

**TOWN OF CHESTER
PLANNING COMMISSION**

October 1, 2018 Minutes

Commission Members Present: Naomi Johnson, Claudio Veliz, Barre Pinske, Cheryl Joy Lipton and Tim Roper.

Staff Present: Cathy Hasbrouck, Recording Secretary, Michael Normyle, Zoning Administrator.

Citizens Present: No one.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Chair Naomi Johnson.

Agenda Item 1 Review minutes from September 13 and 17, 2018 meetings

Claudio Veliz moved to accept the minutes from the September 13th and 17th meetings. Tim Roper seconded the motion. No one had any changes for the September 13th minutes. In the September 17th minutes, Cheryl Joy Lipton asked that the discussion on page 3 of her site restoration text for Chapter 6 be clarified to indicate the text was not a list of plants to be used but guidelines for choosing native plants. Naomi Johnson asked to have an extra period removed from a sentence in the second to the last paragraph on page 2. A vote was taken and the minutes were accepted with those amendments.

Agenda Item 2 Citizen comments

There were no citizen comments.

Agenda Item 3 Continue to review proposed zoning uses and maps

Naomi Johnson recounted the recent history of the area at the junction of Routes 11 and 103, where Zachary's Pizza has been closed for many years, and Dollar General and Jiffy Mart have constructed new large stores. She said that the two stores provide everyday necessities and very low prices, which some Chester citizens value highly. At the same time, the aesthetics of the large buildings offend other citizens. There are many points of view in Chester and the Commission's duty is to hear and consider all of them. Each Commission member spoke about their personal views on how business could be handled in Chester.

Claudio Veliz said he was very concerned about the economic welfare of the town. He discussed studies that show how national chain stores can decimate a town's economy by undercutting local merchants, driving them out of business, taking the jobs they provided with them. The town's commercial center then collapses from the loss of jobs. Claudio referred to the Smart Growth principles outlined in the Vermont *Municipal Plan Guide*, a publication of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. Claudio said he believed some opinions are better

informed than others and should be valued more because they are backed up by study and factual data.

Barre Pinske was concerned about moving Chester forward to adjust to new models of commerce that included shopping online and shipping around the world. He said he did not want Chester to go the way of Sears and Kodak, losing market share because it couldn't adjust to changing times quickly enough. He also wanted to enable small companies to set up small manufacturing facilities in unused barns or other vacant buildings. He felt that a diversity of opinions benefitted all, and all opinions deserved equal consideration.

Barre agreed with Claudio that everyone on the Commission wanted the decisions made to have a positive impact on the community. Barre felt this would happen when the Commission members studied what the consultant presented, attended the meetings, discussed the proposal in detail and voted when there was a disagreement between Commission members. The other Commission members agreed with this. Naomi Johnson said that there were more than one 4 to 5-hour sessions scheduled for the commission to do this, in addition to regular meetings.

Cheryl Joy Lipton suggested Urban Growth Boundaries as a tool for defining zoning districts and Hierarchy of Use as a tool for assigning uses to the districts. Naomi Johnson suggested that Cheryl Joy study the Urban Growth Boundary principles to see how they applied to what Brandy Saxton had suggested as districts so far, and discuss any ideas she had with Brandy. Naomi said that she was not certain of the best way to determine the list of uses to be assigned to each district. She felt that studying the proposed list in detail was a reasonable way to proceed, given the work that had already been accomplished.

Cheryl Joy Lipton said that her field of Landscape Architecture could do a lot to ease the aesthetic impact of a big building, but it could not address the economic impact of such a business. She discussed adaptive re-use, the installation of a new business in an old or existing building. It can preserve the look and feel of a small town while promoting growth of new businesses.

Tim Roper said he believed the Dollar General store filled a need for inexpensive household staples and he did not oppose it. He did not think Dollar General has made a difference to the other businesses in town. Tim said he also wants to preserve Chester. He agreed with many of Claudio's thoughts. He was glad the Commission had divergent points of view. He said it was important for the Commission to recognize that people's sensibilities are driven in part by their economic status or income level.

