

Montpelier Planning Commission
April 26, 2010
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Jesse Moorman, Chair; Missa Aloisi, John Bloch and Tina Ruth.
Staff: Gwen Hallsmith, Director, Planning and Community Development.

Call to Order by Chair:

The meeting of the April 26, 2010 Montpelier Planning Commission was called to order by Jesse Moorman, Chair, at 7:10 P.M.

Review of April 12, 2010 Minutes:

Upon motion by John Bloch and Missa Aloisi the Minutes of April 12, 2010 were approved unanimously.

Comments from the Chair:

Mr. Moorman said a friend and colleague of his who moved to Burlington is moving back to Montpelier because his kids are school age. This says something that a young family wants to relocate to our city. As a Planning Commission we should be aware of these things.

Discussion of the Master Plan:

Last week Ms. Hallsmith highlighted the changes to the Master Plan with the future land use plan.

Ms. Hallsmith reported there is another proposed suggested change. They redid the map to make it a little vaguer. They put it in color instead of having a hard line was better. They did an investigation of some of the areas which had been a continuous complaint on North Street. The likely reason that the properties were included in the first place had to do with the water and sewer lines which run up Cummings Street, which is at the bottom of all of the lots. There are big long lots that come down the hill. From a flat map point of view it looks like they have access to water and sewer because it is at the bottom of the hill. They basically chopped off about five properties that didn't really have access to water and sewer for any practical purposes because it is an extremely steep slope. Because this is the future and having a futures zone and a future map seemed a little redundant they threw in the office park area as part of the smart growth district. That is just because it puts the line in the sand to start with. In the description of the map she included the fact that these boundaries are tentative subject to a significant study. The other comment she has had since the map was developed is that the proposed park they have identified in Sabin's Pasture isn't really accurate any more because right now we don't have any real development proposals that would do that. One of the suggestions was to take the planned park out of this map.

Mr. Moorman said his comment from the last time is why is that a park? To call this a planned park without any real concrete plan at the moment is kind of a bold and not quite accurate statement for the Planning Commission to make in a future land use plan.

Mr. Bloch said they don't know how it is going to be impacted with the railroad development.

Mr. Moorman said in looking at the other park areas he sees Turntable Park and the Carr Lot.

Ms. Hallsmith said the Carr Lot is supposed to be the Confluence Park.

Mr. Moorman asked if cemeteries were now called city land. Ms. Hallsmith replied yes.

Ms. Hallsmith said that also includes the stump dump and a piece of land the city owns off Harrison Avenue.

Mr. Moorman asked if the map reflected an enlarged historic district.

Ms. Hallsmith replied yes. The district now that is identified as the Historic Design District includes the National Register District plus the land up behind the State House. The land up behind the State House under current zoning is zoned low density residential, which is strange zoning right in the middle of the city. The Historic Design District and Low Density Residential both afford a fair amount of protection given that was the goal of that zoning. It seemed that including it in the Historic District given that it is the historic backdrop of the state capitol made more sense than zoning it like a rural area.

Mr. Moorman said if the planned park that is in the Sabin's Pasture area is it just going to be LDR in the future land use. Ms. Hallsmith replied that it is correct. That is what it is under the zoning. It may change as we look at the boundaries and determine whether the existing boundaries are good.

Mr. Moorman said for the same reason they throw the National Life hill into the Growth Center District should they also consider doing that with the Sabin's Pasture area.

Ms. Hallsmith said they are different zones right now. Sabin's Pasture is low density and the National Life Hill is office park. They aren't comparable.

Mr. Moorman asked what it means to extend the purpose smart growth district into the office park area. He is looking at the description in the future land use map of Smart Growth District, which is to promote housing, development, smart growth principles, minimum density standards and infill and cluster development are encouraged. That is what made him think of Sabin's Pasture. Infill and cluster development was the plan that was

hope and hopefully some day maybe a plan that will be. He sees that parcel as a prime infill parcel.

Ms. Hallsmith said Sabin's Pasture and the Office Park aren't comparable. The Office Park District is already targeted for commercial and high density development. LDR is low density. It is a bigger shift to lump that part of Sabin's Pasture into the Growth Center District from a current zoning standpoint.

