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January 31, 2013

APPROVED

HUNTINGTON PLANNING COMMISSION
Public Hearing on Village Code
Minutes of January 10, 2013

PRESENT: Dana Cummings, Everett Marshall, Knox Cummin, Ginger Lubkowitz, Julia Austin, Gordon Miller, Heather Pembrook

ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: see list at end of minutes

MINUTES: Ginger Lubkowitz/Heidi Racht

After welcoming everyone and introducing the Planning Commission members present, Dana Cummings explained that the Village Code committee, funded through a Municipal Planning Grant, met over the course of several months, worked with a consultant, and produced the current information being reviewed about the proposed Village Code. Paul Drehrer from Newport was the consultant and was expected to give the presentation on the Village Code, but at the last minute, was not able to attend.

Cummings noted that members of the Planning Commission had participated in the meetings at various times in varying degrees. Tom Bailey and Knox Cummin were active; Dana Cummings, Ginger Lubkowitz, Heather Pembrook and Gordon Miller also attended meetings.

He summarized the Village Code approach, explaining that it is "form based" rather than "use based," meaning it encourages development that looks consistent with Huntington's current village structures, while significantly reducing restrictions on use.

Tom Bailey, the head of the Village Code committee, was invited to give further detail. He explained that the existing code does not really allow for development in villages; in fact, most of the structures that are in the village are non-compliant, so changes to them are restricted. He reiterated that the focus is on form and streetscapes, rather than use. A few uses are prohibited, as listed in the documents, but most uses are accepted. Bailey explained that this code removes the minimum lot size requirement, allowing for more flexible building and growth. It sets frontage requirements and build-to-zones, and includes standards that were intended to match is currently on older buildings in Huntington, such as the glazing standards.

Bailey explained the new code has two zones: the Village Core and the Neighborhood Zone. Aaron Worthley then reviewed the maps delineating these two zones, explaining that outside of these two zones, parts of the current Village District would still adhere to the current zoning regulations. The "Village Core" districts are intended to be more mixed-use, including commercial, while the "neighborhood" zone is intended to be more residential. The code also references two new potential streets, one in Huntington Center connecting School Street to the Main Road, across from the Town Clerk's Office, and one in the Lower Village connecting Blackbird Swale and to the Main Road south of Raven Ridge. The one in the Center seems more obvious; the one in the Village is less certain, but they both were envisioned because of the increased connectivity they would offer.

Worthley gave an overview of the documents that detail building structures in each zone, noting that the guidelines are intended to be simple and straightforward. There are also standards and documents for

streets and parking in each district. Development of a block, for example, would have requirements about parking and sidewalks, which helps address issues of traffic calming, accessibility and parking - issues that have come up for discussion in the community over time.

Worthley then went on to explain that the idea of the code is to create, in the core, houses and buildings that are oriented to the street, because houses and buildings oriented to the streets makes for a more people-oriented environment.

Bailey explained that nothing in this code requires anybody to do anything, but it allows more to be done if people want to do it.

Worthley presented images created by architect Harry Hunt (who was hired as part of the grant) that show existing structures and possibilities under the existing code compared with infill possibilities with the new Village Code. One of the images includes the most dramatic case of a big box store being built under the current scenario.

In answer to a question from Terry Boyle if there would be a restriction on a Wal-Mart coming in, Worthley explained that there would be no restriction on the store per se, but the restriction would be on how it looked. The entrances would have to be sited in a certain way, the parking would have to be in the back, etc. Megs Keir inquired as to whether or not a building like the new grocery store in Richmond would be permitted, with entrances in both the front and back. Bailey added that the two-story requirement would likely keep big-box stores out altogether.

Huntington Zoning Administrative Officer Ed Hanson asked if all developments in the core district would be subject to review by the town's regulatory board. Bailey replied that most would go through the Zoning Administrator, with limited uses requiring Conditional Approval. The result would be a heavier load for the Zoning Administrator, but the use permits would not be required because almost all uses would be acceptable.

Megs Keir asked if someone wanted to change use for their building, would they need to go through the Zoning Administrator and Bailey responded that because almost all uses are permitted, there would be no need to go through the Zoning Administrator. The existing Performance Standards would apply.

