

Montpelier Planning Commission
August 23, 2004
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: David Borgendale, Chair; Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; Curt McCormack; Marge Power; Richard Sedano
Staff: Valerie Capels, Planning & Community Development Director

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Borgendale at 7:10.

General Appearances

There were no general appearances.

Agenda

Mr. Borgendale said that consideration of the minutes would be moved to the end of the meeting. He reviewed the rest of the agenda and said that an update on the Parking Committee would be added.

Master Plan Tasks

Mr. Borgendale said that it was his understanding, based upon the discussions at the last meeting, that the Planning Commission members would individually take on the responsibility for specific topics with a focus on policies, goals and objectives. Ms. Grodinsky said that was consistent with her understanding. Mr. Borgendale said that he envisions that each person would put together a first cut on the topics and then review the first cut with the entire Planning Commission. The Commission needs to develop a process for circulating the drafts and getting input. Ms. Grodinsky suggested that each section be distributed and reviewed prior to the Commission's meetings. Comments would also be provided and addressed, as appropriate, in the draft before the meetings. Then any needed discussion could take place at the meetings. Mr. Borgendale said that the goal should be set to distribute the drafts to the members at least a week prior to the meeting where they will be discussed. Mr. Sedano said that the Commissioners should try to hold the discussions to no more than 20 minutes on each topic. If an issue can't be resolved in that time frame, the author should go back and try again on the draft. Members can use e-mail to address disagreements or separate meetings could be arranged between members.

Mr. Borgendale said that the Commissioners should keep in mind that this will be a draft for soliciting public comment. The Commission does not have to have a consensus on every item at this point. Ms. Power said that, even if no consensus is reached, the document provided to the public should represent the mature deliberation of the Planning Commission. Mr. Sedano said that the draft could include alternate points of view that have not yet been reconciled. The Commission needs to recognize the points of difference and clearly articulate them. Mr. Borgendale suggested that if a member feels strongly about a dissenting or alternate view, that member could write the alternate view.

Mr. Borgendale said that he asked the members at the last meeting to consider which topics they would take on and to bring estimates of when they can have the drafts of their topics ready. The Commission members present developed the following list of assignments and schedules.

Transportation	Ms. Grodinsky	Sept. 13
Housing	Mr. McCormack	Sept. 13
Infrastructure	Mr. Borgendale	Sept. 13
Civic District	Mr. Sedano	Sept. 13

Energy	Mr. Sedano	Sept. 13
Culture and Recreation	Ms. Campbell or Ms Grodinsky*	Sept. 13*
Parking	Ms. Power	Sept. 27
Education	Mr. Borgendale	Sept. 27
Economic Development	Mr. Sedano	
Natural Resources	Ms. Campbell	
Health and Social Services	Mr. McCormack	
Historic Resources and Built Environment	Ms. Facciolo	

* Ms. Grodinsky said that she could do the culture and recreation topic for Sept. 13, if Ms. Campbell does not want to take on that topic.

Mr. Borgendale said that he would like to have half of the topics ready for discussion at the next meeting. The Commission should not spend more than 20 or 25 minutes on a topic. The drafts should not include background material and if they should not be more than two or three pages. The should contain statements of policy expressed in one or two sentences. Mr. Sedano said that they will really be like executive summaries of the topics with some reasoning to support the statements. Mr. McCormack and Mr. Sedano said that they needed to arrange meetings with Ms. Capels to get information needed for their topics.

Ms. Grodinsky said that the members could note interesting facts or ideas for sidebars and they go through their sections. Mr. Borgendale clarified that he is hoping to get a document from each person that states the objectives and sets of policies. He said that other interesting side notes can be addressed separately.

Ms. Capels said that she had provided copies of an e-mail from Ken Jones with thoughts about the structure of goals, policies and objectives. Mr. Jones said that the Master Plan is begging for an introductory section talking about the relationships and connections between the individual sections. Mr. Borgendale said that he did not see the work product that is being discussed today as being organized in the final form in which the Master Plan will be structured. The structure should show the interrelationships between the topics. Mr. Sedano said that the Commission has previously discussed using a structure for the Master Plan that follows the paths of the linkages between subjects. Mr. Borgendale said that the Master Plan needs to contain discussions and conclusions on the chosen paths in situations where objectives conflict. Mr. McCormack said that it is an excellent point that the Master Plan should contain a plan and notes that there is a price for that plan in that some things will not get done.

Mr. Borgendale said that there is a full list of topic assignments for the next meeting and that the Commission could proceed on that basis while they wait to hear from the other absent members regarding their time frames.