Mr. Bloch said he thought the front end of Sabin's was going to be high density.

Ms. Hallsmith said the green part isn't all of Sabin's Pasture. It is the upper part. The MDR and HDR that is part of Sabin's Pasture are already in the Growth Center District. It is just the low density part of that is not and they included in the park. The little white square is the land that Vermont College owns. She thinks having Sabin's Pasture in its entirety in the Smart Growth District is probably a good idea, but it is a bigger shift on this map to add it without thinking about adding just that or some of Towne Hill.

Mr. Moorman said he is looking at the Smart Growth District description and he is thinking of infill cluster development. The principle of cluster development is what would allow that planned park to be. It seems consistent to at least include that area that is the planned park perhaps in the Smart Growth District along with that portion of the same parcel that is along Barre Street.

Ms. Aloisi said she would not feel comfortable with that. She doesn't think the entire thing should be included for infill. It is a very large parcel of land.

Ms. Moorman said he is thinking about identifying the whole parcel so that it allows a plan along the lines that was in existence for awhile because if you identify part of the parcel the remaining part just sits in LDR which has no language under the Smart Growth District saying cluster and infill development.

Mr. Bloch said he would tend to agree that all of that future park be designated as part of the Smart Growth District.

Ms. Ruth asked if they could just add to the Smart Growth District. Does that get approved by the state for the Growth Center District?

Ms. Hallsmith said they could add it on the future land use map.

Mr. Moorman said he is just talking about the future land use which is a statement of where we want to go. It is not making that change to the existing Smart Growth District.

Ms. Hallsmith said the map doesn't change anything except it does set the stage for changes they want to make in the future.

Mr. Bloch said it sets up a frame for discussion on the future land use. Just looking over some numbers on employment he doesn't know where they are going to put all of these people. We are going from roughly 9,000 jobs to 11,000 in Montpelier in the very near future, and he doesn't know where they are going to put the residents that are going to hold those jobs.

Mr. Moorman said he only vaguely knows the Sabin's Pasture over the past. It has been contentious and difficult, and it may be even more difficult by the planned railroad project. In his view it is probably the biggest and closest to downtown opportunity for housing and smart growth that we have, which is why he suggests at least for the future land use map enveloping that parcel in the purple.

Ms. Hallsmith said the only thing she would add that they may not be considering completely is that one of the recommendations she has written in that smart growth district description, which is something we will want to consider, is that we would apply minimum density standards in the Smart Growth District rather than maximum density. What we have now in the zoning is maximum density. Minimum density means if you want to develop here you need to put a minimum of x number of homes per acre in the developing you are doing and then you can receive trade-offs with areas like the proposed park area. If you are really looking at higher intensity development and smart growth, shifting from a maximum to a minimum density standard is actually good. Calgary, for example, has these minimum standards on all of the development that occurs on their public infrastructure because they know what it costs to maintain the public infrastructure. If you have a bunch of water and sewer lines without enough customers on them you are in trouble. You have to do a minimum of 6 units per acre if you are developing anywhere on the Calgary infrastructure. That is actually smart because then you don't end up with infrastructure you can't afford. That would be something that would have an impact if you rolled in the part that people wanted to commit to open space into an area that would have a minimum density standard attached to it. If the project were being developed under the current way we do it the amount of units you could get on the property is a sum of what you are allowed on the high density area, what you are allowed in the medium and what you are allowed in the low. There is a strong incentive in our current zoning to cluster them and you get higher density even then, a density bonus essentially for developing in a clustered form.

Mr. Moorman said this parcel's existing zoning is HDR, MDR and LDR.

Ms. Hallsmith said she isn't disagreeing with the idea they would add it into the district, but if everyone agreed it would have a minimum density standard attached throughout the whole parcel. What she thinks would be ideal is if the part that ultimately ends up in purple would be the area they want that to have minimum density standard apply, which also coincides

largely with the ability of the city to provide infrastructure to those properties which is roughly the configuration they are looking at. The water and sewer service map is here. It is on the community facilities map. That is figure 7.

