Brattleboro Planning Services

230 Main Street, Suite 202 ▪ Brattleboro, Vermont 05301
Phone 802-251-8154 ▪ www.brattleboro.org/planning

Brattleboro Planning Commission

Special Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2020

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, Kate Audlin, Kathy Urffer, Jessica Gelter and Prudence Mackinney
Staff: Sue Fillion and Andrew Graminski
Public: Doran Hamm

A. **Meeting called to Order**
F. Ratte called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

B. Announcements
S. Fillion made an announcement that Josh Steele resigned from the commission. She also made an annoucment that the Brattleboro Selectboard passed the interim bylaw proposed by staff and reviewed by the commission at the last meeting. Interim bylaw is in effect.

C. Public Comments
D. Hamm made a comment that with Josh Steel resigning, he has applied for the vacant spot.

D. Approve Minutes of August 12, 2020 Meeting
T. Mosakowski made a motion to approve the minutes as written, seconded by K. Urffer. The meeting minutes were approved.

E. Hazard Mitigation committee – appoint a Planning Commissioner to serve for 1 year
The Hazard Mitigation Committee is looking for a planning commissioner to serve on the committee until the plan preadoption at the end of 2020. K. Urffer volunteered to serve on the committee.

F. Municipal Planning Grant – Housing Needs Assessment and Plan
A. Graminski provided a run-down of scope of work submitted by consultant firm Camion 310. Part of the MPG process is to provide a scope of work as part of the application for the grant. A consultant will be chosen through an RFP process that would occur if the Town received the grant funds. Staff asked Camion 310 to submit a proposal where the consultant would complete a comprehensive housing plan that addresses the town's needs, identifies opportunities, and develops strategies while maintaining an equity lens throughout.

A commissioner asked what would the recommendations from the plan look like and if they would all be regulatory focused? A. Graminski responded by saying the recommendations would be a mix

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of programmatic and regulatory strategies. A commissioner asked staff if the not-yet created community safety committee be involved and compensated during this process? S. Fillion responded by saying they have to see if that would be feasible or not. S. Fillion also said that a steering committee will be involved with the planning process but who will be in that committee has not been determined and will not, until/unless the town received the grant funding. A commissioner asked if the consultant/scope of work look at the impacts of potential in-migration from people fleeing climate change and Covid-19 pandemic. D. Hamm said that the town is in a dire need for more affordable housing right now, the town is becoming is really tough place to buy and rent a home. A commissioner asked if staff could upload the scope of work to the commissions google drive folder and give them 24 hours to review then submit feedback to staff. Staff said they would upload the file and wait for feedback before moving forward.

G. Planning Commission Norms Discussion

F. Ratte opened up this conversation by saying that a subcommittee met outside of the commission to brainstorm potential norms to make meetings for inclusive and welcoming for the public. A. Graminski gave a summary of four topic points that were discussed by this committee as follows:

- Trust each other – Offense may be taken, acknowledge the hurt, apologize for causing it and move on.
- Respect each other's time – Come prepared
- Listen actively – Really listen to what is being said
- Be respectful and open – Keep an open mind during meetings

Another commissioner chimed in by saying that this subcommittee also talked about making meeting materials be accessible by everyone and not just commissioners. They also added the idea of moving the public comment section of the meeting agenda to the end of the agenda so if a member of the public comes late, they have an opportunity to say something to the commission. Another commissioner responded to that idea by saying that they feel the public comment section does not garnish any sort of real involvement. To be effective, the public needs to see that the commission is actively engaging with what the public is saying/asking for community engagement to truly be effective.

F. Ratte asked the commission how everyone feels about incorporating these brainstormed norms into the commission bylaws? A commissioner is response asked if the commission should first see a draft on how the norms would look in the bylaws? Wondered if the commission should flesh out more before they are added to the bylaws. S. Fillion said that these norms don't necessarily need t be part of the bylaws. They could be a separate policy like an operational procedure. S. Fillion also said that they have concerns regarding some of the language with the "Trust each other" norm definition as it seems to be too "white centric" oriented then more oriented around inclusivity and equity. A commissioner responded by saying they the definition could be changed to something more on the lines of this:

> Trust each other: "We bring our full emotional and psychological selves to our meetings and are respectful of each other's humanity. We maintain and assume thoughtful and kind intentions and acknowledge if we have caused hurt or offense. We work to make choices that will benefit the greater good.

