

TOWN OF WILLISTON

Planning Commission

Minutes of March 7, 2023– 7:00 P.M.

Annex Conference Room, 7878 Williston Road, Williston VT 05495

Zoom Meeting ID 873 0175 0819 on www.zoom.us/j/87301750819 or call 1-646-558-8656

Zoom Recording: <https://youtu.be/B8iNMUSPkSY>

Planning Commission Present: Meghan Cope (chair), Cate Lamar (vice chair), Jill Pardini, Chapin Kaynor, Ellie Beckett, Shayla Livingston, Alex Daley; **Absent:** none; **Staff:** Matt Boulanger, Melinda Scott, Emily Heymann; **Public:** Ian Campbell

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting came to order at 7:00 pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT (items not on the agenda)

Ian Campbell, Hanon Drive, spoke about the need for housing development done equitably and responsibly. At the bird's eye view of Chittenden County and Franklin County, the Growth center is relatively new only a couple decades old. He asked how are we going to attract developers to build there? There is a shortage of construction labor to make it happen, recognizing that is a state and federal level issue. Williston doesn't have an existing urban center so people don't know how to adapt and redevelop it. How does Williston encourage developers to focus their efforts in the Growth Center (GC)? He is concerned housing won't happen at the rate we need. Left solely to developers, we are not going to see the amount and affordability that we really need.

Meghan Cope said that's been the action for the past 10-15 years in the Growth Center and asked what is missing? What is not going in the right direction? Ian responded that the population is increasing, people want to live close to work, but wonders what incentivizes exist for developers to come here or encourage them to take on projects. Alex Daley noted the new Form-Based Code, which Ian is familiar with, but his concern remains the lack of incentives for those who have the financial means to encourage that kind of density.

Alex Daley stated the town has the next ten years of Growth mapped out, which is indicative of enough developers. Alex mentioned the Essex Alliance Church project as one example. What additional incentives are needed? With the housing market shortages, the opportunity for developers to turn a profit is at an all-time high.

Ian stated the town should incentivize high density housing. Ian stated he rented for 10 years, and that he didn't have a mortgage until he was 30 and it was a condo. The Form Based Code is on the right track to make this kind of development happen.

Alex stated the agenda for the majority of the meeting is about meeting the housing needs. That has been the focus of all his time on the Planning Commission. Parking, structured FBC to get denser housing in the GC. This project doesn't stand alone. Use the GC to incentive and require denser housing. On same page.

Chapin Kaynor views the Form Based Code as a part of the housing solution. He also sees the appointment of an 'Energy and Community Development Planner' as another step to work on housing. This staff person can focus on developing partnerships with organizations like Champlain Housing Trust and can bring developers to the table with these organizations. Ian spoke to historic examples of where growth has occurred, such as South Burlington City Center. Taft Corners is a new growth area compared to other counties. Growth seems more natural for other places. There is less redevelopment in Williston because it is fairly new.

Melinda stated that City Center did not just happen naturally, rather it took many years of planning and financing with mechanisms like Tax Increment Financing (TIF). The "road to nowhere" that finally leads to something. After many years, now it is finally coming to fruition. Ian noted that he is concerned with the workforce shortage - where is the skilled labor, the construction industry is suffering. Ian stated he is curious as to the next steps and the timeframe for implementing Form Based Code.

Meghan stated that parcels that remains in the Growth Center are redevelopment or smaller parcels. It has filled in a lot over past 10 years. FBC opens up for higher density, adaptive reuse of parking lots or big box stores. Most of focus of FBC is residential. The town has a good relationship with the development community in terms of identifying expectations.

Ian Campbell agreed that Snyder has done many big projects in Williston and the region with projects where the density is low and the property value is high.

Chapin stated he is also worried about workforce and availability; however this is out of the PC's purview. Chapin stated the town is trying to create an environment that supports the kind of high-density development that is desirable and in balance with other values, but the Planning Commission does not try to figure out who's going to build it.

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 21, 2023 ([public access PDF](#))

The Planning Commission reviewed the meeting minutes of February 21, 2023. Cate Lamar moved to approve the minutes as amended. It was seconded by Jill Pardini and approved 4-0. Chapin Kaynor and Ellie Beckett were not present during the review of minutes.

LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY CENTER SCOPING STUDY

Emily Heymann gave an overview of the process for the Community Center Scoping Study. The Town Manager and Committee is hoping to conduct many interviews of interested citizens. Staff is hoping to schedule an interview of the Planning Commission, but individuals are also welcome to schedule their own interview.

WILLISTON HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND POTENTIAL BYLAW AMENDMENTS

Melinda Scott gave an update on her revision to the report. Ian noted that two people working jobs with average wages is still not enough to afford a mortgage or rent. Melinda concurred. Meghan Cope said that in Williston there is a greater impact because our jobs skew towards lower wage service sector jobs. Melinda highlighted some new or reformatted graphs to clarify the data findings.

Chapin Kaynor is concerned about short-term rentals (STR) and suggested that with any zoning changes that would increase housing supply there needs to also be regulations on STRs. Matt said that AirDNA reports about 63 STRs in Williston on Airbnb and VRBO, including about 25 hotel room cross-listings out of a total housing supply of 4,500 homes. Staff can continue to monitor to see if more show up relative the number of houses, as well as monitor state-level legislation. There have been prior, failed attempts at the state level to require rental registry. Alex Daley respectfully disagreed with Chapin, citing that STR is not a problem in most communities. Chapin clarified that his concern long-term as it will be harder to reign in STRs when there are 500 rather than today's small quantity. His concern is mainly when a unit is rented out, but the owner doesn't live on the property. Meghan Cope would like to see how zoning could apply to STRs and what would it look like.

Melinda Scott reviewed some of the proposed bylaw amendments in concept, including developing up to 4 homes on an existing parcel, adaptive reuse projects, hotel conversions. She mentioned that in the Gateway South there are hotels that could be converted to residential use. There would need to be standards to ensure the quality of the housing is maintained. Within Inclusionary Zoning, there are many policy "levers" to consider.

The Planning Commission discussed the idea of Inclusionary Zoning as an alternate path to Growth Management. In other words, projects that have Inclusionary Zoning would be exempt from Growth Management.

Chapin stated he is not ready to give up Growth Management in the RZD, and he is not sure about ARZD. In the Form Based Code district, no Growth Management encourages more construction. Meghan stated it's challenging to require IZ in a place where we have high design standards. Hard for developers to mesh those two goals. Meghan said we need more housing at all price points, and she would like to know more about what it would look like in the FBC area. She has concerns about bifurcating housing costs while squeezing out the middle-income housing. Meghan stated wages are also not keeping up with the price of housing. IZ is one tool to consider but the town should not leap into it without considering the impact on middle-income housing. It is hard to think about in the abstract and the PC should consider the practical logistics and unintended consequences.

Ian asked if the Planning Commission has been having conversations with other Planning Commissions, for example South Burlington or Colchester. What is the approach and pushback in other communities? Matt is the conduit of information on that. Matt provided some updates from nearby communities. Chapin stated he watches local access for South Burlington too. Kennedy Drive is where affordable units are being built as part of a larger project and going into their own building. Chapin said he doesn't like it when affordable units are all in one building and prefers them to be integrated into the entire project. Chapin stated that the regulations need to be fine-tuned to avoid unintended consequences.

Matt said that the Planning Commission can work on refining the IZ regulations, if there is consensus about IZ being an alternative. Matt noted that there are potentially negative consequences to making the regulations too complicated. The more you make zoning a game, the

fewer players who know how to play the game will develop here. The simpler it is the better it works.

Chapin stated he can accept IZ as a starting point in the Growth Center. Wouldn't change anything in the ARZD, and doesn't want to require affordable homes there. The issues are bigger in the RZD, affordable housing in a suburban center requires offsetting with higher prices homes, so he is not sure how it would work in the RZD.

Shayla apologized for being late. She agreed with Chapin on the first bullet (require IZ in FBC district and eliminate Growth Management in FBC district). Be considerate of how and if it will work. We have FBC in the GC and a place we want to see most development. There is less frustration from residents about development in the GC, but she hears a lot of frustration about development in the RZD. Shayla stated the town should try IZ in one place where it will be most successful and where we have other parameters in place.