Review of Open Space Advisory Committee Resolution

Mr. Borgendale said that the Commission had tabled discussion of the resolution when they could not find agreement at the last meeting. Ms. Grodinsky said that she had looked back over notes on this subject. She said that her feeling was that the Open Space Advisory Committee was looking at technical matters and is to provide information for the stakeholders to use in making decisions. The bulk of the Committee's work related to natural resources. The goals and recommendations in the draft open space

section of Montpelier's Master Plan recommends that the Committee continue development of open space planning tools and finish the natural resource inventory and field assessment.

Ms. Grodinsky suggested changing the first "whereas" of the resolution to read "...created a subcommittee for identifying and gathering information on Montpelier's significant natural resources. She said that she feels that a term should be used to show that there is some importance to the resources since the purpose is to prioritize the value of the resources. Many of the resources require a technical evaluation. Mr. Borgendale said that his sense is that the Open Space Advisory Committee is helping the Planning Commission with criteria for determining the best use of open space rather than just preserving all open space in the community. Ms. Grodinsky and Mr. McCormack agreed. Mr. Borgendale said that the end of the first "whereas" stacks the deck against this. Ms. Grodinsky said that she believes that this committee is helping to identify the attributes of open space for the Planning Commission or the City Council. Mr. Sedano said that he likes the wording. He said that he agreed with Mr. Borgendale that the Open Space Advisory Committee is also advising on the best use of land. He did not want to change the sentence, but said that another sentence could be added. Ms. Power said that a modifier could be added such as "important open space" or "significant open space" because every piece of open space is not to be preserved. Geoff Beyer said that the question is how to protect the character of Montpelier which is a balancing of competing goals. He said that the problem with the wording "best use of open space" is that some of the best use of open space may be to allow development of it. Those decisions will not be within the expertise of the Open Space Advisory Committee.

Ms. Grodinsky asked what the focus or purpose of the committee is. Mr. Beyer said that the first paragraph of the resolution was his best attempt at describing the focus. The committee is looking at open space and recommending how to best preserve it. The question becomes how to best preserve open space when all of it will not be preserved. The open space must be prioritized and much of that work will have to be done by the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board. Mr. Sedano said that Mr. Beyer was suggesting that the Planning Commission should not cede responsibility to the Open Space Advisory Committee, but should let them do the open space assessment. Mr. Beyer said that the Open Space Advisory Committee should make the Planning Commission's job easier by designing tools, gathering information and making recommendations.

Mr. Borgendale said that he did some research on what other communities have done regarding open space committees. Some communities have charged the open space committees with the development of a classification scheme and inventory of open space. The legislative body would then make determinations on the use of land. He was hoping the Open Space Advisory Committee could do something like that as a long term mission. Ms. Capels said that was where the inclusion of stakeholders might help. Ms. Power said that they did not have a role in the inventory work. Mr. Borgendale said that he is not confident that the technical work is as objective as might be hoped. The choices of what to measure often drive the outcomes. One reason to have broad representation is to have different points of view in determining what to measure. The representation of all view points was a way to get buy-in.

Ms. Power said that the question is at what level various issues should be resolved. She would rather have accurate information and then make decisions at the policy level. She did not want to have the information cut off because of the opinion of a stakeholder at the information gathering level. Ms. Grodinsky said that many of the issues are scientific in nature, but there are some aspects that are more objective such as view sheds. Ms. Power said that she would want to see the technical group identify that there is a view and then have the policy makers decide the relative importance of the view shed. Mr.

Beyer said that he hopes that the Open Space Advisory Committee can make recommendations on that type of issue. The Planning Commission could then accept or reject the recommendations. Ms. Capels asked whether, in the example just discussed, the Open Space Advisory Committee would make the decision of whether the view is noteworthy. Ms. Power said that the Planning Commission or other policy makers would determine whether the view should be protected. Mr. Beyer said that the committee is proposing going beyond the facts and that they would recommend policy for the Planning Commission to accept, modify or reject. Several Commissioners said that was what they would want to see.

Mr. Borgendale said that the issue is whether or not differing views are needed on the committee. Ms. Grodinsky said that the resolution needs to clarify that the committee will also be identifying what is significant about the areas. Mr. Borgendale said that he understood that the first task was to develop criteria for evaluation open space. He was then hoping that a classification scheme would be developed or a model would be built.

