

Morristown/Morrisville Planning Council
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Meeting Minutes of Tuesday 12 December 2023

Council Members present: Joshua Goldstein, Etienne Hancock, John Meyer, & Wally Reeve

Council Guests: Seth Costa, Tom Cloutier, and Jamie Morris

Staff: Planning Director Todd Thomas

Call to Order: Chair Hancock, participating over the phone, called the meeting to order in the Community Meeting Room of the Town Offices at 43 Portland Street in Morrisville at 5:00 P.M. Mr. Thomas asked the Council to add a discussion at the end of the agenda for candidate interviews for the open Planning Council Seat. The agenda was amended as such by consensus.

Meeting Minutes: Member Meyer moved to approve the October 24th meeting minutes. A vote of 4-0 affirmed the motion.

Discuss: Recording of Planning Council meetings. Mr. Thomas said that Bonnie McDermott, who was hired to assist with recording planning meetings, was home sick. As such, the meeting tonight could not be recorded. Video recording would instead begin at the Planning Council's next meeting on January 9th, with the video of that meeting, and the video of future meetings being uploaded to the Town's YouTube channel once the Selectboard adds video to its written record retention policy and creates said channel.

Discuss: 2023 Zoning change postmortem. Mr. Thomas shared that the 2023 zoning changes were approved unanimously as proposed by the Selectboard & Village Trustees in November.

Discuss: Citizen request to ban message boards on signs. The Council discussed resident Jamie Brewster's request to ban message boards on signs as part of the next zoning update. Member Goldstein said that he did not find the pictures included in the meeting packet of local signs with message boards to be problematic. Mr. Thomas explained, per a question asked of him at the previous non-quorumed meeting, that none of the surrounding towns limit the percentage of signs that can be used as message boards. Prospective Planning Council candidate Jamie Morris asked if electronic messaging signs were allowed. Mr. Thomas said electronic signs were not allowed, and that the current practice of allowing the old-fashioned non electronic message boards on signs was meant to be a compromise for the business owners who had previously approached the Planning Council requesting that electronic message board signs be allowed. The Council, by consensus, decided that message boards were not a pressing problem at this time, so they declined to take any further action on Mr. Brewster's request to ban them.

Discuss: Citizen request to place zoning restrictions on tree clearing. The Council discussed resident Jamie Brewster's request to regulate tree clearing under zoning, and if clearing was a problem that needed regulation. Member Meyer cautioned that by the time clearing was found to be detrimental in the future, establishing such a regulation then could already be too late, as local development pressures had grown quicker than imagined in recent years. Mr. Thomas presenting his findings about how surrounding communities limited or regulated tree clearing. He explained

that there was very limited to no regulation of tree clearing in the communities that surround Morristown, other than Hyde Park (Green River Reservoir Overlay District) and Stowe (Ridgeline and Hilltop Overlay District). The Council briefly discussed establishing a similar overlay district until Member Goldstein expressed doubts that the Council could properly regulate it without a lot of expert guidance and public input, which it did not have time to take on currently. Chair Hancock added that he sees large tree clearing as a State or regional issue, and something that it is too big for one town successfully regulate (ex: the mountain backdrop to Morrisville lies in multiple other municipalities). The Council, by consensus, declined to take any further action on Mr. Brewster's request to regulate tree clearing at this juncture.

Discuss: S.100 Homes for Everyone zoning changes. Mr. Thomas presented the first wave of zoning changes designed to bring the Town's development regulations into compliance with Vermont's new S.100 "Homes for Everyone" law. The Planning Council discussed and made decisions regarding the proposed zoning changes, which included: emergency shelters, increasing minimum lot sizes to combat undesired density increases in rural areas, confirming when pavement is requirement for residential development within the Village, treating single-family homes and duplexes uniformly in Section 206 Design Review, and establishing maximum lot sizes within much of the Village. Member Goldstein said he did not support some of the zoning changes that were meant to push back on the S.100 mandates, including doubling the minimum lot size in rural areas from 2 builder's acres to 4 builder's acres. The Council ultimately agreed to compromise on 3 builder's acres (120,000 ft²) for a minimum lot size in the Rural Residential Agricultural (RRA) Zone. After a long discussion, the Council also agreed to 8,000 ft² (approximately 1/5-acre) maximum lot sizes in the less populated residential sections of the village that are served by water & sewer, 10,000 ft² maximum lot sizes in the High Density Zone, and 20,000 ft² maximum lot sizes in the Central Business Zone. Mr. Thomas said he would refine his draft S.100 changes per the discussion and present them for an informal sign-off at the January 9th Planning Council meeting.

Discuss: 2023 Town Report Submission. Mr. Thomas presented the Planning Council's submission into the 2022 Town Report as a means of asking what should be included in the 2023 Town Report entry that he would write for the Council later in the month. It was decided that the report should focus on the successful 2023 zoning update process, the unsuccessful Jersey Heights sidewalk connection initiative, and the coming S.100 zoning changes. Mr. Thomas said he would e-mail out a draft submission for the 2023 Town Report within the following week.

Discuss: Interviews for open Planning Council seat. Interviews were held with prospective candidates for the open seat on the Planning Council. It was determined that both candidates (Jamie Morris & Seth Costa) would be able to serve the Town well on the Council. The Council members ultimately recommend that Jamie Morris be appointed to the open seat on the basis that he applied to fill the vacancy first (a first come first served tiebreaker). Additionally, it was decided that Seth Costa would be added to Town Administration's Planning Council candidate list for 2024.