Naomi Johnson said that ridgeline development is another contentious topic that will be discussed when the R-18 (Rural, 18 acres per dwelling unit) district is examined. She asked the Commission members to be thinking about ridgeline development in preparation for that discussion.

The Commission then resumed its discussion of the General Business (GB) district, which it had begun at the previous meeting. The Commission examined their full-size copies of the proposed zoning maps, the table of zoning districts and proposed uses that will be part of the new bylaws

and a document prepared by Cathy Hasbrouck that presented the zoning districts and uses as a list by zoning district, which resembles the current bylaw presentation. The General Business district as proposed has three lobes. Beginning at the southern end of Main Street at the former Zachary's Pizza property, it follows both sides of Main Street to the corner of Pleasant Street, then curves east to follow route 11 on both sides. At the middle branch of the Williams River it extends north along both sides of Elm Street to Chester Depot. It also extends south along the middle branch of the Williams river and rejoins route 103 south of town at the Stone House Antiques lot.

The Commission looked specifically at Pleasant Street to the east of the intersection with Main Street. The properties included the Pleasant Brook complex of affordable housing units, some residential properties and the proposed site of the Chester Emergency Services Building. They wondered what impact being in the General Business district, which does not allow single, two- or multi-family housing, would have on the Pleasant Brook complex. Would this lead to tearing down the housing complex to make way for new or expanding businesses?

Barre Pinske said he didn't think the Pleasant Brook housing should be part of the General Business district. Barre suggested that the east side of the Green Mountain Turnpike, currently part of the R3 (Rural, 3 acres per dwelling unit) district would be better as an area for commercial development. Claudio asked how town services would be delivered to the Green Mountain Turnpike area. Town water and sewer are not currently available on the east side of the Green Mountain Turnpike.

Attention also turned to the western end of the proposed General Business district. The Commission agreed that the apartment building opposite Lisai's, Cummings Hardware and the apartment building opposite the Town Hall on Depot Street should be put in the V5 (Village, 5 dwelling units per acre) district, not the GB district. (It should be noted here that the Commission decided to make the area along Depot Street and Maple Street marked as V3 (Village, 3 dwelling units per acre) on the proposed map into V5, to allow for denser use.)

Naomi Johnson pointed out that Brandy Saxton considered frontage on Routes 11 and 103 and the distance between buildings when laying out the General Business District. She also noted that the R3 district, where the Green Mountain Turnpike is located, does allow a number of commercial and industrial uses, mainly as conditional uses.

Michael Normyle was concerned about the former Zachary's Pizza property, which is 6-8 acres. Under the current UDB's it could have a building with up to 20,000 square feet of enclosed space, but that building must be broken into 4 sovereign units of 5,000 square feet each. This property would be in the new General Business district. Michael was concerned that a big or medium box store could be built there under the proposed regulations. He wanted to know what the proposed General Business district uses would allow. Additional concern was expressed about the lots surrounding this property, such as the lot the post office is currently occupying.

Cheryl Joy Lipton said she didn't want the General Business district to exclude residential uses. She felt that people should be allowed to live near their business or place of work. Some other Commission members disagreed, noting that commercial uses bring noise and traffic with them.

Conflicts would occur between home owners and business owners. Barre Pinske said it was a question of civility. Can business owners limit their noise and home owners tolerate the usual noise level of commerce?

Claudio Veliz wanted to know more about the entire package of proposed regulation for the two districts. Naomi Johnson said that Brandy Saxton would be producing design standards for each district soon. Naomi concluded that the majority of Commission members favored keeping the residential use prohibition in the General Business district. She also recapped the changes from V3 to V5 on Maple and Depot Streets which had been agreed to at the previous meeting, and the change from GB to V5 for the area between Lisai's and the Town Hall agreed to at this meeting.

The Commission discussed the large number of proposed permitted uses in the General Business district and the fact that many of the conditional uses are larger scale versions of permitted uses. Michael Normyle pointed out that Brandy Saxton is planning to allow permitted uses to only require a site plan review by the Zoning Administrator. This, combined with the large number of permitted uses, will make it easier for new businesses to set up in Chester.

