

Montpelier Planning Commission
June 12, 2006
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; David Borgendale; Anne Campbell; Craig Graham; Ken Jones

Staff: Valerie Capels, Planning & Community Development Director

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Ken Jones at 7:00 p.m.

Public Appearances

There were no public appearances relating to items not on the agenda.

Downtown Forum

We are going to discuss issues for the downtown. The Planning Commission is starting the process again of revising the Master Plan. Certainly, many of the topics we are going to consider have an impact on the condition of the downtown. We know that many of you have had some discussions about what you would like to see, what you see as the current condition, and we would like to open up the meeting at this point to hear what some of your comments are with regards to issues for the downtown. We have some specific topics that we as the Planning Commission have raised that we would like your feedback on.

A community member inquired about the status of projecting signs. She said she believed the City Council voted on the issue of projecting signs. Valerie said the City Council did vote to strike that footnote from table 8-11(C), but they haven't taken final action to adopt that change. None of the proposed zoning changes currently before City Council have been acted on in a final form.

Jay Ancel said they had been looking at that issue for a lot of years. If you look at the old historic pictures of Montpelier, there were many projecting signs that added a lot of character to the city. You see them on Langdon Street. There are some provisions for control within the ordinance. Our city and streets allow for more a pedestrian approach than for vehicles. He said currently it only allows a 3 foot projection, which he believes the signs on Langdon are probably larger than that.

Ken Jones said if he thought 3 feet was too small, what might be a limit that would be too much. Jay replied they would be comfortable with something like 42 inches.

Valerie said to let the public know the Commissioners did receive a copy of the letter dated May 10, 2006, in their packages from the MDCA about this topic and about the riverwalk.

Ken Jones said in terms of any of these priorities, how does the Planning Commission know if they are doing well with regards to the nature of the downtown? If we do a riverwalk and other things to marginally improve conditions, how do we know it is getting better, and how do we know if we need to alter our approach?

Jay Ancel said if people are coming into downtown and shopping in our stores, then we probably are doing well. Montpelier is doing well, and it could be doing better. Ken said if they could get a barometer of how things are going, are visits to the stores going up or down, are their concerns, is circulation noted as a problem or are there some places where it is improving, but we need to get that kind of feedback from you folks who know a lot better than those of us who show up every now and then downtown. Ken said he would appreciate that.

A community member said she could speak to some general studies and what people recommend. She has worked with other communities, and experts have come in to work with those communities. It's as simple as what MDCA says they are all about. People have to live there. If people are not living here that's a problem. They have to work in the downtown, and they have to come here to be entertained. Not around the clock, but there has to be a good number of hours for those activities, and all three of those things have to be present. When you start shutting it down and people don't live here any longer you will see an impact. That's why downtown groups will fight to keep the fire station and police station downtown. Ms. Grodinsky said the question in her mind is how do we fill as much downtown vacant space as we can.

Ms. Campbell when you say the number one concern and interest has been the riverwalk. Does the MDCA have any concerns about the river front and what is or what is not happening there?

A community member said she actually joined MDCA for that purpose. When they asked what kinds of issues were important, she said the riverfront is a great asset to this community and one that is not being used. She said she had seen it being used in a lot of other communities to a much greater degree than it is here. It's almost as if it is nonexistent. An example would be that when there was that little bistro over on State Street, if you walked through that building where their kitchen was and looked out there was a beautiful area out there. If they had put their kitchen some place else, they could have put a deck out there so people could enjoy the river. Right now we don't seem to have a lot of access to the river. We are talking about all kinds of parking structures and all kinds of things that will keep people's activity from being there. Again, we need to talk about a balance. Whether the bike path goes along the river or something, that riverfront needs to be used. Other communities actually create that as another opening to their storefronts, so that waterway becomes very active. She is totally in favor of looking at how to develop that asset in Montpelier.

Jon Anderson, a member of the MDCA Board, and Chair of the Carr Lot committee, said it is important to keep the Carr Lot project on everybody's agenda. One of the reasons is for the river access it will provide. It's a bike path, parking and all of those things rolled

up into one transit center. He said we have that project underway, and we need to have others in the pipeline so we can be improving downtown Montpelier.

Mr. Anderson said in terms of being able to measure how well we are doing is look at the rooms and meals tax receipts. We could have some sort of data that would be a sort of indicator.

Ms. Campbell asked Jon if the plans for the Carr Lot still include a park? Yes. He said it's a transit center, a park, a bike path, a pedestrian bridge. There will be as much parking as we can convince Congress to pay for. There will be a pedestrian bridge over the North Branch. Then, whichever side you put the parking on it will be very useful to both ends of downtown because of the pedestrian bridge for you to walk on. You can park your car and walk to the other side.

