

Town of Bristol
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Thursday, January 30, 2025
Meeting Minutes

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, 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: Rob Rooker called the meeting to order at 6:05 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. Continuing Business

Discussion: Final Research Presentations – Middlebury Students

Infrastructure group – these students reported on how to expand wastewater management in an affordable and sustainable manner to support housing development.

- Current state – Bristol’s current community system is generally in good shape, but does have a high rate of organic input which is beyond the capacity of the system. Addressing this would allow for about twice the volume of input than what is currently treated. Bristol also has generally good soils for the development of individual or shared wastewater (septic) systems.
- Problems – new septic systems require engineering, and can be expensive. Expansion of the municipal system would be very costly and take a long time to develop.
- Solutions –
 - Decentralized, shared, clustered systems
 - Help to reduce the cost for individual homeowners
 - Some potential sites identified
 - Funding for long-term municipal expansion
 - Grant and loan possibilities
 - Source reduction strategies
 - Incentivize FOG traps
 - Water saving fixtures
 - Greywater systems for new developments

Increasing density without new construction – this group explained that initially their intent was to focus on beneficial changes to zoning regulations, but upon realizing that Bristol’s regulations already favor the type of development they were investigating, it was decided to focus instead on locating funding sources and finding ways to increase the willingness of property owners to make suitable changes. The students expressed that any changes to zoning would likely be more relevant to infill development rather than rehabbing existing structures.

First, the students explained what situations might provide potential for repurposing existing structures, providing examples such as making more efficient use of larger homes as the population ages, exploring the potential for programs such as Home Share Vermont, reconfiguring larger apartments into multiple units, and finding or creating incentives to promote such strategies for increasing density in larger

dwelling. They also providing information on creating accessible resources for those wishing to develop ADUs, and noted that regulation of Short-Term Rentals (STR) may at some point be determined to be useful in helping to ensure that ADUs are available to house people long-term.

Next, this group presented some information regarding funding programs that could help to move these efforts along, mentioning VHIP 2.0 and Vermont weatherization efforts. They also pointed to some case studies in Vermont, such as Montpelier's housing trust fund and the Rutland community development program, mentioning that an STR fee or Local Options Tax may provide some funding for Bristol.

Some challenges were outlined next, including that there is limited housing stock available for rehabbing, that the associated construction often requires temporary displacement of current residents, and that STRs can be a more profitable investment.

In conclusion, the group noted that rehabbing is essential for preserving and making available older housing stock, that vertical growth should be considered as well, and that finding ways to incentivize an increase in the number of housing units in existing structures is important for increasing the willingness of property owners to do so. They indicated that, while funding options do exist, they generally are not sufficient for project completion.

Infill strategies for increasing housing – the students looking into this topic reported on their findings and presented the GIS mapping work they had completed as part of the project.

The information included in the GIS maps was outlined, with an explanation that small scale additions such as ADUs would be suitable for the downtown, more densely built up, area. It was indicated that there is more potential for some larger development projects on the borders of the already dense areas, areas suitable for PUDs as well as cohousing situations, providing amenities such as common spaces and suitable for both young working people as well as elderly citizens looking to downsize. Some specific locations were pointed out, as well as images from various case studies the group had investigated.

This group had also conducted a community survey regarding infill. Results indicate that there is general support for infill developments, but that how-to guides would be helpful for those adding ADUs and wanting to address concerns both related to the cost of construction and addressing aesthetic concerns of neighboring homeowners. Group members spoke of preapproved design galleries which have been successfully implemented in other areas.

In response to questions, the students noted that they had not looked into the Rocky Dale area, as they were focusing on areas with pedestrian access to amenities and connection to the Town's water supply. They confirmed that tiny homes would be a suitable form of development for some areas.

The group offered to provide any map updates that the PC felt might be useful.

Points made by PC members included that the number of dwelling units per parcel is another strategy for determining density – one that does not look directly at footprints, that duplexes may be an important part of the solution, and that the Town's ADU regulations could be made more permissive.

Community education regarding the need for increased housing and how to allow for it – this group noted that there is generally broad support for housing, and that the focus of educational efforts would best be directed to the property owners and neighbors of individual projects. They reported on

conversations with various relevant parties, and presented ideas for flyers, permit noticing, access to pre-planned projects, and educational events.

Development of two education flyers, primarily focused on smaller development such as ADUs, was outlined: one suggestion was for a one-page summary of the permitting process to be presented as a flowsheet, the other was for a one-page information sheet emphasizing the benefits of communication when working on a new housing structure and hoping to keep neighbors happy about the project.

Recommendations for permit noticing changes made by this group included increasing the size of the notice to a minimum of 11 x 17, mailing a copy to neighbors, and changing the posting requirements to include that those notices be posted within five feet of the adjacent ROW.

A proposal was also included in this group's recommendations for implementing a pre-planned ADU project, which would include a set of design plans developed to fit both Bristol's zoning regulations as well as to help prevent the raising of concerns over aesthetic issues. Benefits would include lower cost of plans, time saving, increased transparency, and helping to maintain neighborhood character.

Educational strategies outlined by this group included tabling at existing events and tours of successful implementations of housing development.

The PC members thanked the students for their efforts, indicating that the information provided will be useful as they move forward with planning work.

IV. Public Comment

Jim Quaglino offered some comments regarding vertical expansion, which he noted was not likely in Bristol, and wastewater needs being critical to increased development.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:28 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Chamberlin, Recording Secretary