting to stay in Montpelier. As they look at bringing in more affordable housing, they need to keep a sense of the character of Montpelier. As one looks around the country, one sees urban centers that are empty and rotten with expensive housing development further and further outside of the city. He knew that parking was a problem for the community. Depending upon how this development is designed, it could make this less of a walking community and more of a driving community creating more strain on traffic. Or, the development could be designed in such a way that it would actually enliven the city center and take some of the strain off of parking because they would leave their car at home. In terms of where affordable housing should go. Historically, this community grew from people having large families and large houses, many of which have been broken up into smaller apartments. They currently have a downtown area made up of three-story buildings of which the top stories seem to not be used. He would like to see more effort to work with the existing structures to increase the amount of housing.

Dan Lindner, Kent Street, liked the concept of a Conservation district. He recognized the need for some development and that limited development along Barre Street might be appropriate.

Jim Libby, Montpelier Housing Task Force (MHTF), handed out a report the Task Force wrote as a followup to their testimony and the questions at the previous hearing on April 14, 2003. He also referred to a report that the MHTF had produced *Sabin's Pasture - A Vision for Development and Conservation*. A previous speaker said there were other developments occurring elsewhere in the city. However, a feature of these developments is that there is tremendous neighborhood opposition. That is an issue we have to deal with as a community. He referred to a book called *Above and Beyond: Visualizing Change in Small Towns and Rural Areas* by Julie Campoli, Elizabeth Humstone, Alex Maclean. The book talks about sprawl, but it also provides examples of some of the commercial and residential developments that are being done in Vermont that fit in with the community character, people like them, and are pedestrian-friendly. He suggested that the examples and concepts were applicable to this project. He recently attended a conference on sprawl which someone said that the first thing people dislike is sprawl and the second thing people dislike is density. That is something they have to deal with. He brought up the issue of "fair share" and referred to a report produced by the Chittenden County Housing Task Force called *Unlocking Housing Opportunities: Strategies for Increasing the Supply of Housing in Chittenden County*.

He then reviewed the report he handed out to the Commission at the beginning of his testimony. They included numbers in the MHTF report of April 17, 2003. He continued that the housing unit numbers used in the discussion of this project are both real and artificial. They are real in the sense in what is being proposed by the petition is for the City of Montpelier to remove the right of the developer to build housing, to develop that land. The right to develop is being taking away, it is not being shifted elsewhere. It is important to not only consider what they are doing to Sabin's pasture for conservation, but they are looking at taking away the potential for development. They are all talking about numbers because they are stuck with an indirect approach. They do not have a direct way with the current zoning regulations to protect that portion of the pasture that the city wants to protect and to develop that portion of the property that should be developed. What is the potential for development? What will happen in a hotly contested regulatory process? After the project is reviewed by the Development Review Board, it will go to the Environmental Court. Then, the developer will have to get an Act 250 permit and go before the Environmental Board, then the Supreme Court. There will be many steps after this one. So, where

should they start? No one seems to support the design of 600 units, but it seems highly unlikely that the developer would ever be permitted for the maximum number of units. One of the disagreements is over how much flexibility should be given the developer. All of the discussions suffer because none of them know the economics.

Mr. Libby commented that he is hearing the comments "I would really like for the city to not change at all and to remain a city of 8,000 people, and I would also like for a place to live and a place for my children to live." He commented that they do not have that now. There is not an adequate supply of housing. One reason property values have gone up so much recently, is because of supply and demand. He was concerned that it would change the character of the city in terms of who would be able to live here.

David Kidney

### **Adjournment**

Ms. Teachout made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Grodinsky seconded the motion and it carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Smith, Planner

*scribed May 2, 30, June 11-13, 16, 2003 by Sara E. Moulton*

*These minutes are subject to approval by the Planning Commission. Changes, if any, will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which they were acted upon.*