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Commissioner discussed that there should be something in the commission bylaws about public participation and how the commission will engage during that aspect of the meeting. If language was going to be added to the bylaws regarding public participation the language would on the lines as follows but final language will be drafted later:

> "Make public comment EXPLICIT on how folks can participate: for general agenda items: a topic is presented, open for clarifying questions from commissioners and public, chair requests motion and second from commissioners, re-open for discussion of the motion - commissioners & public, vote (commissioners only)for public comment agenda item: general public comment must lead to (small or large) action - follow up work requested from commenter or by action taken by planning commission or staff, like adding the topic as a future agenda item or meeting with the individual to address the topic one on one."

Before next meeting, language will be framed out and circulated among commissioners to be discussed at next planning commission meeting. Commissioners were on the same page that two documents would be appropriate for norms. One of the documents being the regular bylaws which would incorporate a public participation aspect and the other would be more of a procedural document regarding how to communicate and be open during meetings.

H. Social Justice Practices

F. Ratte asked the commission what the commission needs to do to address social justice planning in Brattleboro. A commissioner responded by asking another question to the commission' how can the commission be antiracist? A commissioner responded by saying that looking at the planning commission values and norms that were just discussed, there is nothing addressing antiracism in either and should they address it? Another commissioner responded by saying they like the idea of including something on those lines into the norms but said if you put something on paper about being antiracist, will that actually be effective? What would the point be if it was explicit? A few commissioners said that they believe it would be good to include some sort of language about being antiracist in either norms or the bylaws and move from there regarding acting. A commissioner said they in order to get somewhere, the commission needs to have difficult/uncomfortable conversations on the topics of racism. To them it seems that there has been resistance from members to have those conversations and because of that the commission is stuck with a lot of good will but not a lot of action.

A commissioner asked if there are concrete measures that the commission can take to make sure measures/polices created by the commission are antiracist? D. Hamm from the public said they have language round the term anti-white supremacy can be very powerful. A commissioner asked what the definition of anti-white supremacy is? D. Hamm responded by saying that it is against institutions and/or remaining establishment that continue to perturbate a society that puts one people based on the color (white) of their skin above other people (non-white). A. Graminski made a comment saying that we need to understand that past planning polices and many still in place today were built by white supremacy. As a commission and planning staff, we should be taking action to dismantle those structures and incorporate other ways of knowing that have been left out into planning in Brattleboro. S. Fillion said that there are other equity issues present in Brattleboro along with racial inequities, we need to be more than just antiracist. She continued to say that the City of

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Northampton, MA in their fair housing plan gave different definitions of equity, something for the commission to keep in mind.

1. Distributional equity- who benefits and who loses from public goods. Clearly, this is a major part of the focus of fair housing and city efforts to support affordable housing.
2. Structural equity- how to overcome historical racism and institutional racism that has created a path (path dependence) that is very hard to change.
3. Trans- or Inter-generational equity- how do decisions we make today affect opportunities for future generations.
4. Procedural equity- how do we include members of effected populations not only in outcomes but in representation at the table and in decision making.

A commissioner responded by saying that there understanding of why planning was ever a thing in the United States was because of capitalism and to capitalize on the value of the land and that value is only capitalized by one group of people. Today, we live in that kind of society, and because of that, there is a lot that we as a commission will have a hard time tackling like dismantling the system of capitalism, though we can try. A commissioner said that they like the four points and definitions made by the City of Northampton and that maybe the commission could adopt similar points to the commission bylaws or to be some sort of policy? It could be a good starting place. Another commissioner said that these four points could help shape efforts in the future that are led by the town and the planning commission. Some of the points seem tangible and other seem a little bit more difficult to tackle but it's a good starting point and a way to help take action to address equity in Brattleboro. A commissioner will word smith some of the four points to add clarity and at next meeting, the commission will review and act on it.

I. Adjourn

J. Gelter made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by K. Urffer. Meeting was adjourned at 7:50 PM.

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