

TOWN OF WILLISTON

Joint Meeting of the HAAC and Planning Commission

Minutes of December 15, 2020– 7:00 P.M.

Location: Zoom Meeting ID 158-006-871 on zoom.us/join or by calling 1-646-558-8656

Meeting Recording (7:00-8:50 pm): <https://youtu.be/kcB3KEAvR50>

Planning Commission Present: Chapin Kaynor (Chair), Meghan Cope (Vice Chair), Cate Lamar, Jill Pardini, Shayla Livingston, Ron Bomer; **Absent:** Alex Daley

Historic and Architectural Advisory Committee (HAAC) Present: Doug Goulette (chair), Emily Morton (vice chair), Karen Fragnoli-Munn, John Marcotte, Chelsea Levis; **Absent:** Brian Forrest, Jim Thornton,

Staff: Matt Boulanger, Emily Heymann, Bonnie Woodford

Public: Geoffrey Farrell (consultant), Anita Morrison (consultant), Taylor Newton (CCRPC), Terry Marron

1) CALL TO ORDER

The meeting came to order at 7:01 PM.

2) PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

3) DISCUSSION: GROWTH CENTER FORM-BASED CODE (WITH CONSULTANT TEAM)

Matt Boulanger gave an introduction of the FBC project and the two committees attending in the meeting tonight. The HAAC has experience administering the existing bylaw's design standards, as they provide recommendations to the Development Review Board (DRB). Geoffrey Farrell introduced Anita Morrison, a colleague for several decades who will focus on the market study.

Geoffrey gave his PowerPoint presentation, [which was recorded and posted to YouTube](#). Some highlights include, but are not limited to:

A form-base code needs to have a plan, a vision. It's also important to communicate about vested or perceived rights people think they have as the rules change. The FBC process is about helping the citizens define their community vision. Due to the pandemic, small groups discussions at tables are replaced with Zoom break out rooms. Now, a scribe draws down the ideas rather than everyone doodling on a map together. The emphasis is big picture vision, not where the potholes are located.

After the public defines what they want, the technicians work on a code. After the visioning, comes the problem solving. They work with the street and utility experts to deal with the realities and contingencies of build out. The realities of the market are also taken into serious consideration. In Geoff's experience, parking is the curse of the last three decades. "*Parking drives.*" It is a problem we are just starting to outgrow. Most people drive to the growth center, thus a need for a lot of parking. He discussed walkability and traffic demand management (TDM) where people can park once and enjoy many places.

Geoffrey explained his team's approach to visualizations and renderings. They strive to create drawings and computer images the average person understands, that are not esoteric but grounded in reality of a place. Their visualizations show existing condition vs incremental change that grow into a good environment, because a vital town center is not created (or recreated) overnight. The process looks at the synergy of an existing place, always trying to build around what a community already has. He referenced Roger Lewis cartoons. Their approach is rooted in honesty, not convincing people of a particular style, but rooted in what people tell us what they want. The key is taking the visions and translating it into regulations.

Geoffrey Ferrell used Peoria and Cedar Falls as examples, and a public street overlay study in one of those places. For example, a public street overlay where the rules for development are different, depending on the individual street. He explained their approach to writing the regulation: limit fancy language; architectural standards are the “dress code” how the building is designed; using formula of intent statement + images + specific rules; make signage standards very simple.

Geoffrey Ferrell talked about the building’s relationship to the street and public realm. For example, pick any beautiful building (Taj Mahal?) and, in your mind, place it along a highway or 5-lane roadway. That beautiful building loses its appeal. The best, most beloved places are accessible by foot, bike, or transit. A walkable environment is also the best environment for business. For example, a parking garage with ground-floor retail and parking to rear/upper floors. Parking is behind, in this case, a retail shop on the ground floor and behind and upper floors is parking. Parking lots stop the vitality of a street. Parking and service (trash/deliveries) should be located behind the buildings.

