



# Brattleboro Planning Services

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230 Main Street, Suite 202 • Brattleboro, Vermont 05301  
Phone 802-251-8154 • [www.brattleboro.org/planning](http://www.brattleboro.org/planning)

## Brattleboro Planning Commission

Monday, May 4, 2020  
Meeting Minutes

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**Planning Commissioners:** Felicity Ratte, Tom Mosakowski, Josh Steele, Kate Audlin, Jessica Gelter and Prudence Mackinney

**Excused:** Kathy Urffer

**Staff:** Sue Fillion and Andrew Graminski

**A. Meeting called to Order**

F. Ratte called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

**B. Announcements**

S. Fillion announced that Town Offices are being staffed at a reduced level. Members of the public can come into the building by appointment but are encouraged to continue to conduct business by phone or email. Members of the public will have to wear masks in the building. If they do not have a mask, a mask will be provided to them. Staff will also be wearing masks when interacting with the public or any other town employee.

**C. Public Comments**

No public comment.

**D. Approve Minutes of March 2, 2020 Meeting**

T. Mosakowski made a motion to approve minutes with edits to the language on page 3 of the minutes. Motion was seconded by P. Mackinney. Minutes were passed 6-0.

**E. Covid-19 and Planning Issues**

F. Ratte opened up the discussion of planning and COVID-19 and suggested that this is a time that the Planning Commission could brainstorm where to put some energy depending where the discussion goes.

Commissioners put forth the following ideas:

- Health and safety tied to economic development and the reopening of businesses – sanitizing stations, sidewalk paintings remind people to stay six feet apart.
- Requiring public buildings to have doors that open without using hands in the Land Use Regs
- opening up sidewalks for restaurants and drink service so that a restaurant's capacity is not reduced
- shutting down roads and allowing restaurants to take over the streets
- cordon off bike lanes on roads as an experiment because traffic volumes are less (like Burlington)

- utilizing the top deck of the parking garage for overflow restaurant seating

S. Fillion talked about some of the challenges to these ideas including Main Street being a State road, ADA requirements, need for physical barriers, the way that weight is distributed in the parking garage (cars vs. people – there is a difference),

Other ideas from Commissioners included making parking free for a period of time downtown to attract more people to help with the businesses on main street. Some suggested compiling information from the downtown parking study and talk to downtown business about how the town, other businesses and those who use downtown would respond to an extended change to free parking in the downtown area.

There were discussions about suggesting eliminating the local option tax. There was idea to replace it with an opt-in “round up” program to support the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance(DBA). Other suggestions included hiring Brattleboro residents and companies only (or at least prioritizing in the RFP process), providing free public WIFI, more frequent cleaning of sidewalks, roadsides and parking areas and support downtown beautification projects. It was suggested to look into rent stabilization.

There was a suggestion to find ways to help those that may work from home, including ensuring that there aren't land use regulation barriers and expanding broadband.

The Commission discussed ideas centered around land use and development including investigating a vacancy tax or equivalent for unused or underused properties. Another tax that the commission thought would be useful to research included an equitable implementation of a “use tax” or similar tax for properties that are more of a burden on public services than those more centrally located and near services like water and sewer. The commission at a future meeting will take a look at zoning recommendations brought by staff to increase infill and other development in already developed areas of town. The commission thought checking in with Groundworks Collaborative to see if there is anything the commission can do to support new initiatives would be helpful and within their realm of duties.

There was discussion on whether to survey existing businesses to see how they are doing at this time to help inform economic recovery. It was noted that the BDCC survey had a low Brattleboro response. S. Fillion expressed concern about duplicating work and S. Fillion said that there needs to be a clear reason to survey the businesses. She said that staff could not prioritize a survey at this time.

Some commissioners asked how the commission as a whole should move forward with the items discussed. As the Planning Commission only make policy recommendation, S. Fillion suggested writing a letter to the Selectboard to see if they wanted to direct the Planning Commission with those topics they felt would be useful to them. A few commissioners will work on a draft letter. The commission agreed to meet again for a special meeting on Monday May 18, 2020 at 6:00 PM.

There was a brief discussion of using subcommittees to move work along in between meetings.

## **F. Planning Values Review**

Due time, this was tabled to a future meeting.

**G. Land Use Amendments**

Due time, this was tabled to a future meeting.

**H. Adjourn**

J. Gelter made a motion to adjourn meeting which was seconded by J. Steele. Meeting was adjourned at 8:05 PM.