

Montpelier Planning Commission
March 28, 2005
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Marjorie Power, Chair; Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; David Borgendale; Anne Campbell; Irene Facciolo; Richard Sedano
Staff: Valerie Capels, Planning & Community Development Director

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Power.

Minutes

MOTION: Mr. Borgendale made a motion that the minutes of the March 28, 2005 Planning Commission meeting be approved. The motion was seconded by Ms. Campbell. The Planning Commission voted 5-0 to approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Sedano abstained from the vote.

Comments from the Chair

Ms. Power had no comments.

Public Appearances

There were no public appearances.

CVRPC Northwest Project

Ms. Power introduced Dan Currier, a GIS Specialist with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). Mr. Currier described the Northwest Project, which is a collaborative between regional and local planning authorities to look at growth along the Interstate 89 corridor. Initially, the project will focus on the municipalities that directly abut I-89. Montpelier is the third municipality that has been considered.

Mr. Currier said his presentation would be focusing on the development potential model and two buildout models. The values and constraints used in the model can be adjusted and suggestions from the municipalities on how to adjust the model are welcome. Ms. Capels noted that the build-out analysis in the model is limited to residential development. Mr. Currier explained that the mapping of residential buildings accounts for one acre around each house, but future versions of the model will consider a suggestion from Ms. Capels that the area be reduced to one quarter acre. He described some of the constraints the model addressed including steep slopes, flood plains, rivers, parks and conserved land.

Various maps generated by the model were displayed. Mr. Currier explained that potential build-out was analyzed based upon existing zoning regulations and lot sizes. The model places housing points on any developable land based upon zoning densities. Each existing point is based on an E-911 address and is a residential building which could be a single family dwelling or a multifamily dwelling. Constraints are then overlaid, resulting in a reduction of development potential. When the development potential of an area is reduced or removed, the model will recalculate the development potential based on the number of existing units on the lot and the size of the remaining developable land.

Several Commissioners expressed concern that lots in zones where development is contingent upon the availability of sewer or water service are designated as non-developable in the model if the utilities are not available on the lots. The Commissioners said that such lots might be readily developable through

relatively simple extensions of the utility lines. The Commissioners asked that some steps be taken to distinguish between those lots and other lots that are not developable because they are conserved or otherwise constrained from development. Ms. Capels asked whether it would be possible to amend the characteristics of the individual lots to show whether water and sewer are available. Mr. Currier said that was possible. Several Commissioners said that information would be helpful for those situations where utility lines exist near, but not on the lots.

Ms. Facciolo noted that many of the developed lots could support additional residential units through infill development. She would not want the model to exclude that potential infill development when analyzing build-out. Mr. Borgendale said it would be interesting to look at build-out without addressing zoning restrictions.

Mr. Sedano posed the question of how the Planning Commission can ensure that this model continues to be used and maintained. Mr. Currier said the model is free and any town that chose to run it could do so. Alternatively, the CVRPC could continue to run it. The CVRPC wants Montpelier to be satisfied that the model is acceptable. He could make changes to the model in response to the Commission's comments within the next two weeks. It would then be brought back to the Commission.

Mr. Currier said that, once the municipalities in the Northwest Project are addressed, the model will be applied to the other municipalities in the region. Mr. Borgendale said he would also be interested in seeing the information on the communities adjoining Montpelier. Mr. Currier said that data would be made available once it is completed.

Vermont Forum on Sprawl/Smart Growth Collaborative Update

Ms. Capels described her meeting with the Smart Growth Collaborative. She asked for their help in arriving at an end result for Sabin's Pasture. After nearly two hours of discussion, no clear ideas of the process were reached. The Collaborative members were not clear on what services they could provide Planning Commission that had not already been done, noting that several different plans had already been developed for the property.

The Commission members discussed what type of an end product they might be seeking. Ms. Power said she was interested in something like the design exercises used at the NNECAPA conference in which the participants came to a consensus on a plan that would be developable and financially feasible. She said that such a process would be different because the resulting plan would be based on a consensus rather than an interest group's perspective.

