

Town of Hinesburg
Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
June 23, 2021
Approved – July 13, 2021

Members Present: James Donegan, Barbara Forauer, Nina Friscia, Rolf Kielman, Denver Wilson.

Members Absent: Lenore Budd, Marie Gardner, John Kiedaisch.

Also: Alex Weinhagen (Director of Planning & Zoning); Amy Coonradt (Recording Secretary).

Members of the Public: Kate Kelly, Kathleen Newton, Xander Patterson.

Rolf K. called the meeting to order at approximately 7:03 PM.

1. Agenda Changes:

None at this time.

2. Minutes of June 9 Meeting

Barbara F. **made a motion**, and Nina F. **seconded**, to **approve the minutes of June 9 as presented. The motion passed 5-0.**

3. Zoning Revision Public Hearing – Village Area Design Standards

a. Any additional public questions or comments

Rolf K. opened the discussion up to the public, requesting any input on the proposed revisions to the design standards.

Xander P. commented on the standards, saying that he appreciates the thoughtfulness of the revisions and how they are trying to enhance the attractiveness and livability of the town. He asked how much consideration has been given for how it may impact efforts for more affordable housing in Hinesburg. He asked if thought had been given to alternative forms of housing, like shipping container housing. Barbara F. agreed that shipping container-style housing could be important. Xander P. said that manufactured homes are becoming of higher quality.

Alex W. said that the Planning Commission hasn't talked specifically about the link between the design standard revisions and affordability in terms of housing. He said that conversation was more focused around general form and site level interaction requirements than thinking about any specific style of building or type of housing, one exception being requirements around the largest buildings in the Town.

Xander P. asked what would happen if an applicant presented a project that hadn't been anticipated by the revisions. Alex W. replied that the standards begin with an applicability statement and noted that they don't apply to all portions of the Town. He additionally noted that the Development Review Board (DRB) has the ability to waive standards if a request is made, but they must consider the nature and degree of the exception and how the project would still meet the overall intent of the standards. He said that the waiver option isn't intended as a free pass, but an allowance for creativity as long as it meets the intent. Rolf K. added that a lot of the concepts could be around building placement, the result of which is that there is more public engagement and activity needed. He also questioned the need to finance houses the way we do. He spoke about the tension between innovation and housing supply.

Alex W. noted some conversation around the State's Zoning for Great Neighborhoods guidance, which suggests tweaks to municipal zoning to incentivize housing. One suggestion is to be wary of developing more robust design standards that add requirements. He said that the intent of the standards isn't to make it too cumbersome or costly to build, but easier for the community to accept that next housing development, knowing that it met the standards. He said that the goal was to make these regulations clearer and have a robust set of design requirements.

Xander P. said that one of the drivers of the cost of housing are the types of housing being built and that a typical unit costs around \$350,000 to build, which is unattainable for most people these days. He additionally said that zoning can also be a cost driver in certain circumstances. Rolf K. noted that the density requirements in the Village District are pretty substantial. Alex W. added that this community is nervous about becoming like some of the more urban surrounding communities. These standards don't tweak those existing requirements, but build upon them with design requirements. He also noted that while some developers want to build to the maximum density, others don't. He noted several properties that had proposals far below the Village scale density allowances.

Barbara F. asked if the DRB has a consideration for density. Alex W. replied that no, the regulations discuss minimum setbacks, but now they also discuss maximum setbacks. He said that there is no requirement for a minimum density, though there is a requirement for maximum density. He noted that in future they might discuss some tweaks to the density bonus system, since some are used more than others. He said that that discussion could be a good opportunity to address base densities and minimum densities.

Denver W. asked about requirements for affordable housing. Alex W. said that a percentage of projects have to be affordable, and that there are also density bonuses if a greater percentage of the units are affordable. There was a discussion about the State's definition of affordable and whether it truly is affordable.

Alex W. noted written comment from Peter and Phyllis Modley. He said that they expressed support for the design standards, noting that they should be adopted and enforced. They expressed concern about 45' high buildings, which seem out of character for the Village and would require additional accommodations for public safety access (like a ladder truck for the Fire Dept). They emphasized the importance for measures to protect small town character.

Xander P. suggested language in the waiver option around "allowing for other considerations in the town plan, such as affordability," which would give consideration to affordability if a waiver is requested.

Xander P. asked about the approval process. Rolf K. replied that further refinements are being added to the proposed language and that the revisions in their entirety will be submitted to the Selectboard for their scrutiny and comment. He noted that the Town is required to hold at least one public hearing at the Selectboard level. He said that the Selectboard can choose to adopt the standards or let the voters decide whether to adopt or not. Alex W. said that the process generally takes approximately 2-3 months.

b. Review & discuss revisions needed based on public feedback

Alex W. asked whether the Commission would like him to draft any changes, such as maximum building height and some of Greg Waples' suggestions.

James D. asked if now is the time to address the height allowance. Alex W. replied that he didn't think now is a good time to do so and that it feels tangential for right now. Denver W. said that the language that's in there now is there on purpose. He said that the DRB would be able to waive requirements if they would drive up costs were they not waived. He said that the standards as revised encourage density and more affordable homes, while still complying with what the residents are looking for. He said he is in favor of moving this language forward as written.

Barbara F. said that affordable housing should be kept at the forefront of the Town's proposals. She said that Xander's proposed language would serve as a reminder for affordability. Alex W. said there are many different elements that could make housing more affordable, like land cost, materials, size. He said that he isn't sure that the design standards are one of those drivers of cost. Rolf K. agreed, saying that affordability is important but the design standards may not be the place to emphasize that.