Paul Carnahan, a member of the Design Committee of the MDCA, said another area to think about in terms of improvements in addition to the riverwalk is the gateway to the city, such as trying to do something around the area near Shaw's. He said the Tree Board had a landscape designer come up with some ideas. It would be of interest to improve that area to bring people in off of Route 2 into the downtown. It's a complex area because it is a privately owned spot, although the Pomerleau Agency, which owns it, has expressed some interest in doing something there. Jon Anderson talked about having another project in the pipeline. The riverwalk could be one project, and a gateway a second priority.

Ken Jones said he sees the connection. You talk about putting a pedestrian bridge over the North Branch. It empties out in the back of Shaw's. How does it work? You do empty pedestrians there, and something needs to happen there as well. There is the potential for having increased traffic issues because Barre Street comes in there. It's not a very happy pedestrian corner right now. If we get the bikes to come to that corner, it is going to take some creativity to handle all of the increased traffic.

Valerie said the City of Montpelier commissioned a conceptual alignment analysis back in 2002 that studied how to get the path from the North Branch edge over to Main Street, across Main Street and connect it to Stonecutter's Way. There was a public process that identified many different alternatives, and one was selected that favored bringing the alignment through the parking area – there is already a public right-of-way – from the river's edge, alongside M&M Beverage area, which kind of coincides with the railroad right-of-way, and bring it out to Main Street. There are a number of alternatives to improve that intersection, whether it is increasing the number of crosswalks or to the extreme of reconfiguring all together as a potential roundabout. Those are some of the things that were evaluated. Valerie said they submitted a Letter of Intent June 2nd for an Agency of Transportation grant application to build this connection, so hopefully we'll actually see it happen.

A community member said he had a housing question, which he thought had been recognized as an important issue for downtown. The city has a housing coordinator. Are there programs and things being done to enhance the housing downtown?

Valerie said the project George Sieffert has been focusing on has been the River Station Apartments. Another potential grant application the City of Montpelier may be submitting by July 25th is to renovate the Fisher Auto Parts building into apartments on Barre Street. The City Council has been asked to consider that as an application. Other projects right now are more citywide. For example, we have the One More Home campaign encouraging single family homeowners to explore the possibility of adding an accessory apartment to their property. We also have other programs that help income eligible homeowners to preserve their existing housing through weatherization and other maintenance to make sure it stays in good repair and keeps its value. Our office is coordinating with Barre for the Home Share Program, which is a regional program. Other than those programs, there has not been a more specific downtown focus initiative, but if you have specific ideas they would be interested in hearing them. He said he was wondering if something could be done to the Dickey Block. Valerie replied that for all of those projects it typically takes a willing landowner to pursue those kinds of partnerships, and in the downtown area we have limited opportunity to do that. There is nothing new to report on the Dickey Block.

He said one of the topics was the climate. We do a lot to encourage and we have a fair amount of control, and if it could be so that it isn't too onerous on people to undertake projects in Montpelier would be good, which unfortunately the numbers show that it is difficult. One of the things that have been increased over time is the administrative leeway that your office has, and we should allow for more of that.

Ken Jones said we should develop a menu of those administrative actions which do seem burdensome at this point. By looking at the menu maybe we could find a systematic way of making it easier in the future. The community member said it does have an impact. We look at things that will cause an improvement to a building and we don't undertake them because it is indicated that is not what was approved.

Another community member said that in the case of the Dickey Block and other buildings in the downtown there have been discussions in the past about doing tax incentives and also increasing inspections to make sure the buildings stay in good shape. She wondered if anything like this was being explored.

Eric Seidel, a member of the MDCA, and a member of the Economic Restructuring Committee, said one of the things they had talked about is the rather mundane public parking signage we have in Montpelier to our public parking lots. They are typically green letters on a white background with a "P" for parking, and they tend to get lost. As you travel on State and Main Streets in Montpelier, we're certain that there are more attractive options, and also options that will let new visitors to our city know that there is parking available other than just the metered parking on the street. We aren't sure that is something the Planning Commission will deal with, but certainly we are going to take a

look at what we can do as a committee to further that appearance. Eric said on the Planning Commission's list of issues there was one about infill versus open space. I'm speaking as a person who operates a business in Montpelier now and not as a member of the MDCA. Certainly, there is a very limited amount of what you might term intense urban development in Montpelier. He said he would personally opt for more infill in Montpelier. This would be preferable to making another pocket park.

Ms. Grodinsky said as an avid biker she wondered if it was the MDCA who buys or puts out the bike racks. She would love to see more bike racks in the downtown. A community member said the Bike Path Committee does this.

Ms. Campbell inquired if the MDCA had given any thought to increased pedestrian friendly access to downtown, or traffic flow. Eric said they had looked at improvements to the walkways and the alley way here. We are also talking about increasing the sidewalks on the side of Rite Aid to the back of City Hall, and it will be lighted there as well. Ms. Campbell said there had been some discussion last year about traffic flow and some possibility of something like Burlington's Church Street between Elm and Main Streets.