Ms. Grodinsky said she was thinking in terms of traditional neighborhood development and in terms of a picture that would be bigger than just Sabin's Pasture. Mr. Borgendale noted that the City Council had been clear that it would like the Commission to use a term other than traditional neighborhood development. He would like the process to generate a computer model that would show people what the area would look like when it was developed. Ms. Campbell said the end product might not look very different from what was produced at the conference.

Ms. Power observed that a favorable result would be a design that was acceptable to a consensus of the community, that would result in higher density development on the lower pasture and that preserved the upper pasture. Ms. Grodinsky said it was important to use the process to introduce the concept of mixed use neighborhoods in order to help the community to understand how those concepts might be used in the

Master Plan amendments. Ms. Grodinsky suggested there might be a way to do this by using the plans that have already been developed rather than creating a new plan.

Ms. Power said the expertise of the Collaborative would be helpful in determining and reaching a consensus on where the line between the upper and lower pasture should be drawn. There is some agreement on the conceptual ideas but that it is now time to work out the details such as where to place the line between the development and the conserved areas. Mr. Borgendale agreed that there is a broad conceptual consensus but said that he thought the Collaborative could help to facilitate a process to reach a consensus on the details. He would like to be sure that the Collaborative understands that there is not a consensus within the Commission or the community on the details. Ms. Campbell said that is precisely the type of help that the Commission needs in order to work out the details while balancing the community's competing needs and desires for the property.

Master Plan Amendment

Ms. Power said that each Commissioner had received a copy of the latest on the Master Plan amendments from the City Council. The comments had been developed by Nancy Sherman and Nancy Wasserman. The City Council considered the work and asked them to reconcile their comments with suggestions from the full council. Most of the meeting was spent on the future land use plan and the Reserve definition and the document is not finished.

Ms. Capels said the Council has scheduled time on their next agenda to continue work on the draft and to talk about the revised map. She explained that this draft was provided to the Planning Commission to keep them informed as to the progress. Ms. Power noted that the Commission should keep up to date on the work because the Commission will have to eventually write a report on the document that the Council produces. Ms. Capels advised the Commission that she believed that the Council tentatively scheduled a first public hearing on the Master Plan amendment for April 27. Ms. Grodinsky asked whether the Commission would incorporate its suggestions before then. Ms. Power said that the Commission would only be preparing a report containing its thoughts on the draft, not making changes to it. Mr. Sedano noted that the Commission or individual Commission members could comment on the draft at the hearings. Ms. Power said that comments could also be provided at the Council's next meeting so this is an opportunity for the Commission to discuss the draft.

Ms. Campbell expressed concern that language on page 2 seemed to imply there was an intention to rely on the Views and Vistas report and not incorporate the Open Space Advisory Committee's criteria. She wondered if that was the intent. Mr. Sedano asked if Nancy Sherman could address that question. Ms. Sherman said that the Council did discuss the proposed changes. The comments in the document are designated as "Wasserman" or "Sherman" for the sake of clarity. It was agreed that the focus would be on the future land use section 11.4. There was agreement that the Council did not like the term or the definition of Reserve. There was a consensus that the term "land conservation" could be expanded and enhanced to encompass the Commission's intent for the Reserve. Ms. Sherman said it was her understanding that the Wasserman and Sherman definitions would be combined.

Ms. Campbell said the Views and Vistas study seemed to weigh quite heavily in the draft. Ms. Sherman said it had been suggested that the report be included in the draft and that suggestion will go back to the Council for their decision. Mr. Borgendale said the Views and Vistas report is a draft that was produced by the Conservation Commission and there did not appear to be any formal body of the City, including the

Conservation Commission or the Planning Commission, that is willing to take ownership of that report. Ms. Sherman suggested that the entire Council should hear that comment. The Council's discussions were around the land use plan and that they may wish to continue to focus on that section. Ms. Power said the placement of the line was also discussed with consideration given to the contour 650 or 600 as the cross hatched area. Ms. Power was concerned that the line might coincide with a wildlife area. Ms. Facciolo suggested that these comments be conveyed to the City Council either by e-mail or another means. Ms. Campbell said that she wanted to make a comment for the record as she would not be available for the rest of the week. She spoke to Geoff Beyer who told her that he did not have the map that the Open Space Advisory Committee used, but they drew the line at the 675 contour.

