TOWN OF WILLISTON
Planning Commission
Minutes of November 30, 2021– 7:00 P.M.

Watch recording on YouTube: https://youtu.be/wBmNVKF37a4
Location: Annex Conference Room (7878 Williston Road) and Zoom
Meeting ID 158-006-871 on zoom.us/join or by calling 1-646-558-8656

Planning Commission Present: Meghan Cope (Chair), Chapin Kaynor (vice chair), Shayla Livingston, Jill Pardini; **Absent:** Ron Bomer; Cate Lamar, Alex Daley **Staff:** Matt Boulanger, Melinda Scott; **Public:** Taylor Newton (CCRPC staff); Geoff Ferrell, Justin Falango, Keith Covington (FBC team); Reuben Escorpizo, Pam K.

7:00 PM **CALL TO ORDER**
Meeting was called to order at 7:06

7:05 PM **PUBLIC COMMENT**
Chapin asked about when the PC would be looking at and approving the Annual Report. Meghan stated that since not all Commissioners have seen it, to put it off until next week.

7:10 PM **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
Meghan noted a couple of requested edits to make. Chapin moved to approve the minutes as amended. Jill seconded the motion. The motion carried with a 4-0 vote.

7:20 PM **FORM BASED CODE – BUILDING FORM STANDARDS (Section 3)**
Geoff Ferrell presented the Building Form Standards. Public sector sets up the rules, but they have to be smart rules so that they can be built by the private sector. There are limits to how much effect Architectural Standards can have on their own. They have little effect on a landscape scale. Building form standards make the street space. An important aspect is height – what is too tall and what is not tall enough? Variation is important. A minimum and a maximum is needed, and it's important to get the proportions right. Pulling the buildings to the street help form the street space and also provide space behind the buildings – buffer for different uses behind it and room for parking. Geoff showed examples of interior block drive through and gas station. Focus is on the front of the building, with more flexibility for the sides and back. The controls are not about style, but about functionality. If retail, you want people on the sidewalk to see inside the building; if residential, you don't want people seeing inside, but you want to be able to see the street ("eyes on the street" important for safety and pedestrian comfort).

Uses – FBC has looser controls on uses. Even on Main Street, focus more on the ground floor in terms of uses, looser requirements on upper stories. Broad use categories. People like contiguous space along the sidewalk. Geoff showed an example of building up on pilotis forming a "plaza." The retail in back of the plaza doesn't end up doing that well.

How to save the environment - Multifamily development with transit-oriented development (TOD) maximizes transportation efficiency, minimizes energy use both in household and transportation. Compact walkable human scale developments are more sustainable. Cities have less CO2 emissions per household. As density increases, per capita stormwater runoff volume decreases. Peoples' attitudes are changing and more people want to live in multifamily housing near centers.

Geoff went through the Building Form Standards page by page.

Chapin noted that one example picture doesn't seem to have as many balconies as the code requires. Chapin noted the pictures should reflect the code requirements. Geoff agreed, and stated he will change this.

Jill noted on page 17 diagram B – noting the inside corner, she asked how does that design benefit pedestrians? She has not come across that. Geoff explained that buildings are required to be placed in block corners to define the street space. Feeling of enclosure on the street is stronger. People are reluctant to cross a "dead space" with no buildings. Public spaces should be designed purposefully. Geoff noted he is still looking for street spaces with green.

Meghan asked about on the bottom of page 17, the pink text denoting 30 inches versus 36 inches are options for Urban Neighborhoods but doesn't know what it references. Geoff said it references A.1.b (Required Building Line) near the top of that page. Geoff stated that the more urban areas the RBL is 24inches wide, but in more residential areas around it, the RBL was enlarged to 36 inches.

Jill noted on page 18, private open area located above second story, does that refer to roof decks or rooftop pools or something that allows views? Geoff said yes.

Geoff noted that on page 20 Diagram F is important – requiring to step the building heights up the grade.

Meghan asked about 5.c on page 19. Why are there a maximum number of pedestrian access gates? Geoff stated that as a rule the street walls will be very short, so you don't want to defeat the purpose of the wall by having a bunch of gates. Taylor stated that staff is considering the requirement for street walls longer than 40ft to have seating built in, so there won't be much room for additional gates. Taylor asked Geoff if they want to be more specific, stating a street wall on a parcel, and if a street wall extends onto a different parcel it would be considered a separate street wall. Geoff stated it may not be necessary because the rules will apply to individual projects (not likely to span parcels).

