

Montpelier Planning Commission
July 7, 2010
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Public Hearing on Master Plan

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Jesse Moorman, Chair; David Borgendale, Vice Chair; Tina Ruth, Missa Aloisi and Bethany Pombar.
Staff: Gwen Hallsmith, Director of Planning and Community Development

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Jesse Moorman, Chair, at 7:00 P.M. The Planning Commission would like to hear specific comments from the public. There has been a public hearing on this before and posted this one primarily because several changes have been made. Mr. Borgendale said he believes the Planning Commission needs to take formal action to take up the public hearing again. Ms. Hallsmith said this is a new hearing. They closed the last hearing, redrafted the plan, posted the new hearing with 30 days notice and this is a new public hearing.

Comments on Montpelier Master Plan:

Mayor Hooper thanked the Planning Commission for doing such an awesome job on the plan. She asked if the plan talked about flood protection. They talked about storm water protection, but did they talk about the need to do flood mitigation. Ms. Hallsmith replied yes.

Did they pick up the importance of protecting Berlin Pond?

Mr. Borgendale said it is in water resources, Goal A.

Mayor Hooper said both are significant actions the city is going to be engaged in.

Ms. Hallsmith said some of the floodplain issues are addressed on page 60 under water resources. There are some floodplain issues that come in under storm water runoff or under wetlands protection.

Mayor Hooper said she was thinking about an ice retention structure specifically. That is something the city is investing \$1.6 million between the state and local money. There should be something included just as a way to help us with any future collaboration or grant efforts.

Ms. Hallsmith said on page 58 we should add something about Berlin Pond and the ice jam issues would be on page 50.

Mayor Hooper said with regard to Berlin Pond the city is upgrading its ordinances right now to deal with trespass and other source protection areas. Again, it would be good to have that connection there. There was good language about the natural areas and green areas.

Ms. Hallsmith said that would be open space.

Mr. Borgendale said 2.C addresses a lot of that on page 66.

Mayor Hooper said there was a study done that said here are some of the important ones.

Mr. Borgendale said they need some clarification with this because when you talk about views there is the view of and the view from, and those are different. He thinks they are concerned about both. Typically, a view point is a point where you can stand and see other great stuff. It probably ought to reference in some way ridgeline protection as well.

Ms. Hallsmith replied there is something about that on page 71 under land and soil.

Jack McCullough, Co-Chair of the Montpelier Housing Task Force, said he needs more clarification on some things. One thing that occurs to him as he looks through the maps might be helpful is to have a map that is actually labeled with streets.

Ms. Hallsmith said there is one on page 50, wetlands and water bodies map. The transportation plan map for motorized traffic has streets.

Mr. McCullough said the last time he was very interested in talking about designation of areas, particularly Sabin's Pasture, and how it relates to possible housing uses. He is looking at figure 9 on page 44. In the area that he thinks is Hubbard Park some is cross hatched in light green which is labeled as open fields not conserved. He is talking about Sabin's Pasture. There is also some space that is just white so he is curious how they should be interpreting that.

Ms. Hallsmith said the open space network identifies particular types of areas that are open space. There is some common open land. Those are in condominium developments where the land has been set aside as common open land. Current use there is obviously some type of protection there for the farm and forest uses. Farm is open land used for farming. City parks are obviously city land. Planned parks, conservation easements, recreational land, cemeteries are city land. Then, there are the open fields that have been identified because they are open space but they don't necessarily have any official protection on it. That is actually the case with Sabin's Pasture. The way the meadow is now on Sabin's Pasture is a little bit larger than the map shows.

Mr. Borgendale said open fields means unforested open space with no protection on it.

Ms. Hallsmith said they had initially identified a planned park there but because of the status of the project changing they decided to take it out.

Mr. Moorman said David's comment about open space being open fields he wonders if the text could make it clear that they aren't talking about forested property. Hubbard Park is all forested and Jack McCullough pointed out that the open field designation on Sabin's Pasture isn't precise any longer.

Ms. Hallsmith said she thinks it was because the old open space committee had identified those as important areas of open views and open space without being forested. It's like a meadow or a field that is open. Obviously, forested land is also in some ways open space. We should define open space.

Mr. McCullough said the map seems to indicate a clear demarcation of different areas between two different uses of land in that area.

Ms. Hallsmith said they could make the Sabin's Pasture shape more accurate.

Mr. Borgendale said while they are discussing the maps can they change the caption of "use" to "view points." These are spots that have been identified that it is a great place to stand and look all around and see the wonderful sites which is a view point as opposed to a use.

Ms. Hallsmith said on the map they had done they had included the numbered parcels and a lot of private property and we took it out. Most of the open fields are private property. It isn't protected in any way so they could take it out.

