

Town of Bristol
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Tuesday, January 21, 2025
Meeting Minutes
DRAFT

Members Present: Kevin Hanson, Melissa Hernandez, Chanin Hill, John Moyers, Rob Rooker
Staff Present: AZ Larsen, Zoning and Planning Administrator
Others Present: Isiah Bennett, Oscar DeFrancis, Aidan DeLorenzo, Jack Dyer, Riley Foushee, Helena Gu, Hugh Hutchinson, Madison Kim, Addie Lentzner, Sherman Liu, Michael Matheson, Emma McNealy, Joe Morsman, Eliane Odefey, Jim Quaglino, Xander Swann, Alden Tebbetts, Jessica Teets, Herb Wilson

I. Call to Order: Kevin Hanson called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm. The meeting was held in person and via ZOOM.

II. Review agenda for additions, removal, or adjustment of any items per 1 V.S.A. 18 §312(d)(3)(A) and implicit approval

No changes were made to the agenda.

III. Public Comment

No comments were offered.

IV. Continuing Business

Discussion: Student Project Update

The four student groups, who are looking into different housing-related issues for the PC, provided updates on their work.

The group studying ways to increase density through the use of existing structures outlined that they have been investigating potential changes to the UDRs, available funding programs, and non-financial barriers to increasing density. They reviewed their findings:

- Regulations
 - Increase units per acre to allow for smaller dwellings to accommodate declining household sizes
 - Importance of multi-family dwellings indicates that it would be beneficial to expedite the review process to have it take less time and be more affordable
 - An expansion of mixed-use zones and provision for more allowable uses
- Funding
 - VHIP prioritizes rehabilitation projects, with amounts up to \$50K available
 - Research still needed regarding what a rehab would typically cost
 - Units must rent at market rates
 - Dwelling units must be brought to code
 - VT Low Income Housing Credit – this is for larger developers; the group is looking for similar programs for individuals
 - Promotion/awareness of these programs is needed
- Non-financial barriers
 - Education regarding resources is needed for both developers and homeowners
 - PC might serve in an advisory role to assist with designing ADUs
 - Identify properties that would benefit from reuse – direct outreach to those property owners

The group acknowledged that ways to encourage homeowners to add new dwelling space on their property is something that needs more exploration. They indicated that they will next be meeting with John Moyers and Jim Mendall (Bristol Co-Housing), reviewing nearby zoning, participating in a walking audit of Bristol's village areas, and creating an 'adaptive use' campaign.

John suggested figures of \$200 to \$300/square foot for renovation costs. Kevin noted that Katie Meyers of the ACRPC would be a helpful resource, as well as Tom Wells for some local perspective. He also pointed out that Vergennes and Middlebury regulations might be useful, particularly Vergennes as its size is similar to Bristol's.

Next up was the group working on the topic of infill development. They presented a map they had created of current structures within the core Bristol area, and indicated that they had been consulting with local experts in Bristol and Hinesburg. Locating potential sites for infill, and presenting them through the use of GIS is one primary focus of this group; a second main focus is outlining the attitudes of Bristol residents regarding potential infill in Town.

On the map created by the group, they pointed out that there are potential locations for further development along some of the peripheries of current residential zones, particularly in the HDR area. Group members explained that their work is focused on ADU development, although some of the sites they identified may be suitable for multi-unit dwellings.

The students reported that they had participated in a tour of Bristol with AZ and had also met with Elise Shanbacker of Addiston Housing Works, who had emphasized the need for multi-unit dwellings. Discussions had also taken place with local residents regarding the permitting and building of ADUs, including the Garfield Street landowner and a neighboring property owner, where a recent ADU build raised some concerns in Town regarding related issues. They found that most residents have positive attitudes regarding ADU development, but that support includes caution regarding what is built falls within accepted community standards. It was expressed that communication with neighbors is important when considering the addition of an ADU. Size, appearance, and use were noted as the three main concerns to be addressed. Support by local residents was expressed for the new size and height regulations included in the recently approved iteration of the UDRs, but a need for more communication, education, and outreach was emphasized.

The group members also noted that ADUs are best suited in the downtown area, where there is pedestrian access to services. They also pointed to financial barriers, including that VHIP is not a suitable source of support for most, as ADUs locally are often put in place to house family member(s).