Mr. Sedano said that the third “whereas” contained a list of people with different interests. He asked whether the Commission was trying to attain the broadest representation possible. Mr. Beyer said that the Open Space Advisory Committee was created as an ad hoc committee, but that it actively strived to have a broad range and would like to continue to see a broad range. Ms. Power said that it does not have to be that way. Members should have knowledge or interest in open space. She would like to eliminate the specifications on the members and remove the reference to voting and non-voting members. She does not think that there is value to having every point of view represented. Mr. Sedano said that he thinks it is important for the community to have some level of diversity on the committee, but that he would be comfortable with a finding saying that the “Open Space Advisory Committee shall consist of nine members” without specifying the representation. The appointing body could then seek to have diversity in the appointments. Mr. Beyer said that the committee has been seeking diversity in its members and would like to continue to do so. Mr. Sedano noted that the committee will not be making the appointments.

Mr. Borgendale said that he is opposed to eliminating the criteria for members. He especially wants to see property owners participating. People involved in land trusts have told him that it is preferable to have landowners involved early in the process. Land owners may have a particular interest or love for the land and would have ideas about conserving it. Mr. Beyer suggested that the Open Space Advisory Committee do the recruiting for the Planning Commission to approve or disapprove of potential members.

Ms. Capels said that the committee has been referring to itself as a board. She asked if there was any preference for whether to call the group a committee or a board. Mr. Borgendale said that it must be a committee.

Mr. Borgendale said that he would agree to removing the reference to voting and non-voting members. Since the resolution states the intent to represent various stake holders, the wording on the specific membership could be removed. Ms. Power asked if the resolution needs to specify that there will be nine members. Ms. Capels said that there should be a minimum specified and it’s usually an odd number.

Mr. Beyer asked whether the word “significant” really should be added to the first paragraph. He is concerned that the use of the word might limit the committee’s ability to gather information on non-significant resources. It will not be possible to determine the significance of resources without making an overall assessment. Ms. Grodinsky concurred with eliminating the word.

Mr. Borgendale summarized the changes to the resolution. Ms. Power said that she still objects to the use of “stakeholders” in the third paragraph. She suggested that the paragraph refer to “residents of Montpelier.” Mr. Borgendale objected to that idea. He said that there are legitimate interests who are not residents. Ms. Power said that those interests could participate at the level of the Planning Commission meetings. Mr. Borgendale said that they should be able to participate earlier in the process. Mr. Beyer suggested that the word “strive” be moved so that the third paragraph says that “it is the intent that the composition of the Open Space Advisory Committee strive to be representative of the various stakeholders . . .” Ms. Power stated her concern that the use of the word “strive” may imply that, if a representative of a particular interest, such as a landowner, dropped out of the committee, the committee could not function until another representative of that interest was appointed. Mr. Beyer said that the committee would try to find another landowner, if it could not, it would advise the Planning Commission.

Ms. Power said that she could live with the language. Mr. Sedano said that the language could be cleaned up and voted on at the next meeting. Mr. Borgendale asked Ms. Capels to draft the revised resolution. Ms. Capels said that she would send Mr. Borgendale a draft for review.

Other Business

Ms. Capels said that some of the members of other planning commissions have been asking about the status of the sub-regional meeting that the Planning Commission was considering. Mr. Borgendale said that meeting will have to be put on hold.

Ms. Capels read a note from Ms. Facciolo providing an update on the Zoning Committee. She said that a consulting firm has been chosen and the choice will be voted on at a special Council meeting. If the Council approves the contract, it will be signed September 1.

Ms. Power gave an update on the Parking Committee. She said that the committee is considering downtown parking permits. They are proposing to set aside spaces on one half of Court Street and spaces on Stone Cutters Way. She is concerned that the number of spaces does not seem to relate to the number of people with permits. Those designated spaces will be empty when the residents are not using them. She is not sure what the residents will be gaining for their parking permits and the proposal may just increase the anger of the residents. The idea is viewed as a pilot project. Her idea is to allow people with permits to park in a metered space without paying the meter or adhering to the two-hour limit. Some streets, such as Main Street, would be excepted. She does not have a problem with more metering. Mr. Borgendale asked Ms. Power to represent the Planning Commission’s concern that there is a broader problem with downtown overflow into many residential streets. Commissioners concurred that Ms. Power is on the right track. Mr. Borgendale added that he thinks Montpelier’s parking is too cheap.

Mr. McCormack said that he believes that the DET parking lot is not encouraged enough. Many of the downtown residents cannot park on the street during the winter and wondered where they park during that period. The suggestion was made that perhaps the DET lot should be used only by City and State employees. The parking lot at 133 State Street is also available.

Review of Minutes

Mr. McCormack made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 9, 2004 meeting. Ms. Grodinsky seconded the motion. The motion was approved 4-0 with Mr. Sedano abstaining from the vote.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:30 p.m.

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.