

Montpelier Planning Commission
February 26, 2007
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Ken Jones, Chair; Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; Craig Graham, and Christy Witters.

Call to Order:

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

Minutes:

There wasn't a quorum of people who attended the January 22nd meeting who could approve the minutes. Members commented on how concise they were.

Resignation of Christy Witters:

Christy Witters said this was going to be her last Planning Commission meeting. She is moving to Richmond. She e-mailed Gwen and Ken on Friday, and Gwen forwarded her e-mail to Bill Fraser.

Zoning Regulations:

Mr. Jones said he had a concern about what happened to academic PUD's when they expire and what happens to them. Ms. Grodinsky said she wasn't present at the meeting when the issue of NECI as a meat fabrication facility came up. Mr. Jones said that was why the question came up, because the PUD that governs the use of the campus has an issue of when it expires. It was brought to his attention that the city changed the zoning regulations on that very topic this summer. It was suggested that Planning Commission members review the complete zoning regulations and bring any questions they have back to a future meeting.

City Council Member Nancy Sherman said she was in attendance because of the mention about the academic PUD. She said it is mentioned in the zoning regulations on section 317 regarding expiration. With the imminent sale of the College that was announced today it is very important that we announce the academic PUD is firmly in place. If it expires after five years, it continues until there is a new AI-PUD approved by this body. That means we are safe in maintaining what was the Vermont College campus as an academic institution until they get something approved to make it otherwise. The rumor used to be that when the AI-PUD expired it reverted to the previous zoning, and that is what sent shivers down everyone's spines. Even if it expires it remains in place until the city approves something else.

Mr. Jones said they can't do anything until they come up with a new PUD. As he reads it, they can't use the old PUD for development. They can't use the expired PUD as the basis for new development. They could use the old PUD and resubmit it as is. Mr. Graham asked if they could take it out of the AI-PUD status and develop the green as something else. Mr. Jones said a regular PUD is way different than an AI-PUD. Basically, that is an academic institution until they send a new PUD and the city can change it. But it will have to go through the review process.

During the summer did this arise because of that consideration at the college? The sale has been going on for a long time, and there were a lot of rumors that it was going to happen. At the same time all of the Sabin's Pasture stuff was happening so there was a great concern, whether the college was in the AI-PUD or not, that there would be a connection between Sabin's Pasture and the rest of the city through the college property.

Mr. Jones said the Planning Commission never reported on that change because the Planning Commission was never made aware of the change. The report from the Planning Commission to City Council that led to the passage of this has no reference to this change.

There was something that came through minutes to the Council with regard to revisions to the AI-PUD.

Mr. Jones asked if we knew anything about the purchasers and their thoughts about the campus. Council Member Sherman said they knew their names and they are coming to City Council on Wednesday night. They have asked for some bonding and are on the agenda for that. It isn't bonding from the city, but bonding that will cost the city nothing in terms of risk or money but there is bonding at a lower rate if it has the blessing of the City Council.

Mr. Jones said if they are open to any questions about the use on the portion of the properties that isn't related to the campus, in other words which borders Sabin's Pasture, whether they see a need to gain some return on that land or not, the rest of the city would be very interested in engaging in that discussion. The Zorzi property is the subject of discussions, and it would be wonderful if the two discussions happened simultaneously. The mediation process should include the owners of the college property as well.

Mr. Jones said the reason he would invite the purchasers of the college to participate in discussions about Sabin's Pasture is that the development which will take place there could have more positive benefits for the developer if there was coordination between the Zorzi property and the college property. There is infrastructure that could be shared between those two properties so if they could participate there may be some mutual benefit. There is going to be a little development down there in the next couple of years. The bike path is going to be constructed there. It is possible as that construction takes place other infrastructure issues could be addressed that would affect both properties. This is why it could be mutually beneficial for them to participate in these discussions and not just to stop things from happening.

The buying team is headed up by Tom Greene. It is the Vermont College of the Fine Arts with Tom Greene, Bill Kaplan and Peter Richardson. Peter Richardson is a developer from Burlington; Bill Kaplan is from East Montpelier, and Tom Greene was with Norwich University and stepped into this. Then, there are a whole bunch of Vermont College alumni supporting this also. The Master of Fine Arts for Visual Arts, the MFA in Writing Program and the MFA in Writing for Children Program are the anchored programs. If the city is concerned about preserving the green, perhaps they could have them sign as a condition a statement that it will never be developed. This could be a condition for the bonding topic. They could also sign an agreement or condition that they honor current leases and the Wood Art Gallery and NECI, that the AI-PUD criteria be met, that they have a passage way to Sabin's Pasture.

Mr. Jones said he thinks it is the sense from their deliberations on Sabin's Pasture that the lower portion on Barre Street, which the college has a few acres, that development is not a bad thing. If it could also be developed in a way to work with the lower part of the Zorzi property, that would reflect what many of the people in the city would like to see happen.

City Council Member Sherman said the college should coordinate with the Planning Commission and the other property owners in their discussions. Mr. Jones said the Planning Commission does not have a formal role. The negotiations with the city are managed through the City Manager's Office. He has told Bill in the past that the mediation process should include the interests of the Union Institute. The mediation process is going slow and the mediation still hasn't brought all three parties together. The appraisal has been completed.

City Council Member Sherman said that Bill had said at the last City Council meeting there was significant progress made in terms of the mediation and coming to some sort of agreement about a part of the property that included open space.

Mr. Jones said he plans on meeting with the Friends of Sabin's Pasture in March to talk about the open space idea and what they have in mind for the bigger picture. The bike path is going in at the bottom and the redevelopment of the Barre Street corridor. He said he would meet with the Friends of Sabin's Pasture to find out where they are, and also try to meet with the Zorzi family.

