

Montpelier Planning Commission
March 22, 2004
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; Anne Campbell; Bryan Mitofsky; Richard Sedano, Curt McCormack; Irene Facciolo
Staff: Stephanie Smith, Planner

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Grodinsky.

Review of the Agenda

Ms. Grodinsky suggested that the discussion of the May 10 meeting be moved to the end of the agenda and that a discussion of zoning be added to the agenda. The review of the minutes was also moved to the end of the agenda.

General Appearances

There were no general appearances.

Master Plan Forum: Civic District/State

Mr. Sedano introduced the forum on the relationship between the City and the State in the Capitol District. He said that Tom Torti, the Commissioner of the State Department of Buildings and General Services, could not attend the forum but will be available for a future meeting. Mr. Sedano suggested that his written summary of his meeting with Mr. Torti be appended to the minutes of this meeting. The discussions relating to the district heating plant were particularly noteworthy. The life of the existing boiler is shorter than had been expected and that the boiler may need to be addressed in the 2005 capital construction bill. Mr. Sedano stressed that this issue should receive immediate attention.

Mr. Sedano introduced Mayor Mary Hooper. Mayor Hooper said that the City/State relationship is an important one that she and the Governor are committed to continue working on. The City/State master plan is the guidance document for planning in the Capitol Complex area. The Mayor said that the Carr lot redevelopment proposal is an important component for the City. It is exciting to hear that Mr. Torti has a vision for a greenway along the river front and that, while there will be challenges related to parking, a greenway would be a benefit to the City. Mayor Hooper said that the State facilities such as the historical museum bring visitors into Montpelier. The City must promote ways of inviting visitors and State employees into the downtown businesses. The Mayor also suggested that the State and the City can cooperate on broad band technology initiatives.

William Fraser, City Manager, said that the City-State Commission and the Capitol Complex Commission have helped to improve cooperation between the City and the State. The pilot funding has grown to \$565,000, making Montpelier one of the highest funded capitol cities in the country. There had been some disagreement regarding the State's parking capacity. He explained that the State may technically have enough parking spaces for its employees, but these spaces do not address the visitors that are drawn to the city to do business at the State offices. The State has been involved with the City in the work on parking plans.

Mr. Fraser circulated a copy of the "Green Space" draft. He said that the State funded the design process for the riverfront, but that the City and State must address the displaced parking before the plan can be implemented. The City has been meeting with State representatives regarding the district heating system. The State representatives seem willing to fund an increase in boiler

capacity to make the system possible, but that governance issues must be worked out between the City, State, business owners and residents. Mr. Sedano asked whether, given the short time frame, the City will be able to make a reasoned choice regarding the heating district. Mr. Fraser said that there is time and that the State seems to be willing to work with the City on feasible locations further away from the center of town. Ms. Grodinsky suggested that the City should work with the State to promote and to provide incentives to encourage car pooling and use of public transportation. Mayor Hooper agreed and said that the proposal for redevelopment of the State Complex will create opportunities to improve public transportation.

Mr. McCormack said that he understood that the State's heating plant was inadequate for its current needs. Mr. Fraser said that the current plant will not meet the State's capacity needs. The State is willing to size new boilers to be capable of providing for a district wide system.

Mr. Sedano asked the Mayor to discuss the Carr lot. Mayor Hooper said that the City is considering redevelopment of the lot where the current bus station is located. They are planning for a building to house a multi-modal center. The balance of the site would be open space. The options for replacement parking have been narrowed to two sites. Mayor Hooper said that there is funding available to pay for the construction of a parking garage once a site is found. Mr. McCormack asked whether there was an opportunity to include housing as part of the project. The Mayor said that the grant requires a transportation component, but other aspects are open to consideration. Jon Anderson said that the grant can be used to build the shell for the transportation building. The building can be more than one story tall and the planners want other activities in the building so that people will be present. The two most likely uses of the additional space would be affordable housing or office space. He said that there was a consensus on a 50/50 division between open space and the transit center. Mr. Mitofsky noted that the lot could also be sold to a private developer.

Mr. Anderson said that the State has been helpful in guiding the project. Federal funding was possible because the project is on the State project list. The project is earmarked for at least \$3.5 million. There should be a net increase in parking when the replacement parking facility and the transit center are built. Mr. Mitofsky noted that there is a possibility of receiving additional funding for the Barre Street extension. Mr. Anderson explained that the project has been broken into parts. The overall project includes the Barre Street extension and the City will be in a position to request more funds to complete the project.

