

Montpelier Planning Commission
July 28, 2003
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Chair David Borgendale, Members Irene Facciolo, Carolyn Grodinsky, Bryan Mitofsky, Anne Campbell, Sara Teachout, Planning Director Valerie Capels, and Planner Stephanie Smith.

Call to Order

Mr. Borgendale called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Approval of Minutes and Review of the Agenda

Sara made a motion to approve minutes from July 14, seconded by Ms. Campbell. Mr. Borgendale asked that page 6, 4th paragraph down of the minutes be revised to read “Mr. Borgendale does not want to get bogged down in details, though best efforts should be made to establish ball park estimates of development potential.” He also noted that his name has been spelled incorrectly. The motion to approve the minutes as corrected passed 6-0.

Mr. Borgendale asked if any member of the public would like to provide comment on anything that was not on the night’s agenda. No one from the audience spoke.

General Appearances

Mr. Borgendale reviewed the agenda and no changes were proposed. Mr. Borgendale asked if any member of the public would like to provide comment on anything that was not on the agenda. No one from the audience spoke. Mr. Borgendale handed over the meeting to Vice Chairperson Teachout, who provided the introduction of the Economic Development Forum.

Economic Development Forum

Richard Angney, Vice President of the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation (CVEDC), stated that a thriving economy is key to a city like Montpelier. CVEDC is 25 years old and provides assistance, financial and otherwise, to businesses in Central Vermont. They strive towards creating jobs, and recruiting new business to the region. Doing this type of work is costly and the CVEDC has been somewhat successful—MicoTech, Bombardier, and Verilux. They also work with existing business to help them grow, such as Vermont Mutual.

The CVEDC runs a small business loan and assistance program. Pat Travers is the regional development center specialist. He recently assisted Raina Launderville and Shane Farrell to open up their shoe store, Paseo, on State Street.

Mr. Angney said that Montpelier has the infrastructure for economic development: a nearby airport, the Interstate exit, transportation routes, proximity to Burlington, and good quality of life. Another key to developing business is having established telecommunications capabilities.

He lamented that there are no easy solutions to developing a thriving economy. The community should be business friendly and provide assistance to businesses like, such as tax stabilization, and create a tax increment finance district. The city should think regionally: Montpelier is part of a larger economy. Montpelier should realize their constraints: there is little room for industrial development, and no area in the city is “shovel ready;” and there is currently

little office and retail space available within the city, which indicates that downtown is doing well. Another character of the area, which may help or hinder Montpelier is its rural character. To some businesses, Montpelier's location is a drawback; to others it's a draw. Recruiting business is very competitive state to state and region to region, and it is very important for the to strive to keep the businesses we have here. The upgraded intersection at the corner of 302 and 2 will help encourage redevelopment of the Interstate Equipment and Grossman's properties. The Gallison Hill area, National Life property, and the Union Institute properties are other areas the city should pay attention to for economic development opportunities. Mr. Angney said that "quality of life is the #1 asset" to the city. The city also has an exceptional workforce.

Ms. Campbell asked for clarification about the statement that not many companies would choose to locate in Montpelier because of its rural character, yet this is their #1 asset. Mr. Angney replied that the city has the perception of limited night life and culture, but said that this was untrue. There are three accredited institutions for higher education: Woodbury College, NECI, and Union Institute. There are plays, music, and a nightly activities. It is the scale of these activities which can affect a company's choice of where to locate in Vermont. Ms. Campbell asked if Mr. Angney could provide specific examples of assistance the city should give to the Union Institute. He answered that the Union Institute is growing their programs, it might be helpful to invite Dr. Hanson in to speak to the commission about their intentions and ask him the same question.

Ms. Teachout said that so many communities try to attract high tech industries because of their relatively low impact, did he have any suggestions how Montpelier could stand out. Mr. Angney said that it is important to have the telecommunications infrastructure in place and usable where the industries can locate.

Mr. Borgendale asked what the proportion of industry was in Montpelier. Mr. Angney said he didn't know the exact proportions off the top of his head but thought the leader was state government, FIRE, retail/service and very low proportion of manufacturing. Ms. Capels said that she had the DET #'s and could share this info with the commission.

