



RUTLAND CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

City Hall – 52 Washington St. – Rutland, VT 05701
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Minutes July 14, 2021

The meeting was held by teleconference and in-person in the VISION conference room at the Rutland Police Department.

Present: Patrick Griffin (PG), Alvin Figiel (AF), Rebecca Mattis (RM), Sarah Roy (SR) and *Dave O'Brien (DO).

Also Present: Andrew Strniste, Planning and Zoning Administrator, Brandy Saxton, Dave Cooper, Alderman Doenges, James Sanchez and Barbara Spaulding, recording secretary.

RM, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:31 pm.

- I. ADDITIONS/DELETIONS – None.**
- II. PUBLIC COMMENT – None.**
- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – June 23, 2021.**

PG moved to approve the minutes of June 23, 2021. RM seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

- IV. NEW BUSINESS – None.**
- V. OLD BUSINESS –Draft Zoning Bylaws Review with Brandy Saxton.**

Brandy picked up the discussion with the Architectural Review Overlay District Design Standards for New Construction and Signs Chapter 2, Page 61 §234. Brandy said the overarching standards came from the Redevelopment Plan and current ARC review process and include: A Building Location and Orientation, B Building Form and Massing, C Building Elevations and Treatments, D Accessory Buildings & Service Elements and E Signs. She reviewed the standards for each element, discussed the psychology behind them and provided photographs.

PG asked if this was form-based code and if other communities were doing this and who is reviewing them. Brandy said this is a design review approach and the Architectural Review Committee will need to be made up of people with design backgrounds who can translate the proposed standards to the applicant and the DRB. The idea is to have some level expertise to explain the standards.

RM asked Brandy to explain the difference between form-based code and the design review approach. Brandy said form-based code is a type of zoning that is only 20-25

years old and the idea is to replace Euclidean zoning approach which is focused on the use of a building with some basic dimensional standards around lot size like Rutland's zoning. Form-based code focuses on the building and not what goes on in the building. It came out of architecture and architects and not out of planning with the idea that if you build to a specific form there will be a kind of sense of what uses can occur at the building. Form-based code cares about what the building will look like and how it functions on the street and the public view of the building and not what is happening inside. By bolstering the dimensional standards in design districts some of the form-based code elements were picked up. But this approach of conventional zoning with design review is an older approach and been around for a long time and used by communities across the country. The trade-off for form-based code is that it would do all the planning up front so by the time the community gets done and has their code, administering the code becomes black and white process with more standards for the developer but no public hearing process and the administrator just provides the permit. Communities in Vermont with form-based codes have not eliminated the public hearing process because there is an expectation in Vermont that there will be public input.

AF asked which communities in Vermont adopted form-based code. Brandy listed the following: Burlington, South Burlington, Winooski, and smaller communities with a hybrid code such as Newport, Bennington and a district in Colchester.

RM asked if these standards are intended for use by the design review committee to apply to the public review process. Brandy said the design review process is required to be considered a Designated Downtown. RM asked if the purpose of the guidelines is both for the review boards to apply to everyone impartially, as well as, provide developers a set of guidelines in advance of the review. Brandy said that is the benefit of having more specific guidelines and standards all of which were already in the zoning just expanded upon and should help an applicant provide better proposals with more consistency in outcomes of decisions as well. Vermont communities have just started doing illustrated design guidelines but it is becoming more common.

Brandy asked if there is a consensus with this group with the overall approach for the overlay district and is this heading in right direction. It also remains unresolved whether the process of the review with design guidelines is how you want to go.

AF asked about the boundaries of the AR Overlay districts. Brandy said the overlay district as proposed includes the Downtown Business District, Courthouse, Main Street Park and the gateways of 4 and 7. The gateways that extend out to Route 7 NS and Route 4 East and West were removed. Alvin asked if the ARC standards should be applied to those districts without the committee review. Brandy responded that they could but she feels the issues with those areas would be solved through better site plan review. AF agreed that good site plan controls would protect the extremities of those areas. PG added that he did not think creating standards for those areas were politically feasible.

Dave Cooper said the standards proposed will require a board of certified architects to interpret whether an application meets or does not meet certain guidelines not only in gateway districts but further out and normal applicants are not going to be qualified. He is

in favor of simplification and added that what is being proposed requires a level of expertise a typical applicant is not going to have. PG said the Commission needs to decide whether the ARC should review anything outside the Downtown and if they should review Gateway Districts. He feels it is a leap to jump to these specific requirements. He asked Brandy to clarify whether omitting the figures in 2-01 and keep 234 A-D for the ARC to apply for their review. Brandy said that is essentially the design standards currently in place today.