Mayor Hooper said that the City has urged the State to stay within the Capitol Complex. She added that the City has made it clear that it wants to participate in any discussions of proposed changes or expansion to the Capitol Complex.

Zoning

Ms. Grodinsky said that there were two issues related to zoning to discuss. The first was acquiring funding to rework the zoning regulations. The second was the development of a list of all issues to be considered in order to address zoning changes. Ms. Facciolo said that the zoning subcommittee or the Commission needs to develop a list of ideas of how they would like the zoning rules to work. Then funding could be sought for a technical writer with zoning expertise to write zoning language. Mr. Mitofsky said that the subcommittee should provide the full Commission with the goals that they had worked up.

Stephanie Smith said that the Master Plan process will develop goals to be implemented in the eventual zoning changes. She suggested that working on zoning language before developing the

Master Plan may be premature. Ms. Facciolo said that the opportunity to address citywide zoning will be lost if the Commission waits two years for the Master plan update. The Sabin's Pasture interim zoning will expire before then and that the Commission should not address only Sabin's Pasture in a zoning change. Ms. Campbell said that this proposal would clarify and inform the Master plan process. The final zoning regulations would not be completed before the Master Plan, but the Commission would have complete information to inform the Master Plan. Ms. Grodinsky noted that the Commission needs to zone Sabin's Pasture within the time frame set forth in the interim zoning. The time is right to address these zoning issues now. Mr. Mitofsky said that ridgeline protection is part of the current Master Plan. The Sabin's Pasture zoning issues relate to ridgeline issues. He added that the goals the Commission wants to achieve regarding density work with the goals for Sabin's Pasture and the work needs to be done now.

Ms. Grodinsky asked Ms. Smith to explain the need to wait for the Master Plan update before moving ahead on zoning. Ms. Smith said that the Commission has been gathering information over the past year. The Commission should digest and evaluate that information in order to develop goals based upon the gathered information. Ms. Grodinsky said that the zoning language could be developed, but does not have to be finalized. The Commission could focus on Chapter 3 of the Master Plan as the chapter contains the most significant aspects that affect zoning. Ms. Smith said that the public should be able to see the draft Master Plan and provide comments for the Commission's consideration. Mr. Mitofsky said that the Commission is really following through on the goals of the current Master Plan. Ms. Facciolo added that the current zoning does not reflect the Master Plan goals. She noted that 84% of all variance requests are approved.

Mayor Hooper suggested that the Commission could use the Sabin's Pasture zoning as a model for use in the next Master Plan process. She cautioned the Commission to be careful not to subvert its own process.

Mr. McCormack said that the current zoning does not work with the current Master Plan. He said that the high percentage of variance applications that are approved demonstrates that the zoning is not working. Ms. Smith said that the majority of variance requests are for setback variations rather than for density issues.

Ms. Grodinsky said that the Commission needs to figure out how to move ahead with zoning changes using the current Master Plan or to use other methods to move ahead. Mr. Mitofsky suggested that the discussion be tabled in order to allow the Commissioners to review the minutes of the meeting at which the zoning subcommittee was created.

Mr. Mitofsky made a motion to table the zoning discussion and to include a discussion of zoning on the agenda of the next Planning Commission meeting, seconded by Mr. McCormack. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Grodinsky said that she would like to see a copy of the minutes of the September meeting prior to the next meeting. Ms. Smith asked for a copy of Mr. McCormack's proposal of September 17 so she could distribute it to Commission members prior to the next meeting.

Master Plan Outline

Ms. Smith advised the Commission that the recently distributed Master Plan outline reflects the comments from the last meeting. Ms. Grodinsky said that the community section of Chapter 2 should include a report card assessing the goals and timelier from the last Master Plan. Mr. Sedano said that the obstacles to achieving the goals should be included in the document.

Ms. Grodinsky asked what the term "growth centers" was intended to mean. Mr. Sedano said that he thought that it referred to the locations where the Planning Commission would want to see growth happening. Ms. Campbell said that the Land Use section should include a natural resource checklist. Mr. Mitofsky said that the graphic inset for Chapter 4 should show historic and proposed growth. Ms. Campbell said that historic resources in the built environment need to be addressed. Mr. Sedano said that Chapter 6 should identify essential allies needed to achieve goals. Ms. Grodinsky added that the last Master Plan included a matrix showing priorities, timelier and the parties that need to be involved.