Bailey noted that this proposed document has minimal architectural requirements. Gabled roofs for example are encouraged, but not mandated. Discussion of the value of encouragement instead of hard rules ensued with regards to building design, specifically two stories and roof pitches. Duncan Keir noted that there are many roofs in the existing village that are not gabled.

The public comment phase of the hearing was announced.

David Worthley noted the Lower Village does not have much land available for building. He asked if an inventory had been done as to how many lots there could be. Aaron Worthley responded that more room for infill exists in the Neighborhood District, rather than the Core District. He added that more land for building exists, in general, in the Huntington Center Core District than the Lower Village Core District.

Terry Boyle brought up the issue of water/wasterwater capacity, if this concept is to move forward in

Huntington. Dana Cummings replied that, yes, the two go hand-in-hand.

Sarah Jane Williamson asked if small houses could be built behind some of these other houses even if they can't all be on the road. Knox Cummin explained that, in the code as written, the lot could not be subdivided but an accessory apartment could be built. Bailey added that there is a restriction of two residential buildings per lot, though each lot could have up to five units (after five, Conditional Approval is needed).

Dean Grover asked if the stream setbacks would apply. Heather Pembroke answered that existing stream setbacks would apply.

Grover then asked for someone to speak to parking and traffic calming. Aaron Worthley explained that narrower streets, parallel parking, and activity closer to traffic has a natural calming effect on traffic going through. A good example is Plainfield, he said, where these concepts seem to work. Street standards in this Village Code include parallel parking on the streets; on-lot parking is behind the house or requires screening. Bailey said that this plan allows for and encourages shared parking. He went on, the current zoning has specific parking space requirements that are very restrictive.

Rich LaChapelle had two questions: 1) Would there be a maximum lot size in the village (the answer was no) and 2) Noting that he finds the claim of lifting restrictions as suspicious, he asked if this was being pushed on the town from an outside force or the CCRPC. Tom Bailey answered that he and Gordon Miller (both Huntington residents) attended a session on Form Based Code where Paul Dreher spoke, they both thought it sounded interesting, they then heard of grants available, applied, and got the grant. Bailey said he liked the idea of working with Dreher because he was from Newport and would have more of a sense of how to make this work for a small Vermont town.

Mark Smith commented that he really liked this work, felt like it was a real step ahead and helped promote community, which is at the core of Vermont villages.

Morris Knight noted that, as one who lives in the village, he moved here from Burlington and if he wanted more density he would move back there. Being close to the road is not great, he stated. He asked if the town could put constraints on the amount of development, perhaps by limiting the number of permits per year, being mindful of impact on schools, etc.

Jeanine Carr said she was on the Planning Commission and believes that the good of the community should be focus of commission, not individual desires. She is not sure that increased density in the village is consistent with maintaining the quality of life for those who live in the village. She also said she wondered about the feasibility for how some of these things would work financially.

Knox Cummin noted that having more people in the village will help sustain businesses like Beaudry's Store and the Post Office.

Debbie Worthley asked if there are other small towns that are trying to use form based code; Tom Bailey noted that Huntington is the smallest.

Sarah Jane Williamson asked how the boundaries of the core vs. the neighborhood were drawn; Aaron

Worthley explained it was an iterative process and happened over many meetings and many edits.

Melissa Hoffman said that the mixed-use space, public walkways, etc, resonates with her, but that it suggests commercial activity. Is that what is intended? Worthley said that the idea is to allow for more commercial development, even if it doesn't happen soon. Hoffman also said that the glazing requirements in particular seem odd. Bailey responded that they match what is already in the Villages.

Randy Richland observed that he doesn't see where new structures in the Core Village can go. Houses are close to the road because they had to be. He suggested that the best case scenario is that the put a stop sign on both ends of the town to slow down the cars.

Rich Lachapelle said that he understands it is fashionable to have density in the village, but is the purpose of parking on the streets traffic calming? Dana Cummings replied, that as Paul Dreher had said, when development is oriented to the public realm, it provides people places to walk, connectivity, circulation.