A community member said an issue they are dealing with right now is finding a home for the farmer's market that they can be happy with. Whether along the riverfront, or some place we can find a space that would be appropriate for events like this that would make sense. Farmer's market seems to be an issue that keeps coming up. They keep being displaced by buildings or the security of the court house. If there was a space that could accommodate things like this in the city, it would be great. People keep looking at the Capitol lawn. Ms. Campbell inquired if the park in the Carr Lot would be a sufficient space for this. David Borgendale asked if Jon Anderson could address that because there was some discussion about there being considerable open space in the Carr Lot.

Jon Anderson said the Carr Lot committee functions as long as we are talking about a 50/50 split between the developed portion of the Carr Lot for the transit center and the greenspace area. They are still locating everything to make sure they can do it. Once they have the location package down then they can go for a specific design. In the design area he would like them to give thought to the park being the space for events like the Farmer's Market. They haven't gotten to that discussion yet.

Lisa, one of the owners of the Langdon Street Café, said as a business owner on Langdon Street her interest is in improving the economic climate of the downtown. She said she had conversations with the woman who manages the farmer's market about the Sheriff's parking lot becoming the farmer's market area. She could envision a situation where there is a riverwalk and a pedestrian walk which would be on Langdon Street so no cars could drive down Langdon Street. The riverwalk and pedestrian way on Langdon Street would interconnect with the farmer's market circuit. This would basically dead end Elm Street at Langdon Street instead of going all the way to State Street. To me, in conjunction with the Carr Lot project and the riverwalk, and taking the cars off of Langdon Street and centralizing the farmer's market and putting greenspace in the

downtown is a key component to making Montpelier a really green place to be. She thinks it would be extremely attractive and matches Vermont's brand and the marketing of the values that the state puts out there for Vermont.

A community member said she would like to speak about Burlington's empty building ordinance, which she has had some experience with by working in Burlington. The historic structures' demolition by neglect ordinance they are also working on, there was an example of a building in Burlington that looked perfect to the eyes but it didn't have a roof. Under the ordinance, which is frankly not being followed, so monies were not being collected which was roughly \$2,000 a year and probably not a huge incentive, when it became collected because of some articles that were in *Seven Days*, then that building was sold at a public auction. The new owner was not pleasantly surprised to find that when he used the new key to the front door there was nothing inside. It was a nice 1875(ish) Italian with slate roof with some really nice exterior details. If you know anything about historic structures, you know that a really thick coat of paint can be effective in keeping the elements off the outside but not on the inside. If you are looking at protecting historic structures, you might want to take a look at Burlington's proposed ordinance for demolition by neglect.

Valerie said she could share with the audience that the Planning Commission has expressed a lot of concern about demolition by neglect. As part of the package of the zoning revisions that went to the City Council there was some proposed language in an example provided by the Town of Bennington, which has a very strong section in its ordinance on demolition by neglect. Valerie said they would also look at the Burlington ordinance, which she wasn't aware of.

Ken Jones said he would like to get back to some points raised earlier about housing. Some of the follow-up discussion was about housing within the downtown portion of Montpelier. Also, in terms of the vitality of downtown, he is curious about the sense of how important it is for folks who live in Montpelier but still probably drive downtown and Central Vermont as well. How important is that level of growth, and do you have suggestions on how the city is supposed to approach the overall housing issue? Where do we encourage housing? When do we encourage it? Should we encourage housing growth? Should it be downtown? How about the rest of the city? How about Central Vermont? How important is it to the vitality of the downtown businesses?

A community member said he thought they all recognized the need for housing in Montpelier and Central Vermont and the prices and availability. People who work in his office can't find affordable housing. He said we need new housing for the vitality of downtown. There are models for good housing, whether it be downtown or Sabin's Pasture or in East Montpelier. There are some good studies on creating new neighborhoods, where there is mixed use in the neighborhoods. We need to be cautious of sprawl and not push our problems onto our neighbors. We need to do some regional thinking and planning.

Anne Campbell inquired if the MDCA had a position with regard to the amount of growth that is optimal for Montpelier? Do you basically see bigger and bigger as better and better? Are you concerned with retaining the character of Montpelier as it is?

Jay Ancel replied he felt quality is an issue and responding to the needs of those who work in the area.