Jill asked about 6. d. "Curb cuts and driveways shall be located at least 100' (75') away from any block corner, other curb cut, or parking garage entry on the same block face. These requirements are not applicable along alleys." Jill asked why these requirements don't apply to alleys? The curb cuts make it difficult for wheelchair users and people pushing strollers. Taylor noted that the sidewalk will remain constant and not drop down where there is a curb cut. Geoff will double check this with DPW.

Chapin commented that entrances should all be ADA accessible. On page 18, 4. l. "The private open area must be open to the sky except for tree canopy, pergolas porches, and decks." Chapin would like to add "and solar canopies." Geoff said he isn't sure this a good idea because then the private open space wouldn't be open. Chapin would like to make solar canopies to be a hallmark, theme, feature of this area, so he would like them to be visible. Geoff said he was envisioning canopies would be visible. On Page 19, 7b "Parking spaces on the top level of a parking structure shall not count as an additional story against the height limits of this code. Shading and solar structures that are not clearly visible from the street-space are permitted." Chapin wants to strike this out. He thinks solar canopies should be visible from the street. Meghan agrees with Chapin, we should be able to see solar where it is used. Geoff agreed to strike "that are not clearly visible from the street-space."

Chapin commented on page 20 regarding building height. 2.a. states "Building heights are measured to the top of the wall plate or top of the parapet, whichever is higher. (See Diagram

F).” Chapin said if pitched roofs are allowed, the total height may exceed the capacity of the fire department equipment, so does it make sense to specify absolute building height? Geoff stated it’s not necessary because Fire Codes will address that and the buildings will all be sprinkled.

Jill commented on page 22, 2.c. (iv) “Finished floor height shall be no more than 8 inches below the first interior finished floor level of the building.” Jill asked if that eliminates English basements. Geoff said no, this refers only to stoops and front porches.

Jill said she doesn’t like the title “Neighborhood Manners” (page 23) She says it implies there is only one set of values. Geoff said it means you are being considerate of your neighbors. Jill said it sounds loaded, could imply discrimination. Geoff said he is open to other suggestions. Chapin suggested “Neighborhood Respect” or “Privacy.” Shayla suggested “Conduct.” Chapin suggested “Neighborhood Design Concepts” and Matt suggested “Neighborhood Relationships.”

Chapin would like another elevation sketch of a Mansard Roof on page 22. Geoff said he is still looking for one, but also thinks it may not apply directly to a rule on that page.

Meghan said she would like some language encouraging “witch windows,” as an example of distinct regional vernacular architecture that are an endearing feature in Vermont, although she hasn’t seen any in Williston. Could we include those/allow those within the windows section? Geoff said they could specifically mention them. Justin said we will need to make sure they are used in appropriate situations.

Chapin commented on pg 22 e. Bay windows:
(i) “shall have an interior clear width of between 4' and 8' (10') at the façade. Chapin prefers 10ft. For e. iii – at the second story and above, shall project no more than 42" (30") beyond the required building line” Chapin prefers 30 inches. For f. ii – “be enclosed by balustrades, railings, or other means that are 50% opaque or greater;” Chapin thinks this is a very high minimum of opaqueness for a balcony railing and would like the requirement to be less than 50%, perhaps 25%. Chapin noted it takes away from the feeling of openness to the street if it’s much enclosed. Geoff said it serves as filtered privacy and helps to shield the view of people’s stuff. Chapin thinks it should be okay to have a regular railing with balustrades. He said he does not feel that we should be trying to enclose the balconies because it defeats the purpose of the balcony. Geoff said it’s a balance. Chapin also noted the lack of a maximum and that it could be problematic.

Pg 23 – “Dormers for attic stories are permitted so long as they do not break the primary eave line, are individually less than (15) 20' wide, and their collective width is not more than 60 percent of the facade.” Chapin said he prefers dormers to be 10ft maximum not 15 or 20ft, with a collective width not more than 50% of façade. After discussion, they settled on 15ft.

Shayla shares Chapin’s concern about the opaque surround for balconies. Geoff proposed a minimum/maximum instead, 25 to 75% or 20% to 70%.

Taylor noted on page 23 that definition of civic building is defined broadly, and includes not only municipally owned buildings but churches and other privately owned buildings. Geoff stated it means ceremonial buildings like city hall, church, temple but not office buildings. The idea is these are special buildings about community aspirations.