Megs Keir said that she had gone on one of the guided walks through the Lower Village with Dreher and others. She described her sense that it is not just the buildings but also the spaces between the buildings that define the village. She said she is not comfortable with the requirement to have minimum structure requirements of two-story houses in the village minimum and 1.5 in the neighborhood. Much discussion ensued on this point. Keir then suggested that the HPC should look at depth of lots. The question was raised, why not allow driveways to structures in the back, with subdivision?

Terry Boyle asked that the Commission to consider the point of allowing for development in the back of the deep lots, and he inquired about the civic/municipal investment that would ultimately be required to create and maintain parking and sidewalks.

Mark Smith asked where this goes next. Dana explained that the commission will likely consider revisions, have more public hearings, and then send it to the Selectboard which would likely send it to hearing too. Mark also asked how would this impact people who live in the outer districts. Tom responded that a more vibrant village center would be a benefit to the whole community. Mark agreed that the implications were town-wide; you change the village, you change the town, you change its mindset, noting that it is important to think of this as a full community model.

Dean Grover noted that parking and activity at Beaudry's Store creates traffic Calming. Traffic slows down there because it has to. He also said that none of this can happen without movement on water/wasterwater capacity.

Heather Pembroke noted that she feels that some of the concepts in this are workable - she may not necessarily want a road between her house and her chicken coop as envisioned, but maybe a walking path could go there to create more connectivity in her neighborhood.

Morris Knight asked about the traffic calming study that was done long ago, saying that much of this comes back to traffic. He asked that the study be reviewed in conjunction with the Village Code work.

Sarah Jane Williamson added that she sympathizes with the challenges of building and being on the

road, but she does think that this model, with more activity on the street, will really close the traffic. She recommended that the Commission reexamine the two-story building requirement and explore ways to build buildings behind buildings.

Duncan Keir said that he agrees with clustering development to minimize sprawl and to minimize environmental impact, but he is not a fan of the form-based requirements, which cross the line of individual personal property rights. He wondered if the Commission could “just tweak” the existing regulations, which don't encourage density because of the lot requirements and setbacks.

Aaron Worthley made a personal comment that, initially, he was skeptical too of the form-based requirements, but that he realized that, “If we just change a few things here and there, we are setting up the path for a lot of things that we likely don't want.”

Heidi Racht commented that she would like to see pedestrian paths develop as part of the outcome of this. Hopefully, that could be a little piece that moves forward should the town not embrace the whole vision.

Tom Bailey invited people to send further comments to the Commission and noted that he was pleased with the turnout and participation at the meeting.

David Worthley commented that he has to “remind myself that this is a 50 to 100-year plan.” He said that it seems to make sense in that context, it will take time to develop, it is a long-range plan, and he “thinks it is good.”

Throughout the meeting, comparables were raised with participants noting that they did not want Huntington to look like Winooski or Rutland. Dana Cummings commented at this point in the meeting, that Winooski and Rutland are not the comparables for Huntington. He said he thought Richmond is really more what this might allow for.

Terry Boyle noted that 10 years ago the Commission talked about something similar, dividing the villages into two districts. That proposal was met with more opposition, so there was no change. He said he was glad to see so many people at this discussion.

The hearing ended with Dana Cummings observing that the Commission had much to consider as it moves forward with the Town Plan.

UNAPPROVED MINUTES TO THE HPC: January 13, 2013

MINUTES APPROVED: January 28, 2013

APPROVED MINUTES TO THE TOWN CLERK: January 31, 2013

Meeting participants:

Aaron Worthley	Megs Keir	Duncan Keir	Terry Boyle	Mark Smith
Jeanine Carr	Jeffrey Beaulieu	Jim Christiansen	David Rice	Cathleen Gent
Richard Lachapelle	Morris Knight	Dean Grover	Shawn Smith	Melissa Hoffman
Dori Barton	Debbie Worthley	David Worthley	Barbara Elliott	Ryan Elliott
Ed Hanson	Carol Wildman	Sarah Jane Williamson	Randy Richland	Lorrie Richland
Paul Finnerty	Brian Hayes	and probably others who didn't sign in and didn't speak		