

Montpelier Planning Commission
April 12, 2004
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: David Borgendale, Chair; Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; Bryan Mitofsky; Richard Sedano, Curt McCormack
Staff: Valerie Capels, Planning & Community Development Director; Stephanie Smith, Planner.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Borgendale.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Mitofsky made a motion to approve the minutes of the minutes of the February 9, 2004 and the March 8, 2004 meetings. Ms. Grodinsky seconded the motion. Ms. Capels noted that the minutes should indicate that the meeting took place in the Memorial Room rather than City Council Chambers. The motion was approved 5-0.

Mr. Mitofsky made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 10, 2003 meeting. Mr. Sedano seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Comments from the Chair

Mr. Borgendale said that he had attended the Capitol Complex Committee meeting and would update the Commission members later in the agenda.

Review of the Agenda

Mr. Mitofsky said that he would like to give the Commission an update on parking later in the agenda.

General Appearances

There were no general appearances.

Transportation Plan Update

Lucy Gibson told the Commission that she was hoping to get detailed feedback from them regarding the transportation plan. She said that the transportation plan should be viewed as a chapter in the Master Plan with the purpose of guiding City, Regional and State studies and plans. Mr. Mitofsky asked whether this work would comprise the bulk of the work on transportation for the Master Plan. Mr. Borgendale said that this would be the bulk of the work on the transportation element of the Master Plan. Mr. Sedano added that the document will produce material that may replace the transportation element or be integrated into the Master Plan.

Ms. Gibson gave an overview of the outline that she had prepared for the Commission's comment. She described the schedule for the work as follows:

Draft of the filled-out outline to Planning Commission staff by April 30

Receive comments and survey results

Draft to the State by May 14

She said that a final version of the transportation element should be ready by early June.

Ms. Grodinsky asked whether the transportation element related to other elements of the Master Plan besides land use. Ms. Capels suggested that it would relate to the housing, environmental and other elements.

Mr. Borgendale said that one of the things that the Planning Commission decided to include in the transportation element was consideration of tradeoffs related to implementing the visions. Ms. Gibson said the element will contain some discussion of tradeoffs. There will also be some discussion of current trends and noted that the results of the transportation survey will be helpful.

The section entitled "Issues of Concern" was discussed. Mr. Mitofsky asked whether the list of issues should be prioritized. Mr. Sedano said that the Commission should keep this point in mind and make a decision when more information is available.

Ms. Gibson then discussed the "Vision" section of the outline. Mr. Mitofsky said that he would like to see the discussion of walkability closely followed by a section on bike-ability. Ms. Grodinsky said that she would like to see car-pooling discussed. Mr. Sedano said that such discussions would be more appropriate later in the document. He said that the vision statements should be more elevated and should address the overall objectives. Mr. McCormack said that the clearing of snow and ice from sidewalks should be included in the walkability section.

Ms. Grodinsky asked how this element will integrate with regional issues. Ms. Gibson said that it will represent Montpelier's desires and vision and will influence the regional plans. Mr. Borgendale said that the vision statements should address better integration of Montpelier's transportation system with regional systems. Mr. Sedano noted that element should address the fact that the transportation issues associated with the summer and winter seasons are distinctly different. Mr. Borgendale added that geographic issues affect walkability. Mr. Mitofsky asked whether the document was saying that all streets should have sidewalks. Ms. Gibson said that not every street would be appropriate. Ms. Grodinsky said that some cities use techniques similar to bike lanes to provide pedestrian access on roadway shoulders. Mr. Borgendale said that the vision statement should state the goal of expanding walkability to parts of the City that are not currently walkable.

Ms. Gibson summarized the ideas suggested for the Land Use and Transportation section. She said that it is important to maintain a balance between the growth of the City and the minimization of traffic. She also said that the development standards could be revised to consider broader transportation issues. The concept of improving street connectivity was also mentioned. Mr. Mitofsky said that he would like to see a goal of improving connectivity with a grid system of streets so that all traffic is not directed through State and Main Streets. He cited the Barre Street extension as an example. Mr. Borgendale said that it is appropriate to promote connectivity, but that geography can be a significant limitation to grid designs. Ms. Gibson said that the benefits could be described and the limitations recognized. Ms. Grodinsky added that a tradeoff of adding roads will be increased maintenance costs for the additional roadways.

