



Brattleboro Planning Services

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Brattleboro Planning Commission

Special Meeting

Monday, May 18, 2020

6:00 PM

Meeting Minutes

NOTE: Per the “Stay home – Stay Safe” order issued by governor Scoot, this meeting was held with no physical location using GoToMeeting.

Planning Commissioners: Felicity Ratte, Tom Mosakowski, Josh Steele, Kathy Urffer, Jessica Gelter and Prudence Mackinney

Absent: Kate Audlin

Staff: Sue Fillion and Andrew Graminski

A. Meeting called to Order

F. Ratte called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

B. Announcements

S. Fillion made an announcement about an upcoming webinar through Vermont’s Agency of Commerce and Community Development on housing and zoning that the planning commission might be interest in attending. S. Fillion also made an announcement that planning staff are working on creating a housing rental survey to get a sense of the town’s rental housing situation.

C. Public Comments

There were no public comments made.

D. Approve Minutes of M, 2020 Meeting

P. Mackinney made a motion to approve minutes, seconded by T. Mosakowski. Minutes were passed.

E. Covid-19 and Planning Issues

At the last meeting, commissioners agreed to draft a letter that would be sent to the Selectboard on items that commission would like to see pursued to help businesses in Brattleboro succeed during Covid-19. After a draft letter was sent around to commissioners, F. Ratte mentioned that at this meeting, a vote would need to be taken to approve the submittal of the letter to the selectboard. The commission first agreed to vote on the content of the letter and then vote on the letter all together. T. Mosakowski made a motion to discuss the content of the letter before a general vote was taken to approve the submittal of the letter. J. Gelter seconded and the motion was passed by the commission.

The commission discussed what the content of the letter should be as the draft letter had content which not all of the commissioner agree should be included. The commission discussed if the letter should include repealing the 1% option tax and if it's within the purview of the commission to back an initiative like that. The commission discussed what government body has the power to repeal such tax. The commission got confirmation from a selectboard member that it's the body that created the tax which has the power to repeal it. In the case of the 1% tax, it is Representative Town Meeting and that the Selectboard cannot repeal the tax. The commission agreed to remove repealing the 1% tax option from the letter as that would not be in the purview of the selectboard to make the ultimate decision.

S. Fillion made a comment that she feels some of the content items in the draft letter and items being discussed at the meeting are not in the purview of the planning commission. Another commissioner responded by saying how will other bodies and the public feel about the letter if the content included is not within the charge and purview of the planning commission. A. Graminski mentioned that the letter could be more impactful if the content included items that the planning commission does have charge with. A few commissioners brought up the idea of collecting data from businesses in Brattleboro to see where they need help and how long they think they can keep going before having to throw in the towel. F. Ratte said that it is within the charge of the planning commission to take on endeavors that have to do with collecting data about economic development. Commissioners agreed that there should be a few sentences in the letter asking if the selectboard would think it would be helpful if the planning commission collected data from Brattleboro business on their current situations during Covid-19.

The last content item which was discussed was about parking in downtown. Ideas included making parking free, to opening up parking spaces for outdoor dining and retail. Some commissioners had concerns making parking free downtown would encourage more car traffic and discourage making downtown more walkable during these times. Other commissioners thought that getting rid of parking on main street would make main street business upset and that having those parking spaces helps their businesses economically. A. Graminski showed the commission an image from an online article showing a street with modifications to adhere to social distancing guidelines but allow businesses to expand onto the sidewalks and on street parking spots. The commission liked the image and proposed to include it in the letter to the selectboard stating that the commission backs ideas of the image and that they should be considered by the selectboard for something similar to be implemented by the Town.

The commission agree with the final content of the letter and voted to have it submitted to the selectboard after a second round of review and edits.

F. Planning Values Review

This item was partially discussed in item G, subitem a.

G. Land Use Amendments

a. Interim Ordinance proposals

Planning staff have been working on creating an emergency interim ordinance to a few sections of Brattleboro's Land Use and Development Regulations. S. Fillion gave a brief rundown of what the process looks like to enact such ordinance and how long an emergency ordinance lasts (2 years). The regulations which would be modified include LUR sections 302. D and 301. E.

The modifications to LUR section 302. D Outdoor Food Service and Retail Emergency includes making site plan review administrative instead of approval through the Development Review Board and an establishment will just need to provide a drawing or illustration that depicts the outdoor area that is proposed to the planning department would in turn issue them a permit without fees.

The commission discussed what should happen with bars and drinking places and how they should be impacted by this interim ordinance. After discussion of the values, it was agreed that the interim regulations should apply to any bar or drinking place that gets the appropriate state liquor license.

The commission made two motions to approve the emergency interim ordinance. T. Mosakowski made a motion to approve the interim regulation 302.D as amended, seconded by J. Gelter. T. Mosakowski also made a motion to approve interim regulation 301. E as amended, seconded by K. Urffer. Both motions passed. Staff will complete interim ordinance text and will pass it on to Town Manager and Selectboard.

b. Infill Housing

Due to time, this item was tabled to a future meeting.

H. Next Meeting

Next meeting will be held on June 1, 2020 at 6 PM.

I. Adjourn

J Steele made a motion to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by P. Mackinney. Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.