

TOWN OF WILLISTON
Planning Commission
Minutes of February 15, 2022– 7:00 P.M.
Location: Zoom Meeting ID 158-006-871 on zoom.us/join or by calling 1-646-558-8656
Williston Police Station, Williston Road
Zoom Recording:

Planning Commission Present: Meghan Cope (Chair), Chapin Kaynor (Vice Chair), Cate Lamar, Alex Daley, Shayla Livingston, Jill Pardini; **Staff:** Matt Boulanger, Melinda Scott, Emily Heymann, Taylor Newton (CCRPC), Geoff Ferrell (FBC Consultant); **Public:** Al Senecal, Andy Rowe, Barb Giardi, Brian Bertsch, Chris Geffken, Donna Roeser, Dar Gibson, Elizabeth Young, Jeff Davis, Jeff Nick, John Marcotte, Kevin Mazuzan, Marcy Kass, Scott Rieley, Terry Marron.

7:00 PM CALL TO ORDER Meghan called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

-- BYLAW AMENDMENT PUBLIC HEARING --

7:05 PM PUBLIC COMMENT (Items not on the agenda) Two comment letters were received by the Planning Office. Emily summarized the public comment from Mr. Lawes, a resident of Dunmore Lane. Mr. Lawes commented about pedestrian and bicycle safety on existing and proposed streets, and in particular the proposed connection of existing streets to proposed streets that connect with 2A. Chapin stated the Planning Commission should not necessarily change the Code in response to the comments but should consider the issues raised as they apply to any specific development that is proposed under the Code.

- [Carroll Lawes Feb 10, 2022](#)
- [Carroll Lawes Feb 7, 2022 regarding DP 21-18](#)

7:10 PM TAFT CORNERS FORM BASED CODE

(Staff will provide a discussion of changes that have been made to the Hearing Draft thus far, as well as a report on the past two weeks of staff and consultant team conversations with developers and landowners in Taft Corners. Potential changes to the Regulating Plan and text of the Form-Based Code will be reviewed and discussed.)

Memorandum Discussing the changes below:

Staff, PC members and Consultant Team introduced themselves to the members of the public. Planning Director Matt Boulanger gave an overview of the code and then went over the proposed changes since the hearing draft. Staff have heard from major developers and members of the public and have outlined some changes to the code and regulating plan in response to concerns raised. The Planning Commission can consider those changes and whether to incorporate those changes into the draft that gets transmitted to the Selectboard. Matt stated there is the option to close the public hearing but not transmit the draft to the Selectboard, and then hold a working session during the next meeting to finalize the draft code.

Matt went over the memorandum outlining the proposed changes (see below):

“PINK TEXT” CHANGES DISCUSSED BY PC BEGINNING 1/18:

- Required Parking – raising minimums to that currently required in bylaw
- District Names

POSSIBLE CHANGES IN CODE AND REGULATING PLAN RE: LANDOWNER CONCERNS

- Curved streets and required building lines
- Building frontage standards for corner lots and alleys
- Regulating Plan: Double vs. Single-Loaded Streets
- Provision for One -Story buildings south of Marshall Avenue
- Regulating Plan added flexibility with DRB waiver

Matt noted the concerns raised by developers, such as “single loaded” streets on Al Senecal’s property abutting Cottonwood Crossing and the Essex Alliance Church property (proposed Snyder development). In response to those concerns staff and consultants have proposed reconfiguring streets in both areas to allow some building on both sides of the street. On the Essex Alliance Church property the addition of an alley has been proposed at the end of certain streets to allow emergency vehicle access and avoid the need for cul-de-sacs. Chris Snyder’s project has already undergone Preapplication review and he is requesting the project be vested under the current version of the bylaw. Jeff Nick and Jeff Davis had a number of requests including the ability to build single story buildings south of Marshall Avenue, shifting the Trader Lane green, and increasing flexibility for moving or eliminating certain streets when it conflicts with proposed development. Matt noted that under the proposed code the Zoning Administrator has authority to allow shifting of streets up to 50ft. Staff and consultants have proposed increasing that flexibility to 75 feet.

Meghan Cope, Chair opened up public comment to those who had previously not been able to speak or who had not attended the previous public hearing. John Marcotte said he likes the concept of the Form Based Code although he has concerns about 4-5 story buildings. A lot of residential growth is proposed, and he wonders how much population growth is anticipated for Williston in the coming years. Matt stated he looked at the full buildout of Taft Corners under the proposed Code and estimated it to be approximately 3,000 new dwellings at full buildout. From 2010 to 2020 the growth rate in Williston was about 1%, so the buildout of Taft Corners under Form Based Code would not significantly change this. Growth management allocation limits are still in place (80 units per year). While the plan allows greater density on any site than what is allowed today, growth management is still a limiting factor as well as the limits of sewer allocation.