Mr. Moorman said he hasn't read the views and vistas study. Two things are critical. One is to just be consistent so it is clear, and it isn't clear to him whether these are views we are going to look at from another spot or these are vantage points that are indicated on the map.

A member of the audience said relating to Sabin's Pasture he has been working on his own idea of how we might incorporate much of this into a plan for Sabin's Pasture trying to address all of the needs of the community. He would call it Central Vermont Eco Village. When he first mentioned the plan a couple of years ago he didn't receive much reception. He would like to be able to present again an alternative idea for the property. a gentleman said he didn't go up there any more. To him this is a jewel for Montpelier to be a very much community friendly place. This concept is a public community in that a lot of recreation, all public, and a lot of infrastructure put in by the village and all public. This concept might deserve a little more attention.

Mr. Moorman said his one hurdle to all of this is the fact that it is private property that the city doesn't control. A proposal such as that would have to necessarily have someone in control of the private property would have to get their hands around that proposal.

The member from the audience said it wouldn't make sense to buy it for that purpose unless there was a general agreement that this is a good idea.

Ms. Hallsmith said what Jesse is saying is that the first person to present the idea really is the property owner and to make the presentation to the city you would need to come with the property owner who was in agreement with the idea before you made the presentation to the city.

He said you wouldn't want to buy it unless you felt that could happen.

Ms. Hallsmith replied in that case the property owner would need to be applying for the permits to make it happen as a condition of the purchase. The person you need to have the buy in from in the first place is the property owner in order for the city to consider it.

Mr. McCullough said he was going to talk about figure 30 on page 114 which is future land use. Much of what he is interested in is to see the comments he made last time which looked like a previous draft precluding some possible uses for Sabin's Pasture. He thinks that doesn't do that now the way the figure 30 is listed now. Sabin's Pasture seems to be within the 10-year growth priority.

Mr. Borgendale replied it is in the 5-year priority.

Mr. McCullough said he has a small question about figures 30. Right in the middle there is an area that is marked as city land that he thinks is the Catholic Cemetery up on Lincoln Avenue. Is it accurate to call that city land?

Ms. Hallsmith replied no.

Mayor Hooper said no, they really don't want it.

Ms. Hallsmith said that should be changed to cemetery.

Mr. McCullough said he believes that is owned by the Catholic Diocese. The cemetery out on Elm Street is city land. Green Mount Cemetery is city land but run by the Green Mount Cemetery Commission.

Mr. Moorman said it might make sense to call cemeteries "cemeteries" and not city land. He suggested the planned parks be a bright red with dots in it.

Mr. McCullough said he didn't spend as much time looking at all of the data that is in here. He will have some of the people from the Housing Task Force look at it between now and when it goes through the Council.

Mayor Hooper said she assumes the city's planning for bike paths has essentially been grounded to a halt, that all of the work they have done on the interconnection for the bike path has stopped because of the exertion of the railroad's right-of-way. She is curious if they would want to think about statements that are made in the plan about biking and what is the fall back position. She thinks it is really important to be supporting biking in the community as a way of transportation. They have been putting all of their eggs in the railroad right-of-way bucket. It's a real change.

Ms. Hallsmith said there are specific strategies and goals around bike paths.

Mayor Hooper said they talked about connecting Taylor Street with Stone Cutters Way very specifically, but beyond that she isn't sure it talks about the next stage.

Ms. Hallsmith said right now strategy 1(b) says to construct the bike path link between Taylor Street and Stone Cutters Way and extend the path so that it is tied into the larger regional transportation path plans. It's not going to happen any time soon so how do we tie into that?

Mr. Moorman asked if there was another way to make this link.

Mayor Hooper said it may be too big of a question to put in now, but perhaps we should be looking at a lot more accommodation on existing roads. She is so glad the Bike Committee helped us to make sure we have the shoulders going over to Barre because at least now there is a way to get to Barre on the main road. Maybe we ought to be having that as a strategy. We need to put together a group that is really going to make this happen.

Ms. Hallsmith said they could add language under 1(b) saying to extend the path so it is tied into larger regional transportation path plans, or to create a committee to see how to do this. It says to develop a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian plan for Montpelier to include shared use paths and on-road bicycle facilities. We are saying we want to put this up on the front burner and make sure these plans come together. Then, we make it clear we want to connect the bike paths.

Mayor Hooper said there could be an acknowledgement that the current strategy is not viable in the short term and alternatives need to be sought to connect with the larger paths.

Ms. Hallsmith said they could say it will be tied into larger regional transportation path plans. We need to seek alternatives to the current plans that utilize rail rights-of-way.

Mr. Borgendale said the issue here is construct the bike path link between Taylor Street and Stone Cutters Way. It is too specific. 1(b) needs to be a more general statement about developing basically alternative bike paths.