A community member said she would use Burlington because it is perhaps an advanced example of the change in Vermont because it is the largest city in Vermont and quite similar in its protection of historic resources and its emphasis on the quality of life in the community. There is always this problem of combining residential and business. In Burlington it has reached some interesting problems where the people lived in condos on Church Street that they didn't stay there very long because the noise is pretty intense. Of course, the difference here is that you aren't open until 2:00 a.m., and you don't have the same student population either. That makes a huge difference in the community. Also, she isn't sure if the ordinance includes a restriction on first floor space. Is first floor space in the downtown required to be commercial space versus residential space? That was an issue in Vergennes where some very valuable commercial space became occupied by residential units on the first floor, and the same thing has just happened in Burlington with a house on Cherry Street where an agency has taken it over and they intend to put residential housing on the first floor and the local business community is justifiably concerned about losing space in the downtown.

A community member said he thought having housing closer to downtown, the better it is for the downtown. Personally, he feels a responsibility for us as a society to make sure there is adequate housing for everybody. As a member of the MDCA he would like the housing to be concentrated as close to downtown Montpelier as possible. The reason it is good for a downtown to have housing is people will shop closest to where they live and do errands closest to where they live, so the closer they are to downtown the healthier a downtown we'll have.

Ken Jones said let's move on to the topic of transportation. We have just gone through a summer with no Elm Street. He said the Planning Commission is interested in their thoughts and reflections about what we have experienced with regards to traffic, how it affects business and what we should keep our eyes on with regards to the current transportation infrastructure and what we can plan for and be focusing on from your perspective. We definitely had some high traffic issues because of the closure of Elm Street, and to what extent does that make a difference.

David Borgendale said he would like to expand on the issue of transportation. What we struggle with, particularly in the downtown area, is the challenge of everyone having a pedestrian friendly open area in the downtown and yet there is a major thoroughfare running right through the middle with very few alternatives. To tell you the truth, for the size of the community traffic is awful. Are there any ideas for meeting that challenge? We talk about closing off streets for pedestrian friendly places. Right now there are only two ways to get across town.

Valerie said she would like to add an addendum to that. There have been a lot of ideas already expressed. Are there echoes of support?

A community member said he would suggest that traffic and parking are intimately connected. If we had adequate parking in downtown Montpelier, we would probably cut our traffic flow by 5 or 10 percent just from the people who are circling downtown looking for a parking space.

Jay Ancel said someone mentioned the possibility of closing off part of State Street. That would place too much restriction on it. He said he didn't think Montpelier's retail market would improve.

Ken Jones said one of the factors with regards to traffic and parking are actually the employees themselves. To the extent that there may be opportunities to move the ring out a little bit, that more of the parking in the very concentrated State and Main Streets area is exclusively there for people who are there to shop and not for people who are there for 8 hours. Is there any way to encourage that sort of movement of parking? Ken said another observation has to do with Stonecutter's Way. Since they put the parking meters in, there are always parking spots there now. It's a 2-minute walk to Main Street.

A community member mentioned she believe in the European way, which is park and stride, and having the parking areas on the edge of town and having people walk in. There have been discussions from time to time about getting employees out. They have talked to Mayor Hooper about the city employees. It's not appropriate to have a city space. We should be able to do some sort of shuttling. When the legislature is here there are a lot of people who park out and get shuttled in. It depends upon our culture. It's like you said, everybody wants to be within a couple of feet where they want to go.

Jon Anderson said he believes there are solutions if we will just free up the politicians to pursue the solutions and be accepting. Frequently, we knew what the answers were when he was on the City Council, but there was such opposition to any change whatsoever in terms of how we dealt with parking. He has seen more flexibility as time has gone by but if you let the Council manage it as a resource rather than setting down lots of rules that we'll get where we need to be sooner. He said what the City Council did on Stonecutter's Way is excellent to try to meter and charge people. If you want to drive out the all-day parkers, just price it so they have an incentive to get out of the downtown. From his perspective, what will not work is the notion that shoppers are going to park at the perimeter. That just won't work. We live in a competitive environment and people will go to the mall or go to Barre to shop, especially if we impose that kind of barrier to coming to downtown. If we really work on the parking issues, every answer we find will be progressively more expensive. If we build parking downtown, eventually it is going to get so expensive we'll look at alternative places for folks to park. If we accurately price and actively manage parking we can cause people to do the right thing. We will have people shuttling when they are supposed to shuttle.

David Borgendale said he lives very near to downtown and he can guarantee if he leaves his parking spot downtown that it will be gone in about 2 minutes. One of the issues about it being expensive to park downtown is you almost have to control parking as it moves out into the residential areas as well. As you price up the cost of the parking downtown, you just push the parking out onto the residential streets that are near downtown. That makes it that less attractive to live near downtown.

Mayor Hooper in a note to the Planning Commission said in 1999 there was a survey of businesses on upper floors of buildings. She wanted to know how things had changed in the past 7 or 8 years in regard to that topic because she said it was very enlightening as to what the status of these upper businesses is.

A member of the MDCA replied that this is part of the Economic Restructure Committee's plan. It is her understanding that there is some new equipment in City Hall that will make it easier to access.