Chapin noted on page 24 the stipulation of not more than 1 ADU per lot. With housing crunch could two be allowed. Jill agrees, and also thinks it’s strange to allow no more than two adults. Meghan said the existing bylaw has some of these requirements, and she thinks nothing could be said about who lives there because that could run into trouble with Fair Housing Laws etc. Geoff

stated there is a logic for having owners on the premises, that ADUs will be self-policing. Chapin stated we could merge these regulations into what is currently in the bylaw. Matt stated the section on ADUs expand on what is allowed today, because it allows a unit in a collection of row homes to have ADUs. He doesn't like the idea of having rules on who can live there. Geoff agreed to strike the rule about no more than two adults.

Meghan commented on page 25 – she doesn't like the bottom left photo. Geoff will strike it. Chapin noted the bottom right photo doesn't seem to meet the floor height requirement, but Geoff said it does meet it.

Geoff noted the "tofu" diagrams on page 26 that show the buildings from behind. They give the developers a heads-up that the buildings can take different shapes. Chapin (at top of pg 27) had a question about the height of the building at the back. Why is back section limited to one story? And why do the tofu diagrams appear to show backs of buildings that are 2 stories? Meghan has the same questions. Geoff said that at the time the document was put together the diagrams used had not caught up with the rules. He stated that by limiting the height in the back it prevents the block from getting too deep and too dark and preserves the block interior for open space. Geoff noted that one story can be up to 18 ft.

3.2 Urban General Frontages /C. Placement/2. Buildable Area
Chapin stated the maximum building footprint should be 15,000sf for 2 d and 20,000sf for e. Private open area should be a minimum of 20% of buildable area. Chapin asked how to account for multiple story residential and the need for enough open area to walk dogs and for kids to play. Should open space requirements be dictated by # units not building footprint? Geoff stated people will need to carry bags. Dogs will be walked in the streets and tree lawns. Geoff said there will be greens within about a 2-minute walk of residences.

Jill asked if there is a way to encourage contiguous open space in the back of buildings, to host benefits that the community wants. Geoff said this also serves as private space. Geoff stated right now the incentive for open space is for stormwater absorption and maybe that function could bring it into the center of these blocks in addition to the interior open space. Meghan asked if the regulating plan could be a tool where that could be required. Geoff is concerned about asking for too much. Some blocks will be able to accommodate this function while other smaller blocks won't be. Meghan suggested incentivizing the open space as public asset through some kind of bonus. Taylor agrees with Meghan. Colocation of private open space over multiple lots could be hard to do if we don't regulate lot sizes. Height bonus could be an incentive. Geoff noted we don't want to sacrifice the private open space – it's critical. Geoff noted he is thinking about additional locations on the regulating plan for public open space.

Chapin noted on page 28 maximum building heights in top left diagram, he is okay with up to 5 stories in the Core but the general sentiment among the Planning Commission is 3-4 stories.

Chapin said Ground floor finished elevations (2.b) should state requirement for ADA on the front of the buildings, and not be delegated to the backs of buildings. Chapin would like explicit language stating the ADA requirement and that there should be lobbies. Geoff stated that will happen anyway to meet federal ADA requirements. Chapin said buildings should be welcoming to all from the street/front entrances. Geoff will add the language.

Shayla stated she supports five stories if it would allow for greater affordability. She thinks it's important to keep equity concerns at the forefront during this process. Meghan agrees. Jill agrees. Chapin supports five in Urban General. Meghan stated that increasing the allowed height as an incentive for affordable housing makes sense not only to get projects to pencil out but for energy conservation. Geoff stated the bonus height is a simple, powerful way to support affordable

housing. This increases the value of the land. Chapin asked should the five floors be linked to affordable housing, and Geoff stated yes, it would be a bonus based on a required percentage of affordable housing. Taylor recommended talking with Regina about inclusionary zoning if that's where the PC is leaning. It might be easier to incorporate that later on after the code has been adopted. Shayla would like to talk about this issue more. Staff will work on getting the PC some information about inclusionary zoning and the options available. Matt suggested Williston staff could put together a survey straw poling the Planning Commission regarding the standards in the remainder of the chapter, and report back next meeting.

Matt asked if there are any other pressing issues that should be addressed now. Chapin noted that classrooms and gyms are not mentioned as uses and wonders where they fall. Geoff stated the intent is to be very broad. Jill mentioned the need to provide public restrooms. Taylor stated that can be discussed in Section 5.

9:00 PM **ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- December 7, 2021, Capital Budget Review
- December 21, 2021, Form Based Code: Regulating Plan; Operating Budget

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