Alderman Doenges asked as the City of Rutland, do we have a look and a feel that we want Rutland to have and it may not be the drawings proposed today but this is our opportunity through guidelines for those districts to look and feel the way we want 20 years into the future. Brandy said what has been provided is fairly generic design language that will not be unfamiliar to many franchises or national corporations that might come forward to build a new building in Rutland. The proposal is not Rutland specific but just generally good urban design, that could be bolstered and she described other cities who do that.

*Dave O'Brien arrived.

AF agreed the proposed standards are generic and from an architect's point of view, are common sense and promote responsible building construction and should not cause any hardship for any responsible developer, but they do not talk to specifics of Rutland.

Alderman Doenges said having the guidance to start with saves the developer money vs having to go back and forth.

RM said some of the examples seem very specific and could easily be left to the zoning administrator and wouldn't require an architect to decide whether the standards are being met; so why not just leave the decision to the administrator. Brandy agreed some of the standards are quantitative and could be administratively reviewed. But there are others that are not as clear and really the point of AR review, who do not need to all be architects but have design perspective, is catching things that may be missed. An added benefit of AR Review is providing guidance and technical information to a small project that does not have a team of professionals.

RM said if we have concerns for the look of our districts beyond the Architectural Review Overlay, most of those concerns will be alleviated through site plan review with rules regarding parking, building orientation, entrance locations and those types of things. Brandy said site plan review will take care of parking, landscaping, lighting and pedestrian access, all of which will contribute to the overall quality of the end product. She said if the Commission wants to add some basic design type standards to the underlying gateway zoning districts without design review, it would have to go back to the districts in Section 217 page 39 and add more district standards. But she said some thought should be given to whether they are going to work with the existing uses and types of building form on those auto-oriented corridors or change the pattern with rules that will lead to that outcome over time. Brandy said they need to be aware that some

business will play and some won't come. Discussion continued regarding drug stores and grocery stores and the varying degrees of how they will work within areas.

RM does not think this group can answer to what the political will is for the City and it needs to ask the Board of Aldermen what they are looking for with regards to this document and how visionary it should be with regard to design standards.

Brandy said public input is desperately needed to know what to do but you have to agree on a product to show to the public for feedback and direction even if it is a product that is notated with questions for the community.

Brandy continued the discussion with the ARC process suggesting that committee members have building or interior design backgrounds, architectural backgrounds or historic preservation backgrounds with a small group of 3-5 members. As an advisory committee it can meet without all of the notice requirements and either 24-48-hour notice and an application could be turned around in a week or two. Applicants in design review might have to go ARC but don't have to go to DRB unless the development proposed was originally required to do so, therefore it doesn't necessarily cause a drag on the process and the time. The process should not be a huge administrative burden.

PG asked if the element pages could be re-organized based on which are applied to Downtown and which are for the Gateway to avoid a negative reaction to the overall idea.

RM asked what are the standards that are the most powerful and useful that can be marked as recommended to do the most work toward the look of our City. Brandy said it is difficult to rank or prioritize them because they all work toward the same basic principles. The elements could be separated out into two lists. Brandy did try to show illustrations that showed a range of different building types to demonstrate there are a lot of ways to meet the standards. She said it does look overwhelming for an applicant but these are really the standards for a new building or a major new addition to an existing building so at that point most applicants would have employed professionals for such a large investment.

DO said we have been too easy going and afraid that things would be too expensive that we allowed ourselves to get where we are now. He suggested the Commission focus on the arc of time that we want to see an impact by establishing standards that over time will get us to where we want to be for the look of our gateways. DO suggested getting a white board and go through the process to develop a property. Alderman Doenges agreed that a flow chart of basic business development in laymen terms was a good idea. Andrew added that we can go through a typical development project and what's required from an engineering standpoint. PG said there is a lot to a development not just in Vermont but everywhere. RM agreed that a list of steps would be helpful. SR said process mapping shows the steps and timing from A to B but we should make it real life and suggested the KFC development. Andrew suggested choosing a few projects to go over in a meeting without Brandy. He also suggested that the Planning Commission needs to nail down where they want a committee to be reviewing projects. Andrew discussed that he does not have subjectivity like a review committee.

RM would like to know what types of standards could be included in the document to increase attractiveness in the parts of the gateways that do not fall under Architectural Review.

Alderman Doenges asked if excerpts could be taken from other City's zoning that we like. Brandy said it is standard practice to look for inspiration from places that you like but you have to make sure it complies with Vermont's enabling law.

VI. ADJOURN – PG moved to adjourn. DO seconded. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting ended at 7:19 pm. The next meeting will be held July 28, 2021.

For the Commission: Barbara Spaulding, Recording Secretary