Valerie said she would like to throw out a general question, and maybe it is something the MDCA has discussed recently. Of the range of topics that have been discussed here or within your own organizations, what might be the top 3 or 5 priorities for the downtown community that the Planning Commission or the City Council should focus attention on, whether it is through Master Plan policies, budget decisions, or through other policy making decisions? Are there specific topic areas or initiatives that we should focus attention on?

Jon Anderson said the Carr Lot, the Riverwalk, and whatever Paul Carnahan wants to make as the project to improve the design of the downtown. If Paul wants to work on signage, it might take us a year to coordinate how to work on the signage. If Paul wants to work on the gateway, then that is what we work on.

Jay Ancel said he would add housing to that list, along with mixed uses for downtown.

Valerie said that in recent years the Planning Office has talked with different property owners in the downtown, and near the downtown looking at different options for their properties. When the subject of housing would come up, often times the reason why it wouldn't be pursued is because there is limited parking available for residents. Even with the financial incentives available through the different programs, there was not an incentive for them to want to pursue it, or they just didn't want to deal with the restrictions that come with those funding sources. They had a different vision in mind for the types of dwelling units that they wanted to see, which wasn't always consistent with the priorities of those funding programs, and the other regulatory requirements that go along with those programs. Often times, it really does boil down to the property owners' desires themselves. I don't know how we work with that to achieve some of these broader visions. That is a factor we have to acknowledge and work with.

Anne Campbell told Jon Anderson that at one point the Carr Lot project had the possibility of including housing in the upper levels. Jon said they are completing the

overall design and one to two floors of housing are included. When they define the project and know where the parking is going, then they'll be able to develop that project. The funding structure that Jon feels responsible for putting together does not include funding for the upper floors. We need to find a partner, and to the extent that partner needs public money we would expect that partner to find it. That partner may need to go get a housing grant.

Ken said they had talked about a couple of specific hurdles that make it challenging to do business. One is housing, and one is the perception that it is hard to do business in Montpelier. I'm hoping you folks have more discussion to add to that about what we could do to alter things to make doing business a little easier. He said he would like to hear this as they consider the scope of the Master Plan and see where some of that falls within the Planning Commission's purview.

A member said when they were considering opening the Langdon Street Café, here are the options and things you should consider when opening a business and give the information up front. Those could all be rolled into one application which would make it easier both for the applicant and the Planning Commission.

A member said his experience in opening a business in Montpelier is that every little thing you do or change needs additional review. You need to pay an additional \$56, even if you don't go through Design Review. There should be a way to streamline and reduce the costs for additions or changes to plans. It is hard as a business owner to know everything up front.

Ken Jones said the reason we have the Development Review Board is to protect businesses. I don't know if there is a stronger way to provide the feedback as to what kinds of review really do help you folks so that other businesses, structures and activities are not affecting your work.

Valerie said that one question which has come up a lot in the last couple of years is how important it is to regulate colors. We are getting the sense over the last couple of years that there is less interest in regulating colors or the change of colors on a building. I'm hearing that is one of the things that might get relaxed a little bit. Ken asked if there had ever been a case where the Design Review or Development Review Board had required a change in color. Valerie replied there had been debate.

Ken said he appreciated the discussion, and if there are more topics please feel free to raise them. Please stay tuned as the Planning Commission does develop the Master Plan. We seek your feedback as we translate your observations into the Master Plan language. We share goals for what happens with the downtown. It is about a year to the completion of the Master Plan, so these next six months is the strong development of its products. Starting in early 2007 it is the review process by groups such as the MCDA as well as the public. We want to make it a more public process. We want to get some information out through the internet and The Bridge, about where we are and clearly the issue of growth. He said the City of Montpelier needs a clear position. He knows there will never be

consensus. But there needs to be a clear position for the Planning Commission to work with as to what they need to say this is what growth should look like in Montpelier. He said he encouraged them to stay tuned and they would do what they could with communication.

Valerie said another thing the Planning Commission will be doing at the same time as the Master Plan update is the zoning revisions for issues that have come up over the years. Signage is on the list of things to address. At a prior meeting the Planning Commission had set the objective of allocating 50 percent of its time on the Master Plan update, 25 percent of its time on the zoning revisions and progressing them through the process, and the other 25 percent of its time on just issues that present themselves. Stay tuned to some of the zoning revisions, too.

Jon Anderson inquired if the Planning Commission could tell the group what they have in mind for growth in terms of their responses. Ken said he testified during the Sabin's Pasture hearings that his personal feeling is we can have housing development there and the city will be a great city, and we don't have to have a housing development and the city will be a great city. We are open to hear not just how much people think there should be for new housing but also the ripples of when we have housing how much more traffic can we handle. How bad was it during the Elm Street closure? His perspective was that from 4:30 to 5:00 pm. it was a pain in the neck. We may get a little more of that if we get significant housing growth. Or, if we are going to get increased school population and we can still maintain our schools and not have the property tax pressures, then we can handle that.