Ms. Facciolo asked if there is a noticeable change in the forecast in the 2000 census about population after 9/11/01. Mr. Angney said he thinks the shift would help the Vermont as a whole.

George Malek, of the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce distributed several materials which would supplement his presentation. Mr. Malek spoke of the last master plan update in Montpelier. The planning commission identified areas for future development and as the public hearing process progressed, these identified areas were eventually eliminated from the plan. He stressed that this commission should not to let this happen.

Mr. Malek commented on the housing needs. He handed out a map of Montpelier and dots, each dot represents 20 units of housing. He asked the commission to locate 400 units of housing in the city, as this will be the needed number of units in the near future.

Mr. Malek commented on the importance of "growth centers," and referred to his memo to Kevin Dorn. He said that the state has many definitions, some conflicting, and recommends

that municipalities take the lead in creating definitions and identifying these areas in their cities and towns. When creating growth centers think about incentives that make development in these areas work.

Mr. Borgendale asked what the city and the planning commission should be doing now to increase their chances for recruiting business. Mr. Malek suggested working on planning the interstate exit.

Mr. Mitofsky asked what the state is doing about growth center designations. Mr. Malek said that it depends on who you talk to. Various agencies in the state have differing opinions and definitions about growth centers. His memo to Kevin Dorm further addressed these issues. Mr. Mitofsky asked if Mr. Malek supported regional growth centers rather than individual growth centers. Mr. Malek stated that growth centers should not be bound by municipal borders, and that communities should work together and analyze patterns of development and look at where the infrastructure is. Mr. Malek said that city's and town's should initiate the development of policy concerning growth centers. He commented on for greater local control over development. He urged the planning commission to endorse local review of development in place of state/Act 250 review of local projects.

Mr. Borgendale asked if Mr. Malek was aware of businesses not choosing Montpelier or relocating out of Montpelier due to some limitations in the available workforce. He was unaware of any problems with workforce.

Ms. Campbell asked how he arrived at Montpelier needing 400 units of housing. He replied that he used a standard equation involving current population and expected growth and included the trend in decreasing household size.

Jack Hoffman, Executive Director of the Vermont Broadband Council, spoke about the role of technology and communications infrastructure in economic development. He agreed with all comments provided by the earlier speakers. Telecommunications is an essential service; people expect to be able to have a fast Internet connection and people with the skills to maintain the networks.

Mr. Hoffman explained the wireless network project underway in the city. It was initiated by the Union Institute to improve their infrastructure at the college, for both future students and staff. It has blossomed into larger project to support the Montpelier community.

Claude Stone pointed out that this is a demonstration project, and that he is interested in creating a greater presence of Vermont companies on the Web and interested in improving the Internet capacity of the city. The City could be the provider and either receive revenue from the users or pass along the savings to the customer, but the City needs to decide what role they want to play in the project.

Summit Technology wants to test out new software, which they developed as part of this project. Problems with this type of technology is security on the Web and affordability. Mr. Hoffman stated that there are security software packages, which are installed on the provider end that could assist in solving the security issue. It will cost about \$60,000 to start-up the project.

Ms. Teachout asked if the city is working alone, because the state could be well served by this technology. Mr. Hoffman agreed and thought that the state would be involved. It would provide for better services to lobbyist, legislators, and visitor to our State Capitol.

Mr. Mitofsky asked if this would render Adelpia obsolete. To some extent yes, but there will still be users of the slower connection speeds for quite some time. The wireless technology is the future of Internet communication.

Mr. Stone, who has been urging the city to get involved in this project and take advantage of this technology, stated that retailers will expect this type of service and it should be treated as a utility. It is great opportunity for economic development and the city might catch the attention of high tech companies if this technology is available. It will also provide an opportunity for the Montpelier community to get educated on these issues.

Mary Hooper spoke on behalf of the MDCA and stressed the need to talk about the economic vitality of the community. She posed the question "what makes up the community?" There has been an incredible amount of change in the Montpelier over the last 25 years. The community has become a diverse and exciting place, with activities 18 hours of the day, seven days a week. We have two pharmacies, the hardware stores, four book stores, many personal service and retail establishments, and three higher education facilities. Many of these operations are locally owned and operated. Montpelier has some strong, rich, cultural and entertainment enterprises.