Turning back to the intersection of Pleasant Street and Main Street, Cheryl Joy Lipton suggested that the part of Pleasant Street closest to Main Street that had affordable housing, single family housing, multifamily housing and the proposed emergency services building be V5 instead of GB. She proposed that lots further back from the road would be GB. Barre Pinske proposed that instead of GB, those lots should be V5. He also proposed that the interior area between Pleasant Street and Depot Street marked as R2 (Residential, 2 dwelling units per acre), be changed to V5.

Naomi Johnson looked at the difference in uses between V5 and R2. There were numerous differences, as V5 allows both residential and commercial uses and R2 focuses on residential only. The specific differences can be seen in the Zoning District and Use table. It was decided to keep the possibility of changing some parts of the GB district to V5 in mind, but not to actually change the map yet. There was no town road accessing the lots behind the lots that border Pleasant and Depot Street.

Barre Pinske asked Claudio Veliz what he thought about designating interior parcels for larger business uses. Claudio said that interspersing signs for larger businesses set back from the street and keeping smaller businesses and residences along the walkable street has worked well for some towns. Cathy Hasbrouck pointed out that the owners of the large lots set back from Pleasant Street have shown no interest in developing them and any change to that would probably only occur decades in the future. Claudio Veliz said that things do move slowly in Chester and that is generally a good thing. Barre Pinske said that when Chester can make it easy for people to produce a product in their home, hang out a shingle and sell it, the community benefits.

Naomi Johnson read the purpose of the V5 and R2 districts aloud: The Village 5 district includes land in the historic centers of Chester Village and Chester Depot that have been used for a mix of civic, business and residential uses. The purpose of this district is to:

1. Promote the long-term vitality of these historic centers;

2. Provide for a diversity of housing and small businesses in a traditional mixed-use village setting;
3. Ensure that new construction and renovations are compatible with and enhance the historic character and settlement pattern;
4. Encourage investment that maintains or rehabilitates historic buildings; and
5. Provide an attractive streetscape and a pedestrian friendly environment.

Residential (R2)

Purpose. The Residential district encompasses land in proximity to existing centers that is developed or intended to be developed primarily for residential use. The purpose of this district is to:

1. Guide residential development to land in proximity to existing centers where public facilities, services and transit already exist or can more feasibly be provided in the future;
2. Accommodate a full range of housing options;
3. Provide a pleasant neighborhood setting for residents; and
4. Maintain traditional small-town neighborhood character.

Cheryl Joy Lipton felt, after reading the description, that the inner areas still need to be V5. She thought that R2 will create low density bedroom communities. Claudio said that the V5 seems very street oriented, where R2 is more like an island. He felt the current designations are appropriate. Barre Pinske thought that the V5 designation would be helpful at some time in the remote future. Michael Normyle pointed out a lot next to the current R2 designation which probably should be included in the rest of the R2/V5 area.

Naomi Johnson said the R2 issue will be put aside. The next area of the proposed General Business district to be considered at the next meeting is further south on route 103.

Agenda Item 4, Set date for next meeting

Naomi Johnson said that the four chapters of the town plan which have been changed should be finalized at the next meeting. The Commission agreed that it was time to adopt the changes to the Town Plan.

The status of the four chapters was recapped. Cheryl Joy Lipton's solid waste text needs to be inserted in Chapter 3. She will discuss this with Naomi Johnson during the coming week. Naomi Johnson said that any other changes to be made to Chapter 3 need to be handed in by Tuesday October 9 so that they may be distributed to the Commission members. Chapter 5, education, needs the home-schooling text added. Claudio may have text to add to Chapter 10, economic development.

Naomi Johnson agreed with the Commissioners that the new bylaws need to be focused on. She said that after the bylaws are worked out, she thinks a vision statement for the Town Plan would be appropriate. Barre Pinske suggested that a writer be hired to give the Town Plan some excitement and vision. Naomi said that may be done as soon as the bylaws are complete.

The next meeting of the Planning Commission will be October 15, 2018 at 7:00 PM.

Naomi Johnson asked about the documents from the EPA website that were handed out before the meeting. Claudio Veliz, who had sent the documents to the Commission members in an e-mail earlier that day, said they could be considered at the next meeting.

Tim Roper moved to adjourn the meeting. Cheryl Joy Lipton seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the meeting was adjourned.