Carolyn Grodinsky said it isn't just about how many more housing units and the equivalent number of cars coming through, but looking at the whole planning issue and car pooling, public transportation and bike paths.

Ken Jones thanked community members and members of the MDCA for their feedback on the concerns you have for downtown Montpelier.

Consideration of a Future Appointment to the Capital Complex Commission

City Council needs to appoint a new person to the Capital Complex Commission. Perhaps the Planning Commission should weigh in to that appointment. At issue is the fact that Marge Power is currently the representative and her term expires in July, and she has informed us that she will not be seeking reappointment. Also, she will also no longer be representing the City of Montpelier on the Capital Complex Commission. Right now the state statute puts the authority to appoint the city's representative on the Capital Complex Commission with the City Council. It doesn't have to be a Planning Commissioner. It can be a City Councilor, an unaffiliated resident of the city. There are two questions. 1. Would the Planning Commission recommend that it be a Planning Commissioner, and, if so, should it be the Chair or just make it open to any member who is interested, has the time and is willing to make the commitment to do it?

David Borgendale said traditionally it has been the Chair of the Planning Commission and people thought it was an ex-officio position. Valerie said the state statute actually did have it that way for a long time, but it has since changed. Ken said it he didn't feel it has been the greatest communication channel. The State is considering doing something with Redstone. Several of the Secretary of State functions might be moving up to National Life. Certainly, Redstone is not an appropriate building for archives. How many jobs does the State see being in Montpelier five years from now? They probably have a number, and I'm not sure the city does. Ken said he doesn't know if the City of Montpelier has an opportunity to actually participate and not just being spoken to by being on that commission. Things the state is considering doing have big impacts on the City of Montpelier. Ken said he is willing to serve in that position, but he may be a little thorny in his position because the City of Montpelier is a host to the State. We should have a little more to say about what they are going to do with the x thousands of employees, how they get back and forth to work, and where they are going to park, because it affects to the city. We don't want to just react to their decisions. David Borgendale said the city's representative to the Capital Complex Commission should be a member of the Planning Commission.

David Borgendale moved that the Planning Commission advise City Council that the Planning Commission believes that the representative to the Capital Complex Commission should be a member of the Planning Commission. Anne Campbell seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

Anne Campbell moved that Ken Jones be appointed to the Capital Complex Commission. David Borgendale seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously 5-0.

Consideration of Zoning Revision Request

Ken Jones said with regards to the riverfront zoning district, there are certain regulations with regards to parking that will be challenging to comply with. You folks have in front of you a request to City Council to revise the zoning ordinance for the riverfront district in order to allow for the development of that property to take place with parking greater than what the current district regulates or restricts, which is 25 percent of the lot. Fred Connor is here to give more detail on this.

Fred Connor said three or four years ago when the riverfront district was created, he wasn't sure the Planning Commission at that time realized when they imposed the 25 percent restriction they did that several months after 535 Stone Cutters Way was permitted at roughly 35 percent parking coverage, and six or seven years after the Hunger Mt. Coop which was permitted at about 40 percent coverage. The Allen Lumber Company also have about 40 percent paving coverage. The Pomerleau property is estimated at about two-thirds coverage. He said he wasn't sure when the number was picked if the Planning Commission members were aware that they were making those properties non-compliant.

The Salt Shed property is kind of unique in that its history is that for 50 years it was a salt shed with maybe a two or three person operation with very little parking requirement

using about 50 percent of the building on the lot. We are trying to do something different from that with a more conventional office development and also share parking with the Coop, who have been with us before the Council on this request. They have expansion plans. He said he believes the district requires that development share access, and we already have some shared parking.

Ken Jones inquired what the definition for shared parking was. Fred said in their case it could either be reciprocal or open ended; it could be after hours. It's complementary parking. The Peralisk could envision their hours as off-hours and weekends. Ken said when you go before the Development Review Board part of the site plan will define this as shared parking. Fred said they have a document that contains an agreement for this.

David asked if the demand for parking with the Peralisk office building for people visiting the building or employees who work there. He thinks the office use would be the standard 9:00 to 5:00 office hours without a lot of incoming traffic.

The Planning Commission has reviewed this once before. The term used to be 25 percent above ground parking, and it was redefined to be 25 percent enclosed above ground parking. We asked the DRB if we could enclose the parking off by a wall or fence and they said maybe. They need clarification on this.

Ken asked Fred if he could give him his schedule. Can you give us a sense of how the grant for the Brownfield Remediation is tied to this? Fred said that would come after this. Both sites were recipients of state funds of over \$200,000 for the clean up.