Energy Team: Energy Town Meeting

Mr. Jones said he is hoping they can use this meeting as an overall topic for the Master Plan. He put an article in *The Bridge* this week raising the idea. It is more than what individuals can do to save energy. It is broader about whether Montpelier can take a leadership role in shifting away from fossil fuels. He thinks we can gain some

benefit as a community in being a leader and doing something ahead of other communities. There are probably some external funds to support people converting from oil to non-petroleum furnaces. Maybe there can be some work with transportation to get people out of single gasoline combustion engines. If Montpelier can make improvements, there are a dozen organizations that can say they took the challenge.

They are hoping and planning for a significant number of people in attendance at this meeting. He encouraged all members of the Planning Commission to attend to show their interest and support in this idea. They shouldn't use this meeting as a single event but hopefully plant enough transportation ideas, housing ideas, new energy sources, and efficiency products and get a group of people to form committees to make those things happen. It is an action oriented agenda where at the end of the meeting there is the formation of teams to pursue specific projects. He envisions there will be ten of these teams and three or four will do something.

Imagine that 30 to 40 years from now we will not be using petroleum like we are using it right now. Mr. Graham said to try 20 years from now. Mr. Jones asked how can we get rid of our furnaces. Mr. Graham said this is something we need to start thinking about. Unfortunately, the American public doesn't start thinking about things until there is a crisis. Mr. Grodinsky said we need to get people to insulate their hoses better. Mr. Jones said this is going to be expensive and Montpelier needs to start a revolving loan fund to assist with this. Mr. Graham said we will need to set up the mechanism because it will have to go beyond Montpelier to the neighboring communities.

Mr. Jones said if the energy meeting goes well he is hoping to also get the Montpelier Housing Task Force involved as well. This ties nicely into the master planning process.

Mr. Graham said you have to bring up the cost savings to people with energy. It is all connected to money because the price of oil isn't going down.

The Master Planning Process:

The Planning Commission discussed their conversations with the stakeholders they contacted regarding "Envision Montpelier."

Ms. Witters said she talked to someone at the Institute for Sustainable Communities and somebody at the Trust for Public Lands and another at the Vermont Forum on Sprawl. They have varying degrees of participating during the whole process and are going to spread the word to their friends and colleagues once they have more information.

Mr. Graham said he had contacted Bob Lizzari who seemed very interested. He still wants to be in contact with Mr. McPherson and a couple of other folks.

Mr. Jones said he talked to a few people and he stopped because he had trouble finding his own passion as to why these people should commit a lot of their time to go to meetings. Where is the urgency? What is this really going to yield? He had a list of some influential busy people in Montpelier. It is hard to get people to make a commitment for 18 months. This is a challenge for us because the only person who can do it is Gwen. Ms. Grodinsky said this discussion is worth having when Gwen is present.

Mr. Graham said the outcome for the Energy Teach is to actually effect a change in weatherization of houses, for example. The outcome for "Envision Montpelier" is a new master plan.

Mr. Jones said if he were to visit some of the people on his list and talk about housing and telling them we are thinking about having an event in the next 12 months where the outcome for that event is 50 people working on housing topics where they are going to be working with the development community building houses, his response from the people would be a little different.

Mr. Jones said the master planning process needs to be included on the next Planning Commission meeting agenda when Gwen is present. They need to think about what the kick-off meeting will look like.

Update on All Board Meeting:

The Planning Commission requested the possibility of have an all board meeting four times a year. Two of the times would have very specific agenda items, one related to budget and adherence to the master plan. The other two times would be more open ended relating to how things are going on in the city. Ms. Grodinsky added to find out how the zoning regulations are working for the Development Review Board and Design Review Committee. It will be the Planning Commission, City Council, Development Review Board and Design Review Committee, and perhaps the Conservation Commission.

Mr. Jones said one of the reasons for this is that there has never been any communication between the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board. One of the questions that need to be addressed in the future is that as the DRB are making their decisions how are they feeling negatively constrained by the ordinance, are they lacking guidance. Then, there is the next master plan, which can't just be the Planning Commission's product. The Planning Commission needs participation from City Council and others. As we move forward, what steps should be taken to form action teams. Mr. Jones said he would talk with Gwen to get together with Bill Fraser to set the agenda for the all board meeting. Mr. Jones will draft a tentative agenda for Gwen to review.

Update on High School Survey:

The survey hasn't yet been carried out because there is still some concern about its process for being completed. The final concerns have been addressed, so it should take place in March. The survey is on open space. The content from our last discussion hasn't changed much. The most recent process issue that came up is whether the survey should take place before an educational campaign takes place on open space. There was a desire to provide some educational material to the people of Montpelier before the survey took place. Ms. Witters voiced concern that it would totally change the results of the survey and been challenging to produce.

The other issue is what is going to happen with the results. It is Mr. Jones' intent to work with the high school class to have it a civics lesson. They definitely want to give a presentation to the Planning Commission, which should be fun. They also want to develop an article for the newspapers. This is a statistics class and statisticians don't come to grand conclusions.

Other Business:

Attendance at the Energy Town Meeting was encouraged by Ms. Grodinsky.

Mr. Jones and the Planning Commission members thanked Christy Witters for her service on the Planning Commission.

Adjournment:

Ms. Grodinsky moved adjournment, with Mr. Graham seconding the motion. The Planning Commission was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen Hallsmith
Director, Planning and Community Development

Transcribed and prepared by:
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City Clerk & Treasurer's Office

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 are acted upon.