MDCA questions policy for growth at all costs, because Montpelier is at a crossroads where she urges the policy makers to proceed with caution. We should plan for tomorrow's needs not today's problems. She borrowed some policy language from Main Street Program of the National Trust and said that policies should be developed comprehensively and incrementally. She asked for diversity in the economy using public-private partnerships. There should be a focus on quality and the plan should be action-oriented. She asked the planning commission to look to the next 25 years and to strive for a higher quality of life for Montpelier citizens—preserve the community character and natural environment.

Ms. Hooper reviewed the history of Montpelier's economy: 175 years ago we were an insurance center; today the economy is diverse with NECI and Woodbury College, and 25% of the service industry is health related. She posed the question of what do the non-profits bring to the table. She stated that it is important to bring in creative business economy (the people who dream up what is the next revolution).

Mr. Mitofsky asked if Ms. Hooper was aware of the Economic Development Advisory Committee's charge from the City Council. She deferred to Alan Lendway, to speak about the committee and reviewed briefly reviewed what the committee's recommendations were to the City Council, which included the creation of an economic development corporation. Mr. Mitofsky asked isn't that the role of the MDCA. She said no; while they are concerned about the vitality of the community as a whole, their focus is the area of town within the designated downtown.

Alan Lendway shared his thoughts on the Economic Development Steering Committee that was

disbanded about one year ago, and of which he was a member. They were advisory to and appointed by the City Council. They supported the efforts in promoting the downtown, but this committee was more interested in a regional economy, growing jobs and other opportunities, like at the route 2/ 302 intersection and other parts of the community.

Mr. Mitofsky still questioned the goal of this committee. Mr. Lendway said they wanted to create the corporation, finding funding opportunities for businesses, create special districts, and organize the businesses outside the downtown.

Dot Helling of the Economic Restructuring Committee spoke about the MDCA alternative recommendations and mentioned the dissenting opinion of the steering committee. Staff noted that this information can be found on the city's Web site.

Hal Isham of the Washington/Orange County Central Labor Council spoke briefly on the importance of quality jobs and sustainable incomes for community vitality. Montpelier has an abundance of service and retail jobs which don't offer the benefits that many people need to live, like a livable wage and health insurance.

Ms. Capels briefly summarized some of community and economic development activities the City has been involved in. Much of what she wanted to cover has already been discussed. She emphasized the question of what role should the City play? The City's traditional role is to protect the public's health, safety and welfare. What we do above and beyond this is based on the community's desires and priorities. The municipality's role currently includes tax policies, development and maintenance of public infrastructure, various regulatory roles, enacting social programs, maintaining schools infrastructure, recreation facilities, and this planning process for the city's future. The planning office also administers a business loan program, housing development loan fund, and also manages the City's Web page. The planning commission should look to their and the public's vision for the future. A lot of good attention is being paid to the vitality of the downtown, but what about the other areas of the city? How should River Street, Gallison Hill, Grossman's area of town will evolve?

Map Amendment

Mr. Mitofsky made the motion to forward the language as drafted by staff for the map amendment and zoning amendment to the City Council, seconded by Ms. Facciolo. The motion passed unanimously.

Planning Commission Work Plan

Ms. Campbell and Ms. Grodinsky distributed the Natural Resource Template.

Carol Doerflin spoke up to discuss the development of the data needed to work on issues related to new zoning for Sabin's pasture. Staff said it is working on this and we should have a good body of info by October 27.

Other Business

The committee discussed what should be on the next agenda and upcoming meetings. It was suggested to revisit the work plan for Sabin's Pasture, CB-II permitted and conditional uses, articulate standards for PRD/PUD development, and LDR zoning district maybe inappropriate. Ms. Capels offered to organize a meeting with Sue Sinclair of the CVRPC to come in and talk

about growth centers. A member thought it maybe possible to discuss View and Vistas report at the 8/11 meeting. The committee set the date for the combined Density and Conservation tools workshop on 9/22.

Mr. Mitofsky asked if the commission would like to receive an update on the DRC and sign subcommittee's direction with signs. He wanted to make sure that the planning commission agreed that more restrictive standards to regulate and organize signs city wide was a good direction to work toward. The planning commission agreed.

Adjournment

Ms. Campbell moved that the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Ms. Grodinsky. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Smith, Planner

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.