Ms. Gibson described the section on the Pedestrian Network. Mr. Borgendale suggested a long-term goal of acquiring right of way along roads to provide space for sidewalks. Ms. Gibson then described the Bike Network section and said that she would like to develop a map showing bike paths along appropriate roads. She said that satellite parking should be coordinated with bike paths. Mr. Mitofsky said that downtown bike safety should be identified as a goal. Mr. McCormack said that the best answer is to create a designated bike lane.

The Transit Services section was then discussed. Ms. Grodinsky said that bus shelters should be promoted to encourage winter use. Mr. Borgendale said that the reference to high school students should be expanded to include middle school students. Ms. Capels noted that there is a need to acknowledge handicapped access in this section and all of the appropriate sections.

Ms. Gibson moved on to discuss the Street Network section. Ms. Capels suggested that there be more consideration on intersection improvements. Mr. Borgendale said that it is important that there be a map showing the road network and connectivity.

The Parking section was discussed. Ms. Gibson noted that the high demand for parking is a sign of the city's success. Ms. Grodinsky suggested that preferential parking for car pools be mentioned. Mr. Borgendale said that the second and third bullet items in this section seem to conflict. Ms. Gibson said that the bulleted items are listed as considerations. Mr. Mitofsky said that studies have shown that a parking garage requires a dimension of at least 120' to be efficient. He noted that there are few suitable locations in the downtown area that could meet this requirement. Mr. Borgendale said that the document should identify public policies that are encouraging large surface parking areas as those policies may need to be changed. Ms. Capels recommended that the section include the management of parking, such as pricing, timing, and which entity is responsible. Mr. Borgendale said that he would like to see objectives in the parking section rather than issues only. Mr. Mitofsky said that he disagrees with the third bullet because parking garages need more space. Mr. Sedano said that the bullets should be considered as placeholder that will be replaced with expanded information.

Ms. Gibson described the Travel Demand Management section. She said that this section identifies strategies to encourage employers to become involved in commuter parking issues. Mr. Borgendale noted that the current ordinances require employers to provide a specific amount of parking. He said that this may have to be reconsidered.

The Commission members and staff members reviewed a transportation map with Ms. Gibson. Suggestions were provided regarding transportation improvement, gateways, bike paths, sidewalks, parking, intersection improvements and neighborhood connections. Mr. Mitofsky said that the School Board's plans for a building addition must be considered in the transportation planning effort. Mr. Borgendale said that the Elm Street corridor should be considered for bike path connectivity. Mr. McCormack suggested that "Share the Road" signage on all streets with enforcement of traffic laws for cars, bikes and pedestrians might be the best alternative.

The Board agreed to set aside a short time to discuss any additional issues regarding this outline at the next meeting or the following meeting.

Discussion of Tentative Meeting With Area Planning Commissions and CVRPC

Mr. Mitofsky said that he would like to understand the roles of the various land trusts and the regional effects of their actions. He said that it seems that some land trusts allow the development of their land. He said that in the planning process, the Planning Commission needs to know whether parcels held by land trusts are conserved as open space or will be subject to development. Mr. Mitofsky suggested that the land trusts should be represented in the discussions of the Master Plan. Ms. Capels said that the Master Plan should be guiding the trusts' decisions rather than having the trusts' interests drive the Master Plan process. She suggested that the trusts' input as stakeholders would be appropriate when the Planning Commission discusses the open space elements of the Master Plan.

Mr. Borgendale asked the Commission members whether they wanted the staff to proceed in arranging the May 10 meeting with the discussion topics identified in the staff draft. Ms. Grodinsky said that the topics should be narrowed to three or four key questions and that one representative of the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) should be invited. Mr. Sedano said that a process should be developed so that regular meetings with the neighboring towns would be scheduled. Mr. Borgendale suggested that the RPC could be asked to assume the responsibility for coordinating such meetings. Mr. Mitofsky asked

whether the RPC could provide a summary of data on regional growth before the meeting. Mr. Sedano suggested that all of the questions in the staff draft should be used for a round table discussion. He also said that a different room setup would foster a better discussion. Mr. Borgendale asked the staff to set up the meeting for May 10 or May 24 and arrange for a meeting space.