Chapin Kaynor said he had submitted some comments in an email related to the size of lawns/dooryards and the open space between Home Depot, Walmart and Gardener Supply and he wants to make sure the comments are addressed.

Cate Lamar asked if there had been a change from 4-5 stories, and she noted her concern with that.

Donna Roeser agrees with John and Cate’s comments. She has concerns with allowing 4 and 5 stories. It is difficult to envision that. She stated she is definitely not in favor of 5 stories and maybe against allowing 4 stories. Donna noted that the Taft Corners Vision Plan mentions developing on parking lots and asked Geoff if he had looked at the Blair Park Hotel and what he thinks about that type of development. Is it attractive? Geoff stated he would prefer not to comment on attractiveness, but he thinks it does have some issues. Geoff stated there is a lot more to it than height. He thinks there was a miscommunication about having buildings in parking lots, and the intention of the Code is to establish rigorous standards for development including fronting buildings on the street and dimensioning them

appropriately to enhance aesthetics. Emily stated it looks like the Blair Park Hotel is shoehorned in between existing buildings and the street, floating in space without a strong orientation to the street.

Chris Geffen stated in lieu of South Burlington's decision to preserve 1000 acres of green space, he wonders where the green space is in Taft Corners. Matt stated on the Regulating Plan there are areas for future parks – light green are parks and dark green are natural areas. No development will occur in those spaces and they will likely be acquired as public green space. Williston has conserved over 2,500 acres of land within its boundaries via conservation easements and more when you include all the protected open space within developments. He spoke about the differences between South Burlington and Williston regarding the provision of sewer service. South Burlington provides sewer service to its rural areas whereas Williston has not. The town owns next to no land within the Growth Center and in order to conserve green space within Taft Corners there is a proposed Official Map that the town could adopt that would provide the town with strong tools to protect that green space. Cheryl Arnold asked about whether a community center has been considered in the form-based code. Emily stated that there is money in the town budget to do a scoping study for a community center and other community facilities to determine what is needed, where those facilities would be located and how much they would cost. Emily also noted that the Code includes a street tree specification to allow more room for trees to grow – wide green belt, and deeper tree wells, that will ensure that trees grow to their full potential and remain healthy.

Shayla asked about the changes made to parking and whether the Planning Commission had voted on them. Matt stated these are proposed changes that have been discussed but not voted on. After the public hearing process is done and the Planning Commission has finished working on the draft, it will vote on transmittal of the entire package to the Selectboard. Meghan stated there will likely be more discussion and refinement at the March 1 meeting prior to voting on the changes. There was discussion about when to close the public hearing. Matt suggested the Planning Commission can close the public hearing when it feels like the public has had a good chance to be heard.

Al Senecal stated he wanted to go over some notes he had. He thinks the easement to Maple Tree Place is shown incorrectly on the plan, so he would need to renegotiate that with the MTP if the plan is adopted. Over 50% of his property is green on the plan and not all of it is wetland. 16 acres has been designated as street – over 9000ft of roads, representing a cost of 10 million dollars to build the roads. About 5 acres is left to put buildings on. He would like to have more input and appreciates that the code is not being voted on today.

Jeff Nick is also concerned about unintended consequences of the Code. He mentioned recent adoption of Form Based Code in Shelburne. There needs to be some flexibility in the Code. Flat roofs are much better suited to the area for safety and stormwater purposes. Form Based Code should not be on the south side of Marshall Ave because there is already established development that is single story and auto centric. He stated it doesn't make sense to put residential development over commercial.

Matt stated the Form Based Code calls for fundamentally more expensive and fully formed street sections than the town's current regulations. This is intended to make those streets pleasant and walkable. Much of the area is coded as 2 or 3 stories. The Form Based Code is a big evolutionary step from the requirements and development that has taken place in Taft Corners over the last few decades. Maximum building footprint is 15,000sf except for grocery stores, which are allowed 20,000sf. This is less than the Blair Park Hotel.

Matt went over the proposed changes to the Regulating Plan. Cottonwood View has been realigned to allow room for development on both sides of the street, new developable areas have been added to the interior of Burr Park Road. Red blocks are newly added developable areas. Matt noted the scale of the street widths and noted that area accommodates the streets, sidewalks, bike paths, tree lawns, etc.

Geoff addressed Al's comments, stating that buildable areas have been expanded where not conflicting with wetlands, etc. Amount of buildable area has been significantly increased.