Geoffrey Ferrell discussed allowed uses. Conventional zoning wants to micromanage use and density. FBC wants to deal with experience of the built environment and how buildings interact with public space. Form-based code defines use in broad categories. For example, the use table for Cedar Falls, one of the smallest places. FBC doesn’t care much about if a storefront is a candle shop or bookstore or coffee shop; FBC cares about how the storefront interacts with the street and sidewalks. To the extent possible, let the small-scale market work. It’s the big scale needs control. Some FBCs deal specifically with use when, for example, there may be a street where most agree the storefront core should be. Upper stories can be more flexible (office or residential). In his experience, residential has been a stronger market in most cases than office. Town centers work when there are a lot of people living there. It allows people to park a car once and do many things, to take advantage of the amenities and experience.

At 7:35pm, Geoffrey concluded his presentation. Chapin Kaynor thanked him and asked for questions/comments from the commission members.

Meghan asked a question about public process: how do you deal with conflicting visions? Not everyone in Williston has the same vision. How will your firm handle conflicting views and handle views where people would prefer to have car-oriented development? Geoffrey Ferrell said it’s important to recognize that contingent in the town and engage them in charrette. He said that Vermont is that one of the places where the conflicts are below average, compared to most places they work where the citizens don’t trust a thing the staff says and it’s a more polarized environment where development are pitched battles. In his experience, the conventional zoning process puts people at logger heads with a developer who unveils a plan and tries to sell it. Geoffrey explained how the local knowledge held by board members can help bring those people into the conversation. When planning the charrette activities and Zoom break out rooms, don’t put all the developers in one group and those in opposition in another group, make sure a variety of viewpoints/backgrounds are working on the charrette together.

Meghan Cope asked the question: how do you reach out to lower income communities, communities of color? Geoffrey Ferrell said this is the most important role for the board members and locals, as locals are the best people who know where those peoples are and best way to reach them. Look for where are living, working, and who are their community leaders. He said it has always been a concern to get people who otherwise would not be involved, but the help of commission members who are more knowledgeable of their community are crucial for bring folks into the FBC process.

Shayla asked the question: what are other critical roles the Planning Commission and other town boards/entities can offer? What has been useful in other places? Geoffrey said with any unofficial or official committee, you guys are more interested and knowledgeable than the average citizen. The Planning Commission is watchdog, making sure we stay on track, but also keen participants. It is important for board members to dive deep into the charette, get your neighbors and friends to participate, and provide feedback on the early drafts created after the charette.

Matt Boulanger opened the floor up to HAAC members, asking about their experiences with where the recent bylaws fall short, greatest hits, or what could have been done differently. Chelsea Levis mentioned Gardener's Supply, a retail store with a lovely café in the greenhouse. Emily Morton explained that the while new development has a "new urbanism" style, the HAAC often deals with old vernacular (Greek Revival, etc.) in the Village. It is important to look not only at the Vermont vernacular, but consider indigenous cultures and settlement patterns that pre-date European colonization of the region.

Doug Goulette mentioned the hilly and rugged topography of Vermont and how terrain has made it challenging to engineer projects in Colchester while meeting their FBC regulations. Geoffrey Ferrell said they have dealt with interesting topography for projects in Winooski VT and Virginia. The market analysis is also important here, because it easier to step a building into to the hillside when there is enough intensity for it to pencil out.

The group discussed submitting photos that exemplify good and bad design. Emily Heymann suggested a simple survey, that way photos and text can be submitted together in one place and not lost in the email inbox. Other staff and the consultant team agreed.

Anita Morrison gave an overview of the market study. It looks at the vision from an economic standpoint: pace of existing development, the mix of uses in the larger areas, gaps that could be filled, issues relative to cost of structure parking or other kinds of development based on rents and sales prices.

The FBC discussion concluded at 8:30 pm. The consultant team and HAAC members left the meeting.

For more information about HAAC meetings, go to town.williston.vt.us and click on "Public Records and Documents," then "Agendas & Minutes." Or call 802-878-6704, or stop by the Planning & Zoning Office at 7878 Williston Road.