Zoning

Mr. McCormack gave an overview of the subcommittee's work. He said that the development of an administrative approval process for planning matters was found to be a good idea. He described how the committee had divided up work items. Mr. Borgendale said he found a Web link that provides extensive information of smart growth planning and said that some of the information may be useful to the Planning Commission. He gave the example of a "form-based" zoning that focuses on the buildings rather than the permitted uses. Ms. Capels noted that there is a need to consider how the implementation of new policies will affect the permit applicants. Mr. Mitofsky said that the subcommittee is trying to step off with a vision statement and then will seek grant funding to hire a consultant to draft the specific zoning regulations. Mr. Borgendale said that he thinks that the Commission believes that the zoning ordinance needs drastic revisions and a user-friendly approach to administering the ordinance will be needed regardless. Mr. McCormack said that the Commission should not wait until the new Master Plan is completed to address that issue.

Ms. Capels cautioned the Commission against taking on too many initiatives at one time. She said the Master Plan is going to require a great deal of time and focused attention and the Fiscal Impact Growth Study has not been started yet. She expressed concern about focusing too much on drafting new zoning regulations before the Master Plan has been completed.

Mr. Borgendale said that a critical aspect of the work on Sabin's Pasture is the development of zoning tools. Some section of the ordinance will have to be rewritten to address Sabin's Pasture. Mr. Mitofsky said that the Sabin's Pasture solution must be applicable citywide. Mr. Borgendale said whatever tool is developed for Sabin's Pasture, the criteria must be applicable to other locations in the city. Mr. McCormack said that zoning has more impact on how the city will look in the future than the Master Plan does. He said that he does not want to keep focusing efforts on Master Plan updates without addressing zoning. Ms. Capels said that the Commission needs to focus on the land use element of the Master Plan so that the zoning will implement the planning policies. She said that the outcomes may not be consistent if zoning changes get ahead of the Master Plan. Mr. Borgendale said that the Commission is really trying to work on two concurrent priorities so that they can be ready to implement the Master Plan as soon as it is completed. Ms. Capels said that developing the techniques for implementing the Master Plan policies and goals is appropriate, but drafting detailed zoning language may not be. Mr. Mitofsky asked if the staff just does not want to do this task. Ms. Capels said part of the problem is capacity. She said that they cannot rewrite the zoning ordinance and the Master Plan and meet other commitments at the same time. Mr. Borgendale clarified that the Commission is only speaking of rewriting the portion of the zoning ordinance needed to address Sabin's Pasture. He said that they are not expecting to rewrite the entire zoning ordinance at this time. Ms. Capels said she is also concerned that focusing on major zoning changes before developing the land use objectives and other related policies is putting the cart before the horse.

A member of the audience said that the interim zoning does not cover the entire Sabin's Pasture property. Ms. Capels confirmed that the area within 400 feet of the center line of Barre Street is not covered by the interim zoning. Mr. Borgendale said that, due to the late hour, he would like to suspend this discussion for now. He said that the Commission should clarify the scope of the work at the next meeting. Mr. Mitofsky said that he is not ready to commit to the clarification of the scope until the subcommittee

spends more time on this issue, but that it may be possible to have for the May 10 meeting.

Other Business

Mr. Mitofsky provided an update on parking. He said that the Carr lot work has been narrowed down to two spots—behind Capitol Plaza or at the Jacobs (North Branch) parking lot. He said that the rear lot parking study was presented in draft form to the parking committee. The lot between First in Fitness and the Catholic church has been ruled out. The most likely proposal seems to be the one that involves digging into the retaining bank behind the Wells building. He noted that a public meeting to discuss parking will take place on May 27.

Mr. Borgendale provided an update on the Capitol Complex Committee meeting. He said that lighting was discussed and noted that the light towers that light the Capitol dome will be replaced with lighting mounted on the Supreme Court building. He said that the committee also discussed options for replacing the lighting in the Capitol Complex. A project to construct a canopy over the Taylor Street entrance of the Pavilion Building was also discussed. He said that a lighted sign will be proposed at the entrance. Mr. Mitofsky noted that back lighted signs are not permitted by ordinance.

Adjournment

Mr. Mitofsky made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Grodinsky. The motion was approved unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Capels
Director of Planning & Community Development

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.