David asked Valerie if the problem with parking was driven predominantly by our zoning requirements and how much parking you have to provide given the general characteristics of the building and activities there. In other words, if we are trying to satisfy a regulatory requirement or whether the issue is predominantly the economic part of the development. Frankly, the problem I'm having with this is we were just having the discussion about using up so much of the downtown parking space for employees who are there all day as opposed to visitors.

Valerie said in the riverfront district changes of use or development within the existing footprint does not have to comply with the parking requirements. Ken inquired if this was the parking spots per square foot requirement, and Valerie replied yes. Valerie said the parking requirement for office space is one space per 250 square feet. If that is 20,000 square feet of office space, then that is 80 parking spaces. That is net office space, factoring out the bathrooms, stairwells and hallways.

Anne Campbell told Valerie it might be useful to fill the members in on the thoughts of the previous planning commission when they developed this and what the intention was. Valerie said at that time there was a lot of discussion about the desire to balance different interests in the Stone Cutters Way area, which is a very narrow space and has a lot of things going on in it. At the time the engine house was still standing. It wasn't a parking lot at the time. We had the two existing buildings: the freight house which is the Jeffords

building, and the engine house which burned and is now a parking lot, and then there was the empty space next to the turntable park and the Salt Shed. There was also a desire to provide more public parking along the street and the recreation path and visual and physical access to the river. Those were the high priorities. Anne Campbell inquired if they wanted to provide more parking along the recreation path. Valerie said the street itself. 145 spaces were created at that time for on street public parking. There was a lot of discussion about how to balance the development, the need to provide onsite parking and the desire to maintain some open space whether it is visual or greenspace that is undeveloped space along Stone Cutters Way. Those proportions were created – 60 percent building coverage, 25 percent surface parking, and the rest is undeveloped open area.

Ken Jones said the rule says 25 percent of the lot is the maximum for parking. Then, it depends on how big you make the building, and the difference will be open space. Ken said City Council is going to take this up, but it is the Planning Commission's role to hold a public hearing on a zoning revision. He is hoping this does not become a multi meeting and endless process. Clearly, there are people with the opinion that it would be great to be all open space. Also, what if it doesn't get redeveloped and stays as the Salt Shed? It is Ken's hope they can have a short discussion here about how to frame this issue for a public hearing that will help City Council make the decision hopefully with the appropriate input from the Planning Commission with regards to the consistency of expanding parking in the riverfront district. We need to decide how that kind of discussion can be facilitated during the public hearing process and to come up with a recommendation that is useful to City Council.

Valerie said she checked the file for 535 Stone Cutters Way and also the Jeffords building. Ultimately, they were reviewed under the riverfront district regulations, and according to the application materials that were submitted at that time the parking was expanded from 7 to 9 parking spaces. In October, 2005, they received approval to expand their parking lot. The three spaces combined of the Jeffords building, parking area between and the river station building is over 50,000 square feet. The parking area was calculated to be just under 24 percent of the site. Ken said the parking lot was already there in October 2005. Valerie said they expanded it and reconfigured it. The information that was provided to the Board was that it was less than 25 percent for the three sites, the Jeffords building, the space where the engine house used to be, and the river station building. It is shared parking, actually. When looking at the area for Sarducci's, we have to remember that the public thoroughfare goes through it, so there is a street going through the Sarducci's area. To some degree, that needs to be factored out of the calculations. With the Hunger Mt. Cooper, the property line between the Coop and the Salt Shed property does divide this parking area. There is also a public thoroughfare that goes through that parking lot. Mr. Borgendale inquired how there was a public thoroughfare going through that parking lot. Valerie said it was negotiated when Stone Cutters Way was created. There is a public thoroughfare through that parking lot to provide legal public access to that parking lot to turn around because that is where it transitions from a two-way to a one-way street. There had to be a public way for vehicles to turn around.

Ken said, Valerie, your initial observation raises a fundamental point. If you take that from Sarducci's to the end of 535 Stone Cutters Way, and that complies with the 25 percent parking restriction, so what, because there's the bike path, but it's a parking lot. 25 percent doesn't do it. There is this hole in the ground, which we call a turn table, which isn't a part of the Connor development, and maybe that could be integrated into the space to make it have more access to the river, which I appreciate deeply, to accomplish what we want to accomplish with the district without hinging on the 25 percent. Ken said he doesn't know what mechanism to use to encourage that kind of redevelopment.

David Borgendale said from what he understood the objectives of what the river district was supposed to be like versus what it is, it seems like we are trying to impose rules on the one piece that is undeveloped. Ken said he didn't think it was all a failure. In fact, it is the bike path. He remembers what it was liked before it was redeveloped; it was a mess. The Salt Shed is a mess. He wants to see something happen so there is more continuity on Stone Cutters Way. Now that there is more housing down at the Coop end there will be more pedestrian traffic on the bike path. He doesn't think zoning regulations are going to be the mechanism to make it happen.