James D. requested more discussion of building height. Barbara F. and Nina F. agreed. Rolf K. said that it would be good to have tangible examples of how the height measurements and options could be manifested. Denver W. expressed concern that this conversation has already occurred and now the Board is circling back to it. James D. said that if allowing this building height will mean the Town would have to purchase a ladder truck, the allowance should be changed so that the Town wouldn't need to purchase one. Alex W. replied that that is a good suggestion from a capital planning standpoint.

c. Discuss next steps and schedule to forward to Selectboard
The Planning Commission will discuss the density bonus and 45' height limit at its next meeting.

Denver W. **made a motion, and Barbara F. seconded, to close the public hearing on the zoning regulation revisions. The motion passed 5-0.**

4. Town Plan Revision (Energy Chapter) – Selectboard Revisions

a. Review Selectboard revisions to generate required report
Alex W. noted that this is a procedural requirement. He said that the provisions are currently in front of the Selectboard, which will hold a second public hearing on them on July 7th. He noted that during their first public hearing and review, they made several minor revisions to the chapter. He said that procedurally, any changes made by the Selectboard to a proposal from the Planning Commission require that the Planning Commission then review the proposed changes and submit a report to the Selectboard on whether they agree with those changes. He noted the changes, which were to identify the top priority action items, and they decided on 8.4.1, 8.4.2, and 8.1.1. Other changes were minimal, and included a summary of the 2021 updates and a tweaked goal about exploring why more school children don't ride the school bus and potentially leveraging school busses for the general public, recognizing that it would be a way to improve local public transportation options.

Alex W. will draft a report saying that the Planning Commission agrees with these changes. The Planning Commission agreed with this approach.

5. Rural Residential 1 District Zoning

a. Review district map & discuss adjustment options
Alex W. showed a large format map of the Rural Residential 1 District and the Planning Commission discussed separating it into potentially separate areas. He oriented the Planning Commission to the district, noting the places visited on their field trip on May 26th. He noted that the one area not visited

on the field trip was the more northerly Mt. Pritchard area, which has larger, undeveloped parcels. He said that there appear to be disparate pieces of the district, and asked whether some should be their own separate zoning districts, or merged into other existing zoning districts. Denver W. asked what the minimum lot size for RR1 is. Alex W. replied that the minimum is 3 acres, unless connected to town sewer, and then minimum is 1 acre and that RR2 minimum lot size is 0.5 acres. He noted that lot size isn't what defines the RR2 district, rather how *much* development is there and how much density there is on a lot, and what class of road provides access to the lots are the elements for RR2. Alex W. said that one of his goals is to disconnect density from lot size in a manner that makes sense for RR1.

Denver W. said that a lot of earlier conversation centered around increasing density in the Village, and said that he would be in favor of taking a density approach to do it like in RR2.

Rolf K. noted the level of steep slopes in the northern part of RR1. He suggested that maybe they belong in part of their own district, whereas the land on either side of Route 116 should maybe be in the Agriculture district. Barbara F. also suggested considering some of the overlay components, like water, when considering whether to modify the district.

Denver W. spoke in favor of transitioning to a density rather than minimum lot size. Alex W. asked if the district should be separated into different districts with different density rules. He added that when the Town has revised other zones, they set up conservation subdivision design standards, in which there was a process that applicants had to look at resources like riparian areas, slopes, and wildlife corridors, which couldn't be touched and that other secondary resources had to be minimally impacted. He said that this has been a good way to look at the land and figure out where it makes sense to develop. He said that this set of standards only applies to the RR2 and Agricultural districts. He noted that the DRB would like clarity in the RR1 district about which primary and secondary resources would need to be considered, and which would be less significant. Denver W. replied that this could be another functional parameter that would control zoning and density in an existing zone, rather than creating new zones. He spoke in favor of this approach.

Denver W. also brought up that Richmond Road is RR1 on one side and RR2 on the other, and suggested modifying it so that there is a 100-foot buffer from the road to include it in RR1, so that the entire road is in one zone. Rolf K. proposed potentially moving some areas to RR2 and some to the Agricultural District and then calling out other special areas.

Kate K. spoke about limits based on steepness and core habitat. She said that the Town needs to consider that those are based on mapping, which isn't perfect or precise. She said that there are other elements in the RR2 regulations like connectivity and landscape diversity that aren't included in current regulations, and that lumping some of them together or relying on maps may not be perfect. She additionally suggested thinking farther into the future. In 200 years, if the population continues to grow, Vermont will become more populated and topography may be disregarded. She said that improving protections for core areas will remain important.

Kathleen N. said that she is listening in as a constituent with land in RR1.

b. Discuss next steps – field trip, differentiated zoning

The Planning Commission discussed potentially having another field trip in the RR1 district, this time focused on the Mount Pritchard area.

6. Other Business & Correspondence

a. Agenda item requests for July 14 meeting

Barbara F. she looked at the proposed Laster development, and it was not as expected. She said she thought there would be a park but that is all houses, and that the neighborhood park in the middle of it feels like it isn't open to the public. She suggested that moving forward, any development needs to allow property for gardening. Alex W. said that because that project was single-family homes on their own lots, they'd have the opportunity to have either in-ground beds or raised beds on their own lots. He said that this would be more of an issue on the Green Street project.

The Planning Commission will continue discussion about height limits, density bonuses, and the Rural Residential 1 District at their next meeting.

b. July 28 meeting planning

No discussion at this time.

Rolf K. **adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:16 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Coonradt, Recording Secretary