Cate asked where the parking would be for the long skinny buildings. Geoff stated in the space behind the building and in the basement. Cate asked if the wetland surveys that the plan is based are accurate. Matt stated no, they are based on the ANR Atlas, which tends to understate the wetlands. Wetlands would need to be delineated before any development can occur. Cate asked if the blocks represent single buildings and Geoff said no, they can fit several buildings. Chapin asked if there would be alleys through those blocks, where would the cycle tracks go, and could Cottonwood View be an alley and not a street. Geoff answered.

Al noted that over time the Burr Oak Knoll increased from 6 to 12 acres. He had asked for a copy of the plan in Autocad so that he could work on it. He thinks the maximum of 15,000ft building footprint is too small, he thinks it should be 20,000ft. He is concerned about the allowed uses and mixing residential uses above some of the other allowed uses. He thinks this plan needs more time for people to digest. Matt stated the current zoning is very specific with regards to uses, the Form Based Code is not. The limitations on building form and street space will largely restrict some of the uses. The intent is not to micromanage use.

Alex commented that the Planning Commission has been working on this for over a year, in response to comments that the process is rushed. The Planning Commission has a responsibility to develop a great plan and they have been working on it in a transparent way for a long time. Shayla wanted to echo Alec's sentiment. She also noted that it is really important that housing, particularly affordable housing, is a focus.

Chris Geffken wanted to know where the current Cottonwood Crossing project is and where Maple Tree Housing is. Matt pointed it out on the plan. Will the current roundabout disappear? Matt stated it would. Chris asked about large truck traffic and whether the new roads would accommodate them and Matt stated the road sections would have the same travel lane width as exists today. What is proposed for pedestrian crossings? Matt stated there are specific standards for crossings and traffic calming elements built into the code.

Jeff Nick stated that developers have been paying attention to the FBC process. He stated it won't work due to a number of factors including stormwater management and incompatibility of certain retail uses with residential uses. Taylor noted that only one section of Wright Ave requires retail uses on the first floor, other than that, buildings can be fully residential.

Matt showed the Essex Alliance property. One sided streets have been moved to accommodate development on both sides. Alleyway behind three streets connect them with the outer ring. Geoff stated the brown area is where buildable area has been expanded to the edge of the steep area abutting the stream. The alley is wide enough to drive through with 2 10ft lanes.

Cate had a question about the alleys. Alleys are typically viewed as not a fun place to be, and how do we alleviate those concerns? Is McGillicuddy's in Essex an example of what the alleys would look like? Geoff clarified that the alleys are just a smaller scale street. Cate has concerns with pulling out into the public street from the alley and the turn radius. Geoff stated there is plenty of room and allowance for turn radius in the plan so this should not be a concern.

Chris stated he understands what the long time frame looks like because it is the same time frame he deals with in developing his projects. Feedback is always appreciated, and because this is such a big step it is important to listen to everyone. He appreciates the willingness to extend the public hearing. He stated he

had received preapplication approval but was not able to become vested in the current bylaw until he submitted a Discretionary Permit application, which could not happen until after he received Growth Management allocation. He thinks it is not fair that he and others would not be allowed to develop under the current regulations given how much time and effort has gone into developing plans that meet the town's current regulations. He has concerns about the alignment of Public Works standards with Form Based Code, and feels that should be taken into consideration. He said there are concerns about alleys, especially around snow clearance. He wants there to be some flexibility to modify the regulating plan where it makes sense.

Matt stated that DRB review is not in the draft Code currently, and the current path for modification of the Regulating Plan is via bylaw amendment. Staff has been discussing options for involving the DRB in the process to allow more flexibility. Matt agrees that there needs to be consistency between the plan and the public works streets specifications, and the town is planning to hire Rick Chelman to work on developing street cross sections that would become part of the Public Works standards and specifications.

Chapin does not want the perfect to be the enemy of the good. Making Taft corners a unified place would address many of the concerns raised by residents and he does not want the issues raised to prevent adoption of the code and plan because there is so much that's good about it.

8:45 PM CLOSE OR CONTINUE HEARING

(Two Options: 1) Close the hearing and transmit bylaw amendments to Selectboard, or 2) continue the public hearing to March 1, 2022)

Meghan recommended continuing the hearing and asked PC members to weigh in. The other PC members agreed to continue the hearing to March 1.

8:55 PM MINUTES

Chapin made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Alex seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Meghan thanked the staff and PC members for all their hard work and persistence during this process. Matt stated if any PC members have any questions about the plan or the document to feel free to reach out to staff. Alex noted that there have been a lot of comments about building heights that should be addressed in the next meeting. He suggested presenting that in some visual way. Matt will share the newly revised Regulating Plan with the PC members and with the developers. Shayla also would like to discuss at the next meeting the process or path going forward.

9:00 PM ADJOURN The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 pm.