

UNDERHILL PLANNING COMMISSION

Wednesday, February 1, 2017 6:30 PM

Minutes

Planning Commissioners Present: Vice Chair Carolyn Gregson, Andrea Phillips, Catherine Kearns, David Edson, Pat Lamphere

Staff/Municipal Representatives Present: Andrew Strniste, Planning Director

Others Present: Stacy Turkos, Underhill Resident; Richard Amore, Representative from the Department of Housing & Community Development

[6:30] The Planning Commission convened at Underhill Town Hall at 6:30pm.

[6:37] Vice Chair C. Gregson called the meeting to order.

[6:37] Vice Chair C. Gregson introduced the guest presenter, Richard Amore, from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, who was visiting from Montpelier to give a **presentation about obtaining Village Center Designation for Underhill Center**. He opened up his presentation by asking for introductions.

[6:40] Mr. Amore began his presentation by providing an overview of village center characteristics in the State of Vermont, and **why the State cares about village centers**. He proceeded to explain what the village center designation entails, and how it **applies to existing civic and commercial buildings**. Afterward, Mr. Amore provided examples of village centers throughout the State, and what types of property qualify to be within a village center boundary. He explained that usually the boundaries are anchored by civic buildings and that the designation is not so much geared towards single-family residences; however, the boundary is amendable in the future to allow for future developers to take advantage of the incentives. Mr. Amore then provided an explanation of the application process, as well as the submission requirements. Shortly thereafter, he explained that village center designations require renewal every five years, and once designated, the Town Plan needs to reflect that.

[6:52] Mr. Amore then began a discussion about the **types of benefits a community can receive by obtaining village center designation**. A brief discussion occurred about the targeted technical assistance benefit, where Commissioner Kearns' question was clarified that the State would assist in coordinating the right type of assistance provided to those communities in the program. Mr. Amore proceeded to provide an overview of **other benefits** communities can receive from being in the program, **which included priority for state grants, priority for locating of state facilities, tax credits, and the neighborhood development area designation**. Mr. Amore went into more depth regarding tax credits and explained that the purpose of the tax credits would be to stimulate investments; however, the credits were only available to income producing property (i.e. commercial properties and multi-family housing properties).

[7:02] A discussion ensued about **how perspective developers could use this program**, in which Mr. Amore responded that Staff would ideally be advising the perspective developers about the program, and would direct them towards the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to discuss those opportunities. Commissioner Lamphere asked if the tax credits could help alleviate the burden caused by the installation of water/wastewater systems. Mr. Amore responded that the tax credits do not; however, DHCD can assist by providing the right contacts to review possible infrastructure improvements. Mr. Amore proceeded by reviewing the application requirements and boundary map requirements. He then provided the

Commission handouts. Vice Chair C. Gregson asked if affordable housing/section 8 housing could receive tax credits, which Mr. Amore responded in the affirmative.

[7:20] After Mr. Amore's presentation, Staff Member Strniste began a discussion on **why the village center designation for Underhill Center could be a catalyst in creating a new zoning district or overlay district for Underhill Center**. He continued to explain that after the joint meeting with the Development Review Board, most members of both Boards were open to the idea of less restrictive subdivision regulations for Underhill Center, and therefore, the Planning Commission should pursue the creation of a new zoning district. Staff Member Strniste then provided an explanation of what a possible zoning district could look like using presentation materials from last meeting, specifically the maps containing the number of nonconforming lots in and around Underhill Center. A short discussion ensued about the septic/well problems within the center and how that affects development.

[7:33] Vice Chair C. Gregson began a **discussion about density**. She stated that she did not think she could proceed with her assigned task until the density issue was resolved, as she did not know if accessory apartments should be considered for density purposes. Commissioner Lamphere explain that he and Commissioner Phillips have contemplated proposing the idea of identifying which lots can support multiple dwelling units, and assigning the number of dwelling units based on a lot's potential developability, rather than assigning an arbitrary number which is derived from acreage. For clarification purposes, Commissioner Lamphere stated that minimum acreage would still be required for subdivision purposes; however, when determining how many dwelling units can be located on a parcel, that number would be determined by the developability of the land. Commissioner Lamphere proceeded to explain that the Town has the most density where it is least supported (e.g. in Underhill Center).

[7:37] Vice Chair C. Gregson reiterated that **the Commission should not proceed with their task until the density issue was resolved**, and also stated that acreage usually ties in with rural development, and therefore, wondered how the abovementioned approach would come into play. Commissioner Lamphere and Commissioner Phillips summarized **that the water/soil type could be a factor in determining housing**, as the land should determine how many units are allowed on a particular lot. Staff Member Strniste stated that he has only seen one zoning ordinance that takes developability into consideration when looking at density, and that was in North Dakota. He then proceeded to explain that this new way of viewing density could be an enormous undertaking. Vice Chair C. Gregson concluded that this approach could significantly change the rural characteristics of the Town.

[7:47] Staff Member Strniste began a discussion about **density bonuses and how they can be beneficial**. He used an upcoming Development Review Board docket item to illustrate why density bonuses are helpful to landowners. He then proposed that the Planning Commission should explore keeping density bonuses, and restrict which districts could take advantage of them.

[7:54] Staff Member Strniste and Vice Chair C. Gregson devised a plan for the next Planning Commission meeting to be held on February 15, where all members present stated they would be able to attend. They stated that the **Commissioners should read Article IX of the Land Use & Development Regulations, specifically the sections regarding bonus densities**.

[8:02] **Vice Chair C. Gregson asked for a motion to adjourn**. Commissioner Phillips moved to accept the motion and Commissioner Kearns seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted By:
Andrew Strniste, Planning Director

The minutes of the February 1, 2017 meeting were accepted this 20 day of July, 2017.

Carolyn Gregson
Vice Chair Carolyn Gregson, Planning Commission Chair