

Montpelier Planning Commission
September 8, 2003
City Council Chambers, City Hall
Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Members Brian Mitofsky, Irene Facciolo, David Borgendale, Carolyn Grodinsky, Anne Campbell

Interested parties: Andrea Cabral, Ken Matzner, Jonathan Armstrong, Chris Smart, Carol Doerflein, Jim Sheridan, Maureen McGuinness, Alan Goldman, Charles Ballantyne, Nancy Sherman, Leigh Seddon, Ethan Parke

Presenters: Stephen Syz (Vermont Agency of Natural Resources), Paul Markowitz (Conservation Commission), Geoff Beyer (Parks Department) and Kris Hammer (Capital Area Land Trust).

Mr. Borgendale called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm and turned the forum to Ms. Campbell. Ms. Campbell thanked the audience for showing an interest in the natural resources forum. She mentioned several essential questions that the Planning Commission wanted to examine.

Accepting that sustainability is our ability to continue functioning (socially, economically and ecologically) into the indefinite future without being forced into decline through exhaustion of key resources, the essential questions before us will be:

- What are Montpelier's key natural resources, assets and strengths?
- What are the weaknesses and threats to our natural resources?
- Is there important information that we are missing regarding the management of our natural resources?
- What do we need to do/plan with regard to our natural resources to sustain and enhance our way of life?

Mr. Syz the city's resources literally make the city what it is. There are four major rivers flowing through the city, which is an extraordinary resource for Montpelier. He noted several valuable resources such as the Montpelier Rivers Report, which mentions Blanchard Brook in Sabins' Pasture. Certain scenic spots also deserve consideration and add to the city's quality of life, economic sustainability and more. Vermont is probably one of the only places where a person can catch a trout within sight of the state house, Mr. Syz said. It is important to cherish and protect the rivers. He said it is also important for the city to manage stormwater, protecting its drinking water and the recourse of contamination to groundwater. He noted that sometimes forests can be overlooked as areas of preservation. Wooded hillsides and significant landscapes are also important for Montpelier. Forests provide economy resources for open space and the economy.

Wildlife, from birds to coyotes, are also a significant part of Montpelier's landscape. Mr. Syz noted that development can sometimes be difficult due to steep

hillsides. He noted that the night sky is also an important resource to remember, as there are many places where being able to see the stars is rarity.

Ms. Facciolo asked Mr. Syz what more the city could do for its rivers. He noted that buffer strips, vegetation management plans and similar things to help prevent pollutants from entering the rivers.

Mr. Markowitz spoke about more of Montpelier's natural resources, such as Berlin Bond. He noted that there are major threats to such resources that can naturally occur with things such as uncontrolled growth. He said he would hope the planning commission would be proactive in identifying protected areas, finding where development would be best placed and maintaining a balance of housing growth and protected areas. He noted such practices as "sustainable cities" where cities minimize the impact of growth, such as moving major parking lots out of the downtown area. He questioned why there are huge parking lots near the river, adding they would make better parks than parking area. Creating pedestrian-only areas and heating with wood chips were other suggested ideas.

Mr. Borgendale said the city has dedicated some funds to wood chip heating as a kind of solution.

Mr. Beyer spoke of the "Views and Vistas" report in his presentation as well as natural resources inventories of wetlands, wildlife habitats, natural communities, geological features, topography lines, water and flood plains. He said these inventories can be appropriate for wanting to site development. Much of this inventorying involved requesting to go onto private property, but only 30 percent of the open space was able to be inventoried before the grant money ran out, Mr. Beyer said. Mr. Borgendale said he felt it was critical for the planning commission to have this kind of information available, particularly in terms of housing development. Mr. Beyer said some landowners were concerned that if their property was viewed, potential requirements for land protection might be requested. He said much open land in Montpelier has been donated, such as Hubbard Park, and while there are park impact fees of 15 percent of land or a fee, the land option is hardly even exercised.

There was discussion about existing deer yards, how deer access different parcels and the potential concern of overpopulation.

Mr. Hammer spoke on various areas of protected property and local "pocket parks," such as a 68 square foot park on Elm Street. He noted areas such as North Branch River park and other protected areas. Using computer technology, Mr. Hammer pointed out how inventory maps can show the planning commission everything from ridgelines to wetlands, making them useful tools for planning.

Ms. Helling noted that air quality and sediment in the river were two of her concerns. She asked about the use of rip rap in preventing erosion on riverbanks. Mr. Syz said rip rap can sometimes channel rivers to flow faster.

Mr. Armstrong said he currently works with the Agency of Transportation as a stormwater management engineer. He showed the planning commission two photographs which appeared to show dirty water flowing into the Winooski as well as petroleum on the surface.

There was much discussion about stormwater and its affect on the rivers and streams, such as increased street sweeping, salt on the roads and best practices of

cleaning the waterways. There was concern about the amount of salt on the roads, but members present from the City Council said slippery sidewalks have called for this necessity. It was noted that while the city has been avoiding plowing snow into the rivers, private landowners have been seeing doing this practice.

Mr. Sheridan noted that he lives downtown and although stormwater screens are a necessity, he says he often sees them plugged up.

Mr. Smart asked about road salt in the waterways and about new technology to using electricity to keep ice off the roads. He also noted that it's hard to see some of the city's rivers as the banks are so steep. There was discussion about entries to waterways, particularly for recreation.

Mr. Borgendale noted there is current conflict between natural resources and housing, making it a very critical issue. He said that the planning commission wants to see a comprehensive study and felt that it was important to proceed with the current study. Many of the presenters felt that landowners should not feel compelled to allow the city to view their property as part of an enforcement, but that volunteering would perhaps make for a more successful viewing. It was suggested that public outreach might be helpful, including an opinion editorial in the newspaper.

Reschedule Transportation Visioning Forum

The Planning Commission discussed a new date for the Transportation Visioning Forum. The first choice is Tuesday, October 21 and the second is Thursday, October 23. Stephanie Smith said she would let commission members know which date is possible.

There was discussion about who would be covered by the survey, including children, tourists and elderly populations. Mr. Mitofsky said his father has volunteered to help out with the study as he has done extensive surveys.

Rescheduling Sept 29 meeting

The Planning Commission decided to keep September 29 as a regular meeting date.

Adjournment

Mr. Mitofsky made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Campbell seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Parker Van Iderstine