Mr. Moorman said as it is drawn they are kind of hemmed in by the fact that the purple part of the pasture is right along Barre Street which may be a real problem if the railroad goes in.

Ms. Hallsmith said she wasn't saying it to disagree with the fact that the pasture might all go into the Smart Growth District.

Mr. Moorman said by putting the whole portion into the Smart Growth District he doesn't envision it all being. He likes it because smart growth means clustering is encouraged and he wouldn't envision the entire parcel being maxed out with each square inch under the maximum density. He sees minimum density as the carrot to the clustering stick.

Mr. Bloch said any developer you want to have do development is going to understand the efficacy of the clusters. The other thing we need to be more real about is the strategic location of that potential green cluster in terms of our transport systems because we are hemmed in by rivers and railroad tracks.

Mr. Moorman said perhaps in 25 years from now the railroad track will be a good thing. It could be a trolley stop.

Mr. Bloch said if it is developed correctly, yes.

Ms. Hallsmith added that right now it is not being developed correctly.

Mr. Bloch said if they put it all in the purple they will have much more latitude and control at the same time in the emerging development.

Ms. Aloisi asked what happens to natural features such as the slate quarry. Does that get grouped in the purple?

Ms. Hallsmith said there are a lot of historic sites that are in the purple area.

Ms. Aloisi said some of it is very difficult development. She is all for extending the purple area, but maybe it needs to be looked at further in terms of what is feasible.

Mr. Bloch said a scale of difficulty rises dramatically when you are talking about the National Life lot. There are some real challenges there.

Ms. Aloisi said they are talking about density but if you look at Barre Street and at the end of Barre Street where they put the new housing and it isn't not even filled because it is such poor quality housing.

Mr. Moorman said that is a different issue, though.

Ms. Aloisi said she is nervous about opening up more land for developers.

Mr. Bloch said they have a commitment as a city for 40 new houses a year in this town, and we have built maybe one. We need to think through very carefully what and where we want additional housing and what kind of developer we are going into a partnership with.

Ms. Aloisi said there are some open fields on Terrace Street, too. That is just as far from the downtown.

Mr. Bloch said it is much further than Sabin's Pasture is to downtown.

Ms. Hallsmith said they are about equal distance.

Ms. Aloisi said there are a lot of sites throughout town that could be developed and not just Sabin's Pasture.

Ms. Hallsmith said in fact Sabin's is one of the harder ones.

Mr. Bloch said actually Alan Goldman tried cluster development about 10 years ago and got his head handed to him on that property on Terrace Street.

Ms. Hallsmith said he had an Act 250 permit.

Ms. Hallsmith said the goal is to use the planning grant to establish the boundaries.

Mr. Moorman said the reason he likes Sabin's Pasture better than somewhere up on Terrace Street. Sabin's seems to be more in the middle of things than Terrace Street does. Terrace Street is just Terrace Street, but Sabin's Pasture is in between Towne Hill Road and Barre Street. If you develop down on Barre Street, which seems to be the only developable portion of the lot, with the right transportation infrastructure and pedestrian facilities you have great access to all of the stuff on Barre Street and downtown.

Ms. Aloisi said they need to fix the congestion problem at the end of Barre Street. This will just make it worse.

Mr. Moorman said smart growth gives us the opportunity to shake a stick at a developer. Prior to the Smart Growth District on this map just mirrored the Growth Center District.

Ms. Hallsmith said that in turn mirrored the MDR/HDR/Central Business. It was built on the old zoning. All it says on the next page is that the boundaries presented here are temporary place holders. It is likely that the boundary study will reveal changes that are needed. That is something you could add in now and leave the rest of the argument to the study.

Mr. Moorman said he would like to add it in, even for the sake of having a public meeting on it. He would like to get the conversation going.

Ms. Hallsmith said if they added in the whole Sabin's Pasture parcel she can just hear a full room of people screaming about it.

Mr. Moorman said they want to hear why. He asked what the conservation easements are. What are these properties?

Ms. Hallsmith said that is the North Branch Nature Center. It is a big old farm.