David said one of the things that were supposed to happen was to have business fronts on the pedestrian walkway so it would be pedestrian friendly, and that is definitely not the case. Ken said they put the bike path on the other side of the road. Valerie said there were existing buildings there at the time. The engine house was there, the Salt Shed was there, and the Jeffords building was there. The turn table was there, and some day it will hopefully be a park. The city maintains the lease on the turn table.

Anne Campbell inquired of Fred if what he proposed for parking would be the existing area. Fred Connor said they were looking at the existing footprint as the Salt Shed. The parking would all be on the Coop side.

Ken said the question before the Planning Commission is whether we should try to structure the hearing process so we can get at the ramifications of the decision and get a recommendation to the City Council.

Valerie read the language that this hinges on. It's on page 2-7 of the most current draft regulations, and Fred kindly included a copy with his letter. "Accessory parking, which is considered 49.9 percent or less of the total square footage of a building that is enclosed and incorporated into the design of a building structure may supplement parking provided that in 204.B.(2)(b) above, which is the reference to the 25 percent limit. This parking shall be designed and screened so it does not appear to be a parking lot and in such a way so as to be integrated into the site and building design, comply with all of the standards and design guidelines outlined in section ... and feature up to two vehicle access and egress entryways which are not required to be screened and shall not be located on the street side or the river side of the structure. Parking requirements for residential uses in the riverfront district shall be waived." What is enclosed? What is attached to or

incorporated into the design of the building structure? Those were some of the questions that were posed to the Development Review Board.

David Borgendale said it is hard not to think about this specific site. What we are quibbling about is whether or not we enclose or pretend that a portion of a piece of land is not a parking lot that is next to a great big parking lot. Ken said that is not actually the question before the Planning Commission, though. We could rewrite this language, but he thinks the suggestion is to rewrite the piece that if it is shared parking it doesn't count against your 25 percent limit. Then you don't have to go through the definition of structural elements. If that shared parking is included in your proposal, then that shared parking doesn't count against your 25 percent limit.

Valerie said once a public hearing date is set and warned, we need to warn the language that is proposed. Valerie said part of their packets included an excerpt of Chapter 117 statutes. This relates to the requirement for bylaw amendments from the Planning Commission side. It talks about the requirements that the Planning Commission has to prepare a report. The report has to be prepared and noticed and made available to the public along with the amendment at the time of the public hearing. In order to warn the public hearing you need to have the report done. David said we also need to be in agreement with the language of the amendment we are proposing.

Ken said one option is for the Planning Commission to go forward with adding the phrase shared parking would not be counted against the 25 percent requirement. That would be the simplest in terms of language revision. Does the Planning Commission want to give more consideration to other approaches for addressing this issue, such as possibly changing the 25 percent requirement? Carolyn Grodinsky said she would opt for more discussion on what the other options are. David Borgendale said this is a very easy solution, but he is a little concerned about not having figured out possible unintended consequences. If you take this language, it is conceivable the whole property could be made into a parking lot as long as it is shared by two users or two businesses, and he doesn't think that is what their intent is. He said he would be comfortable to meet the specific needs here but say you could go some x percent further as long as it was shared. Anne Campbell is more concerned that following the rezoning that took place that asked for more protection from the riverside as well as the Stone Cutters Way side that it would not be in keeping with what Fred suggested. Craig Graham said he understands everyone's viewpoint. How many properties would this affect? One property. Anne said it would also affect the Coop at the point they come in asking for an expansion.

Valerie said it's hard to look down the road too far, but there might be some potential down the road for redevelopment of sites. Ken said he felt they should spend time at another meeting to explore what options there might be. We should take this on for our next meeting. We will hold a public hearing on July 24th.

Relationship Between City Council & Planning Commission

In February or March we were requested by City Council to submit an answer to about 10 questions with regard to our communication with City Council, our mission, about City

Council's relationship to the Planning Commission and how it should be more efficient. This was sent to about 20 different city commissions. We refused to complete that assignment at that time. We were angry because we wanted more clarity on what they wanted from us. Ken said he proposed for the next meeting is to draft some responses he thinks reflects our concerns about our relationship between City Council and the Planning Commission. He'll have some draft language for the Commission to review to send to City Council.

Review of Municipal Plan Update Schedule & Tasks

Education is listed for David Borgendale. Craig Graham's is historic and built environment. We'll also include the discussion of Stone Cutters Way, and maybe a brief review of comments to the City Council with regards to the role of the Planning Commission.

Adjournment

David Borgendale moved adjournment, with Craig Graham seconding. The Planning Commission was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Capels

Transcribed and Prepared by:
Joan Clack, City Clerk & Treasurer's Office