Next steps to be completed by this group include collecting and collating responses to an ADU-focused survey they have created, integrating more information into the GIS mapping they are working on, and gathering more input from stakeholders and experts, including discussions of potential regulation changes.

Kevin noted the VT statutory allowances for SFRs, ADUs, and duplexes, and also mentioned a survey completed by the PC in consultation with ACRPC when working on bylaw modernization; the information gathered to identify dwellings of various types of the Village Planning Area might be helpful. AZ suggested that mapping include a layer noting septic soil suitability.

Students exploring the topic of wastewater infrastructure presented their findings, explaining that they are working to evaluate the existing system's status as well as to determine how there might be affordable expansion of wastewater capacity. They have primarily focused on decentralized systems, due in part to the availability of suitable soils in Bristol; these clustered/shared systems have been found to be cost effective. Bristol Cohousing was pointed out as an example, and other sites where this type of solution might be possible were noted.

The group outlined that a wastewater treatment facility would allow for much greater capacity, but also explained that this would entail a multi-million dollar project. Some potential sources of funding were outlined. They next indicated that the current system which is operating in Bristol has available capacity, and that there is some potential for upgrades that would allow for expansion of this system.

Greywater systems and other alternative solutions were presented, including source reduction strategies such as low flow fixtures, composting systems, and greywater being treated separately from other wastewater. The group will be investigating greywater in more depth, including looking into funding sources for private projects and exploring feasibility with Jill Marsano and further discussions with Elise.

The students addressing the topic of community education presented some of their findings and outlined some suggested steps to be taken that would aid in addressing the legitimate concerns raised around the issue of increasing residential density. They explained that they had done some research, including meeting with various experts/stakeholders, and found that there is plenty of support for increased development but there is often little that is understood regarding regulations and the permit notification process.

In considering how best to work toward more proactive communication – particularly regarding aspects of new construction such as noise pollution, light pollution, parking, and intrusive window placement – the group has decided to initiate work on an ADU development guide outlining some useful strategies, such as using landscaping to mitigate impacts. The group also noted that a one-page explanation of the permitting/appeals process would be useful, and that they are looking into identifying some suitable methods for distributing both pieces of information.

Next steps to be taken by this group include researching pre-approved programs, designing the proposed literature, and developing an education and outreach plan.

Kevin pointed out the distinction between different dwelling types: SFR, multi-unit, ADU; he noted that it might be explored what level of review is needed for each of these. He also spoke of concerns raised regarding permit noticing/posting requirements.

PC members thanked the group for their efforts and indicated that they are looking forward to the final reports.

V. New Business

Discussion: Interim Bylaw Re EV Chargers

AZ explained that they are proposing an Interim Bylaw related to the installation of EV chargers, and provided an outline of the statutory allowance for Interim Bylaws and the related adoption process, which allows for an up to two-year implementation of the regulation approved by the Selectboard. AZ

explained that there are at least two installations of chargers that are in the planning phase, and as this infrastructure is not mentioned in the current iteration of the UDRs, it will be difficult to permit those installations.

AZ outlined the proposed definitions, parking and signage requirements, performance standards, and permitted/site plan required/prohibited zoning districts contained in the draft language, noting that Level 1 chargers would be exempt from permitting.

PC members offered some input on the proposal, noting that there should be consideration of the potential for a multi-charger installation, that maintenance responsibilities be outlined, and that current parking limitations be taken into account. A differentiation between personal use and public use Level 2 chargers was also indicated as important.

Rob pointed out that the definition of service station does not include the form of vehicle fuel being provided, and that a larger installation of chargers might fall into this use category, with some additional standards for approval outlined.

Based on the feedback received, AZ will draft an updated proposal for further discussion.

VI. Administrative Matters

Approval of Minutes – The minutes of November 19, 2024 and January 9, 2025 were approved.

Zoning Report – AZ reported that they are working with Freeda on ideas for MPG work so that an application can be submitted by March; topics being considered are communications and online GIS availability. Az also noted that the fee changes they outlined have been approved by the Selectboard, and that the Selectboard has also approved that Access Permits will be coordinated through the Zoning Office. They indicated that they have been in touch with Department Heads regarding the upcoming Town Plan update, and outlined upcoming DRB reviews.

VII. Public Comment

No public comment was offered.

VIII. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Chamberlin, Recording Secretary