Tentative May 10, 2004 Meeting with Area Planning Commissions and the CVRPC

Ms. Grodinsky suggested that the Commission members e-mail their ideas to Ms. Smith so that she can incorporate them into an agenda. The tentative agenda could then be discussed at the next meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Sedano made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 10, 2004 meeting, seconded by Ms. Campbell. Ms. Campbell said that she would like to clarify that the Conservation Commission is not conducting the open space inventory. Ms. Smith said that she believed that a subcommittee is doing the inventory. Mr. Sedano asked whether the subcommittee is autonomous. Mr. Mitofsky said that he believed that the Conservation Commission initiated the work and formed a subcommittee to get the work done. Ms. Grodinsky suggested that action on the minutes be delayed to allow the Commission check to confirm that the minutes correctly reflect the discussions from the meeting.

Regarding the February 9, 2004 minutes, a member of the public said the minutes should clarify that Patrick Healy is in charge of the City's pocket parks. She also noted that the minutes stated that Union Institute and Vermont College has a full service library. She said that the Commission should confirm that this statement was correct. Ms. Grodinsky said that there is not a quorum of members who attended the meeting present. The minutes will be carried to the next meeting.

Other

Ms. Grodinsky asked if there were any items to discuss regarding the upcoming meeting agenda. Ms. Smith said that items included zoning, the draft agenda for the meeting with regional planning commissioners, and the meeting with Smart Mobility. Ms. Grodinsky said that it was important that the Commission receive a draft Transportation Plan in advance.

Ms. Campbell said that she would not be able to attend either meeting in April. She spoke to Jeff Beyer because the meeting scheduled for last week was canceled. He has been incapacitated due to an injury. Ms. Smith said that the staff had agreed to cancel the meeting because neither she nor Mr. Beyer had been able to complete the tasks that were needed in order to have a meaningful discussion. She said that work load demands and time constraints were the reasons for the delay, but that the staff should be able to meet in the near future to focus on the tasks. Ms. Grodinsky asked that the staff advise the Commission of the date of the scheduled staff meeting. Ms. Campbell said that it is important to keep the Commission members informed of the schedule

because the information is needed for the Commission to move forward. Mr. Sedano asked that the staff give recommendations on how to proceed at the next Commission meeting. Ms. Smith said that she would put together recommendations on the next steps along with a schedule of meetings to finish the product.

Ms. Campbell said that Mr. Beyer is also asking if it is possible for Chris Walsh to assume the chairmanship of the Committee. Ms. Smith said that Mr. Walsh works for CVRPC. Mr. Mitofsky asked whether Mr. Walsh is a Montpelier resident. Ms. Campbell said that as a member of the CVRPC staff Mr. Walsh serves Montpelier as well as other communities. She asked whether he would be able to take on this role. Ms. Smith said that she would look into it.

Mr. Mitofsky said that at the Commission's February 9, 2004 meeting he said that he would discuss the question of handicapped parking at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library with the Parking Committee, which he has done. He said that the Parking Committee says nothing will be done from the public domain to advance a handicapped space specifically for the library. The Parking Committee will address the issue of on-street parking as it affects the entire city. The Parking Committee reiterates the Planning Commission's suggestion that the library pursue a space using privately held lands. Mr. Mitofsky said that the Planning Commission had strongly suggested that the library consider adding a handicapped parking space when the library addition was proposed, but the library did not do this because of cost considerations. Mr. Sedano noted that the City did not insist that the space be added. Mr. Mitofsky said that there were no requirements for parking at that time because the project did not involve any parking. The general consensus of the Parking Committee was that providing funds for a handicapped space at the library could result in a quagmire of similar demands from other location throughout the city. The Parking Committee will consider the city wide issue of handicapped parking at a future meeting.

Ms. Campbell asked about the production and distribution costs for the annual report. Mr. Mitofsky asked that a summary of the costs be sent to the Commission members by e-mail.

Ms. Campbell asked for an update on the status of the creation of a Cultural and Recreational Council which was discussed at the February meeting. Ms. Grodinsky suggested that the topic be placed on the next meeting agenda for discussion.

Adjournment

Mr. Sedano made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Mitofsky. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Capels

Transcribed by Kathleen Swigon

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.