Carr Lot Update

Mr. Borgendale said that there was a public work session on a number of designs and layouts for the proposed transit center. It seems that most people are in favor of the design that puts the transportation center on the southwest corner of the lot with a decorative information kiosk near the railroad tracks. The Committee will be meeting to make a recommendation on a design to the City Council. A decision will not be made on replacement parking at this time. The facility is to be a mixed use facility. The assumptions are that there will be a transit center on the first floor and either two stories of commercial space and one story of residential space or two stories of residential space and one story of commercial space. Mr. Borgendale said that it was possible that one of the stories could be eliminated, but the impact studies will address a four-story building. Ms. Power asked about the proximity of the building to the river. Mr. Borgendale said the proposal that appeared to be preferred placed the building fairly close to the river, but left enough buffer for the bike path. Other proposals had locations further from the river. Mr. Borgendale said that the different locations had different implications for bus turnarounds, parking, greenspace and amount of paving. Ms. Campbell expressed concern that an adequate buffer be provided to the bike path and river.

Mr. Borgendale said a decision is not needed at this time on the parking structure, but noted that there was an issue related to the need for parking near the transportation facility and the fact that parking is not a preferred use for space in Montpelier's downtown.

Ms. Grodinsky asked whether there had been any discussion of using the greenspace to provide additional housing. Mr. Borgendale said there was no such discussion. Ms. Capels displayed copies of the sketches for proposals "A" and "B". She said that one of the reasons that proposal B appeared to be preferred was that the greenspace could be used for overflow parking in the winter.

Mr. Borgendale said that he would welcome the other Commissioners comments on the proposal. He said that the "greenspace" was not yet designed but was envisioned as public open space that might be put to various uses. He said that the types of surfaces that might be used had not yet been determined. Ms. Facciolo and Ms. Campbell said that they preferred design scheme A. Ms. Facciolo said that she did not like the idea of using the green space for overflow parking. Ms. Campbell raised the question of whether Plan B further compromises the riverfront and creates a conflict with the intent of the Master Plan regarding the riverfront. Mr. Borgendale said that Plan B actually allowed for more green space. Mr. Sedano said he preferred Plan B because placing the building closer to the edge of the site which would minimize its impact. He also appreciated Mr. Borgendale's point regarding the amount of greenspace. Ms. Power said she was ambivalent about the two proposals. She liked the idea of the terrace provided in Plan B, but shared the concern that the use of the greenspace for seasonal parking because the parking might tend to become permanent. Plan B had the advantage of avoiding the creation

of parking areas directly adjacent to the river. Ms. Capels noted that Plan B would also avoid the discharge of stormwater runoff from the parking lot (with the associated salt, sediments and oils) into the river.

Capitol Complex Commission

Ms. Power said that the Capitol Complex Commission will be meeting on Monday to discuss a proposed Crime Victims' Memorial on Baldwin Street. She has requested a draft of a proposed policy for such memorial requests but has not yet received a draft. Mr. Borgendale said that, based on the discussion at the last meeting that he attended, he understood that the intent was for the policy to be put in place before action was taken on the Crime Victims' Memorial.

Other

Ms. Power said that the only remaining issue was the discussion of the "big" amendment to the Master Plan, but said that she was willing to hold that item for discussion at the next meeting. She noted that the "mini" amendment would have to be discussed at the next meeting and asked Ms. Capels about the schedule for the Planning Commission's report on the Master Plan amendment. Ms. Capels said the Planning Commission would have to receive a copy of the Council's draft at least 15 days before their public hearing and that the Commission's report can be provided to the Council either before or at the public hearing. Ms. Capels said she would have to double check, but it appeared the first public hearing could not occur before May 4, 2005.

Ms. Power said that the discussion of the "mini" amendment would be on the next Commission agenda. Mr. Borgendale proposed that the work on the vision statement for the larger Master Plan amendment be placed on the next agenda. Ms. Power agreed.

Ms. Capels suggested that the follow-up with the CVRPC be scheduled for the March 25 meeting. Ms. Power said that the discussion of reassigning Mr. McCormack's duties should be delayed until the new Commission member is assigned by the Council. She said that might be in place by March 25.

Adjournment

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

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Capels

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.

Transcribed by Kathleen Swigon