

## **Business Friendly Guiding Principles**

### **DRAFT**

**Discussed August 25, 2021**

The Chester Planning Commission Bylaw Subcommittee has drafted guiding principles on what makes a development bylaw “business friendly.” We are seeking the concurrence of the full Planning Commission on whether these guiding principles are the right ones for the V12 district.

**1. Fewer permits requiring DRB hearings.** The subcommittee believes that a business-friendly environment keeps the number of permit applications that must be evaluated by the DRB to a minimum. DRB hearings can easily take 3 months to complete from the application step through the permit appeal period. This delay can be very discouraging to a new business. Some steps that can be taken to lessen the number of DRB hearings are (1) to provide greater opportunities for administrative review by the Zoning Administrator to approve minor change of use applications, and (2) to minimize the number of changes of use categories that trigger the need to go before the DRB for review and approval.

**2. A non-technical site plan review process.** The subcommittee believes that a business-friendly environment keeps the site plan review process as informal as possible and reduces the need for professional drawings by surveyors or engineers and allied professionals like landscape architects, lighting specialists and sound technicians. Major new developments need extensive and detailed site plan review, but the need to hire professionals to prepare site plans can discourage new business startups.

**3. Easing of parking requirements.** The subcommittee suggests that a business-friendly environment requires that the parking requirements be suspended or reduced for the Village districts, except for providing off-street overnight parking for guests and residents during snow events. The parcels in the V12 district are often too small to allow more than 2 or 3 vehicles to be parked on them. Current parking requirements can prevent new business startups and recent guidance from the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) supports reducing parking requirements.

**4. Allowing micro or boutique shops.** The subcommittee believes that a business-friendly environment should allow multiple very small shops on one property. The property at 78 Common Street is an example of this. Visitors enjoy discovering out-of-the-way shops and where larger business may fail smaller businesses could succeed.

**5. Avoiding creating nonconformities.** The subcommittee believes that a business-friendly environment should avoid creating nonconformities, meaning an existing business that becomes nonconforming through a bylaw change and cannot be reinstated if it is discontinued for longer than 2 years or even less. Chester has several nonconforming business properties in this situation that cannot be reinstated, and this is a waste and loss of potential business opportunity. Any future bylaw change should avoid creating new nonconformities and should allow a means to re-establish benign past nonconforming uses.

**6. Allowing the mixed use of businesses and apartments.** The subcommittee believes that a business-friendly environment includes a mixed use of businesses (generally on the first floor) and apartments (generally on upper floors). Not only do the apartments provide an additional income source, but it is also a benefit for many businesses to provide housing for their workers.