Meghan stated there are tools in the RZD that she has questions about. For example, with the Glaser projects, what if we didn't include garages, which would cut out 20-30,000 dollars of expense. Meghan asked if in a large subdivision, is the land on a lease or is it owned. Matt explained different models of lot ownership, like foot print lots, which leads to affordability. Meghan stated that with commonly owned land, there is more affordability. Matt stated that developer typically distributes the land cost into the units. Meghan said the RZD has potential for more affordable housing. Development should be concentrated in places where there is water and sewer, but development is subject to the development community's timing.

Alex stated he is happier with last meeting's discussion about allowing IZ as an alternative to Growth Management rather than requiring IZ. He stated the biggest cost is land, roads, sewer. Density is what makes things affordable. Alex said he would like to encourage affordable housing in the RZD. With FBC, it would be interesting to see the results of allowing vs. requiring. Prefers to give options, dislikes requirements. Alex agrees that ARZD is not a place to achieve affordability goals unless someone is proposing something unique which could warrant a Specific Plan. Alex prefers IZ to be a fork in the road, an alternative to Growth Management, not a requirement.

Matt stated that Growth Management is filled out for the next ten years. It is challenging for smaller projects, so perhaps they should be exempt. IZ would provide this alternate path. Meghan stated that some form of exemption for small projects in village or RZD would be in order. ADUs are currently exempt, what if we expanded this? Matt stated there is a conversation at state level about allowing multi-units by right. Matt stated GM creates an additional appealable event and that has come up for a small project. It adds risk.

Matt stated there is a size threshold to Inclusionary Zoning. Small projects should be exempt from both IZ and Growth Management. Meghan stated enhancing ADUs and eliminating the barriers to infill are important, and the PC needs to consider these as well as IZ. What percentage of the production of affordable homes that are needed can we expect to see from a tool like this? Matt thinks probably less than 25% of the need from these reforms. The big wins will come from programmatic measures such as infrastructure funding, buying and remediating parcels, building

staff capacity, LIHTAC housing credit. The big piece of the pie will come from town working at it from those angles as well.

Chapin said Williston already allows duplexes everywhere we allow housing. Meghan said we are ahead of the game in that sense. Matt mentioned the next step could be allowing triplexes and quads in the ARZD (for farmworker housing, as one example) where the 2-unit limit right now is a restriction.

Ian Campbell agreed with the need for affordable housing, but we cannot ignore the infrastructure that must be in place to get people to the resources they needed. Making trips without a personal vehicle, transit, the bike path network. Schools may get bigger but not likely to change locations. The village doesn't have groceries or other amenities, whereas in other communities, like Jeffersonville, everything is within walking distance. We have to create the housing but incentivize the state to get infrastructure built to circulate people before increasing the density.

Shayla Livingston agreed with Ian's infrastructure/mobility comments, but that should not slow us down given the sheer quantity of housing that is needed. Meghan Cope added that the Form-Based Code is a 30-year plan for build out and redevelopment.

Chapin asked if the Planning Commission is at a point where we agree to require IZ in the Growth Center and eliminate Growth Management there?.

The Commission gave a "temperature check" on the general direction of the proposed bylaw amendments. Cate Lamar agreed with "fork in the road" where applicant could choose IZ or GM in the Form-Based Code district, but she is not comfortable with changes to the other allocation areas (mainly RZD and ARZD). Shayla Livingston supports IZ in place of GM in the FBC district and is okay with the other option in RZD. Alex also agreed with "fork in the road" where IZ is an alternative to GM. Jill Pardini prefers IZ in FBC requirement and taking off restriction as much as possible including in ARZD. Ellie is also leaning towards the requirement in FBC. Chapin also in the requirement camp, the either-or-option is a valid option but concerned about administrative overhead. Meghan sees both perspectives, but notes the current system incentivizes affordable housing within Growth Management with little success. Matt notes that the scoring system in Growth Management is incredibly complicated with respect to affordable housing. Meghan asked how important Growth Management is to the FBC area, and Matt said currently it is not that much of a barrier in FBC the way it is administrated but it is unknown whether there could be a backlog in the future. Form Based Code is so prescriptive that it is getting hard to incentivize anything. Meghan is interested in figuring out the levers to make it quicker and easier to build housing, but a way that incorporates some affordable housing. From that perspective she thinks IZ should be required.