Mr. Moorman said he would tend to disagree because this is the critical gap.

Mr. Borgendale said they just heard in the short run it isn't going to do any good because you are connecting to something that isn't going to be.

Ms. Aloisi said this isn't just short term but long term visioning.

Mr. Moorman said the critical goal should remain to connect these two to create a link, but they probably aren't going to be able to do it down where they thought they could. They could still link by on-road facilities or otherwise around the blocks and back to it. The goals will put us in that direction.

Mr. Borgendale said he thought with the implications with the rail were that the bike path plans that go out the further part of Barre Street were at risk as well.

Mayor Hooper and Ms. Hallsmith replied they are.

Mr. Borgendale said connecting Taylor Street and Stone Cutters Way is a connection to nowhere until the bike path is constructed.

Mayor Hooper suggested it is very important to connect Stone Cutters Way and Taylor Street in some way.

Mr. Moorman said if you want to bike from the high school to the Coop there is no designated link between the end of Taylor Street to Stone Cutters. He certainly hopes planning doesn't grind to a halt because of the railroad and that we plan on a somewhat temporary diversion. There needs to be a way to help this link happen.

Mayor Hooper said she is asking for the plan to say to do that rather than being silent on it.

Mr. Moorman said the first phrase of 1(b) says to construct the bike path link between Taylor Street and Stone Cutters Way. What they could say is change "the" to construct "a" bike path link.

Mr. McCullough said when saying to construct the bike path he doesn't know if it is clear to a paved bike path because some bike paths which are done unpaved which are fine for people who ride mountain bikes or wide tired bikes but not as good for people who ride road bikes and not useful to people who like roller blading which is more a recreational use rather than a transportation use. He would suggest that one of the standards for a bike path be that it be paved should be a goal of the plan. It would probably increase the ability for people who use wheelchairs to use them, too.

Mr. Moorman said you can construct ADA accessible paths but not pave them. Rail trails are commonly constructed in that fashion.

Ms. Hallsmith asked if Mr. McCullough was suggesting they add language specifying that bike paths be paved. Mr. McCullough replied yes.

Mr. Borgendale said generally when they talk about bike paths that they should be paved bike paths because we are talking about a transportation system.

Mr. Moorman inquired if they define bicycle facilities in the plan, or should they?

Mr. Borgendale said ASHTO probably contains the definition.

Mr. Moorman said they have made enough changes they will have to review this again.

Ms. Hallsmith said she believed it was a short list of clarifying changes. There aren't any substantive changes that would require another hearing. If the Planning Commission is interested in passing it on to City Council she would recommend they make a motion to pass it on with the report to the Council subject to the list of 15 amendments:

- adding clear language on page 58 protecting Berlin Pond;
- adding language on page 60 including the measures we are proposing and implementing for ice jam flooding in the flood control area;
- clarifying the views and vistas protection in all cases;
- taking out the open field layer on the open space map;
- defining open space more clearly in the narrative that proceeds the map;
- making the cemeteries a land use category on that map; adding the Peace Park and the Gateway Park making sure it's a park rather than city land; making the planned park colors brighter and clearer in the future land use map;
- adding the language about seeking alternatives to current plans that utilize the railroad right-of-way for bike paths;
- adding the word "paved" to the bike path link on page 157;
- adding that Harrison is a Montpelier resident and making sure we are clear on that;
- clarifying that the Earth Charter Principles are for illustrative purposes and that they served as guidance for the planning purposes.

Those are the amendments which have been proposed and could be included in a motion to send the plan and report on to City Council once the changes have been made.

Mr. Borgendale moved the Planning Commission approve the adoption of the Master Plan and recommend that City Council also approve the plan subject to the list of amendments being made. Ms. Pombar seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by the Planning Commission.

Ms. Hallsmith said with regard to the report the statute does require that a report be submitted with the plan. The report contents needs to include how the plan is consistent

with the goals of the statute. We have had that as an integral part of the plan all along. It is included in the chart, so the report just makes reference to the chart.

Mr. Borgendale moved the Planning Commission adopt the report. Ms. Aloisi seconded the motion.

Ms. Hallsmith said there is another section of the report that talks about when designation of land changes. You have to add more information, but we haven't changed any of the designation of the land in the plan. There has been some land added to areas where we should include this in the Smart Growth District, but that doesn't change the underlying designation. It just shifts when we expect that land to be developed. Both Jesse Moorman and she came to the conclusion that the underlying designation hasn't changed and therefore the more extended report envisioned in Chapter 117 § 4384(c) is not required, and that is also part of the report.

The motion to adopt the report was unanimous.

Adjournment:

The Planning Commission adjourned at 8:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen Hallsmith, Director
Planning and Community Development

Transcribed by: Joan Clack