Mr. Moorman said one general comment he had in reviewing the maps, which is applicable here because there is a blue legend saying water bodies, is that it is only really on one map where all of the water bodies of the city are shown, even like the little stream coming off of Redstone Campus. Page 46 is the map of wetlands and water bodies. There is a blue legend that says rivers, ponds and lakes and streams. He guesses there is a difference between streams and rivers. Why aren't they showing the streams on every map?

Mr. Bloch said they should also show where the roundabout is so they can look at traffic flow. That should be reflected somehow.

Ms. Hallsmith said the roundabout is so small it won't show up on a map.

Mr. Moorman said John's point is to show that there is almost a secondary road. The new access to the old Grossman's was moved for the rotary.

Mr. Moorman said the map on page 50 which shows a natural resources inventory he notices that some of the references weren't listed under code and name. For example, looking at the first legend is the light yellow-green color. The code name list doesn't match up to the legend.

Mr. Moorman said his next comment is page 78, figure 18, transportation plan. He sees that all of the parking lots are just in the downtown and he wondered why they didn't have parking depicted up on the National Life Complex, the Park N' Ride, and why we also don't depict the train tracks on this transportation plan. He circled rivers, ponds and lakes because he didn't notice the other streams. If they are including any blue water on the map they should put all of the stream on all of the maps as well. Otherwise it raises questions.

Ms. Hallsmith said it was a good suggestion and she has it on her list.

Mr. Moorman said he didn't know what the Central VT Regional Path was.

Ms. Hallsmith replied it is a bike path.

Ms. Aloisi asked if there was a bus loop that went up to Vermont College.

Mr. Bloch said he doesn't know if it is scheduled, but he has seen them up there.

Ms. Hallsmith said it is possible with the buses to get them to divert within a certain area. She doesn't believe it is a regularly scheduled route, though.

Mr. Moorman said he noticed somewhere there were proposed bus routes where we did a study of where people thought more bus access should go. Should that be on this same map?

Ms. Hallsmith said she has been working on getting more bus routes through town. They got the City Council to commit \$30,000 and they applied for a congestion mitigation grant which is a grant that lets you get more buses a couple of years ago, and the city didn't get it. It went to Okemo and the ski area instead. She has been after the GMTA/CCTA folks every year to try again. They are not real enthusiastic about expanding bus service in Montpelier the way we wanted them to. What she has been working on instead is trying to build a smart jitney system which is a real time electronic device carpooling kind of thing because it doesn't seem likely to her that they will receive more fixed bus routes through town. They just don't have the ridership to support it.

Mr. Bloch said one of the reasons they don't have ridership is that people don't see there could possibly be a route. When they said they didn't have a ridership to go from here to Barre, he remembers that argument.

Ms. Hallsmith said they did a major survey. There were 600 people who participated in a survey that asked for more routes. There was a lot of enthusiasm. There is a study described in the transportation section of the Master Plan on page 89, suggested Montpelier bus routes.

Mr. Moorman asked why this wasn't a big map. Maybe we should put it on the transportation map. He has the book opened to the statute about what is required in the Master Plan and it says in transportation plans you can put proposed routes in there. He is back to figure 18, transportation plan map which will add the proposed bus routes. He propose they also add hiking trails or some of them up to the park. Walking facilities are just as valuable to us as bus routes.

Ms. Aloisi asked if there was any planned bike path map.

Ms. Hallsmith replied no. We also don't have the sidewalks in GIS, either. She wanted to put all of the sidewalks into the map as well. Some of the trails are.

Ms. Ruth asked if there was a plan for something up behind Elm Street going to the recreation center. It was either a bike path or walking path. She thinks she read it in the first version of the Master Plan.

Mr. Moorman said here is what the statute says on a transportation plan. *Consisting of a map and statement of present and perspective transportation and circulation facilities showing existing and proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement, more pertinent parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bike paths, trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority of need.* Reading that is what prompted him to suggest the hiking trails be included. When looking at this map there is so much detail, especially with parking lots in the downtown core, is whether we should consider doing a blow-up stand alone of the downtown core that goes along with this.

(End of Tape)

Planning Commission meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen Hallsmith, Director
Planning and Community Development

Transcribed by: Joan Clack