Meghan Cope still wonders how much of a motivator would it be to developers to skip GM in the FBC district in exchange for IZ. Matt thinks it would be a significant motivator. Emily Heymann commented that efficiency leads to predictability. Growth Management takes many years for a project to get all allocation and creates several appealable events while external market forces make it harder to predict if the project can deliver on affordable housing. Melinda

suggested IZ may be stronger if combined with other incentives like a density bonuses, expedited review or less parking requirements.

Meghan stated she is hesitant to take the full leap of requiring IZ and eliminating GM.

Alex stated they are mutually inclusive. If they aren't paired it would not be effective. The question is whether it's required or not. Meghan asked the Planning Commission if they are in favor of requiring IZ and eliminating GM. She stated it sounds like the majority are in favor of that option.

Chapin stated many people worry about how fast we'll grow even in the Growth Center. He thinks there should be some public process on those issues. He would like to see some projections of how many units will be produced without GM, how many affordable units will be produced with IZ, what the impact will be to schools, sewer, town over the next 20 years with this change. Is it acceptable to the town. Wants to make sure people are engaged. We can't restrict development in GC and the rest of town at the same time. One prediction is that the kind of housing likely in the GC isn't going to produce as much children/sewer as single-family home. What impact on services are we taking on. Meghan asked if Chapin would like engagement prior to the public hearing process, and he stated yes.

Matt stated that staff is working on developing a survey regarding housing, work that will lead into the next town plan. He is painfully aware that saying "grow more" is controversial. This is really complicated and there are many moving parts. Matt said there is a general perception that things would be worse if we didn't have GM. At least that is preventing a bad thing from happening. Matt stated that informed survey work is really important, and Emily has done this really effectively in the past and staff will continue to work on this.

Cate stated she agrees with Chapin. Based on conversations with people, she thinks peoples' concerns from the growth comes directly from the GC, she can't speak to ARZD as she barely leaves the GC. The people she speaks to often voice that growth in GC creates traffic and when they think of it coming to the RZD it brings up a lot of emotion. Cate said she doesn't agree that there is universal acceptance that Growth in GC is fine. People have these emotions from growth anywhere and have less information than the PC and staff. People will have these concerns until they are educated.

Ian Campbell said some of the friction Cate refers to is the friction between Finney Crossing and the Annex over the third access point. That is the quadrant of FBC district with the most concern. The land area where the big box stores are has potential for redevelopment, for example a rethinking of Church Street. Cate Lamar responded that Church Street is not something she wants in Williston. It has nowhere to park and is not a pleasant place anymore.

Cate Lamar noted the importance of public involvement and knowledge. Everyone is busy. If every in Williston paid as much attention as we do, then the conversation would be different. Cannot make everyone happy. Growth concerns arise for many different reasons. The growth is a concern for people and the pace of growth concerns them the most.

Chapin stated the survey questions need to have context behind them. Tell people what is being considered, what will be the likely result in terms of growth and impact to town services, then ask the question. Matt said staff will work with the Planning Commission to develop and vet the survey. Matt Boulanger noted that is in-part because of the Planning Commission that an extra sidewalk plow and staff time allocated to plow all the sidewalk. Jill Pardini said Ron should get some credit for that.

Shayla Livingston said the housing survey questions will need to be intentional. It is important to know why someone is in opposition to growth because context is key.

Melinda Scott gave an update on the Microtransit scoping study and MTP Transit Center feasibility project. She shared preliminary sketch drawings of the transit center at Maple Tree Place with access for two busses, shelters, and bike lockers noting that most the parcel is open green space to allow for a pocket park or future expansion. Chapin said his goal here is an interstate-sized facility with restrooms and a food vendor. Meghan Cope asked about park & ride parking, for example the unused back row of Shaw's parking lot.

The Microtransit study is getting started. Contracted with Via Mobility whose done work elsewhere in Vermont and going to form a stakeholder advisory committee. Via software operates in Montpelier. Chapin suggested getting hotels involved/invested because with microtransit they won't have to support their own airport shuttle services.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 pm.