Morristown/Morrisville Planning Council

PO Box 748 / Morrisville, VT 05661
Phone (802) 888-6373

Meeting Minutes of March 7, 2017

Planning Council Members Present: Paul Griswold (Chair), Etienne Hancock, Yvette Mason, Max Paine & Laura Streets
Planning Council Members Absent: Tom Snipp & Mark Struhsacker
Guests: John Meyer, Marjorie Ward, Robert LeFevre, Ethan Waldman, Sarah Thomas, Chris & Melissa LeBlanc
Staff: Planning Director Todd Thomas

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order in the Community Meeting Room of the Town Offices at 43 Portland Street at approximately 7:00 P.M.

Discuss: Tiny house zoning changes and density bonuses – The Council enjoyed a lively discussion regarding a proposed density bonus for tiny houses. The Council and audience members reviewed the proposed density bonus language. Mr. Thomas explained that this bonus would allow 2 additional tiny houses per the average 2 acre lot in the Town, which is 1 additional small home than would be normally allowed by the existing accessory dwelling bylaw. After a long discussion of the proposed density bonus, it was decided that the following changes should be made to the draft language:

1. The maximum footprint for the tiny house bonus should be changed from 500 ft2 to 300 ft2.
2. The bonus should be written to exclude anything with or designed to include an internal propulsion engine, such as an RV or school bus.
3. Tiny houses should be required to be skirted and have the wheels up on blocks once moved onto a property.
4. The proposed residency requirement for the tiny house bonus would remain. However, the Council took note of and appreciated Melissa LeBlanc's point that short-term rental of tiny homes bring tourists and resulting dollars to the local economy.

Mr. Thomas said that he would present revised bonus language for tiny houses at the Council's next meeting on April 4th.

Discuss: Zoning for motor vehicle uses (repair shops & gas stations) – Continuing from a conversation at the end of the prior meeting, Mr. Thomas presented a proposed zoning change that would no longer allow new gas station and car repair shop uses in both uptown and downtown. Council Members discussed the proposed changes. It was determined, by consensus, that car repair operations (the Motor Vehicle Sales & Repair Facility use) were preferable to empty buildings in the downtown and Uptown in the Commercial Zone. However, the Council did decide to eliminate the Motor Vehicle Service Station (gas station) use, meaning that there would be no new gas stations in town once this zoning change was warned. Mr. Thomas said the draft zoning change would reflect the removal of that use from the Central Business and Commercial Zone.

Discuss: $75k muni grand list exemption for new housing 32 VSA §3836 – Carrying over a conversation from its prior meeting, the Council again discussed the 32 VSA §3836 statutory exemption to incentivize new dwellings or farm buildings. The Council decided that this statutory allowance should be used to incentivize infill housing development in the Village as well as new farm structures in the town in an effort to preserve our rural countryside. Mr. Thomas recommend that this municipal tax exemption opportunity should only be available for residential uses in the CB, HDR, MDR & MOR Zones. He explained that housing starts located in the Town or in the LDR Zone of the Village required no tax savings incentive. The Council, by consensus agreed and said that this policy should be discussed by the Selectboard at its next meeting.

Discuss: Blighted property tax exemption, 32 VSA §3850 – Mr. Thomas presented the Council with a printout of 32 VSA §3850. Chair Griswold warned that a blighted property municipal tax program would have to be used judiciously so it was not abused. It was decided that the Selectboard should be asked about how much of a tax hit the community could afford to pay for this program. It was decided that the Council would like to make this program available to owner-occupied properties where the tax savings would only be recommended to Town Meeting by the Council after the homeowner provided receipts for work or materials that repaired the blighted elements of the property. The Council thanked resident Marjorie Ward for this programmatic suggestion.

Discuss: More Permitted Uses in the Commercial Zone – Mr. Thomas presented the Council with a revised list of uses for the Commercial Zone. Mr. Thomas said that Gary Nolan, the Chair of the DRB, had asked for this change now that village sewer and water were readily available in that area. The Council, by consensus, agreed with the revised list of uses that would be included within the next zoning change.

Discuss: Administrative Approval of Minor Subdivisions – Mr. Thomas presented the Council with changes to the subdivision bylaw that included administrative approvals of subdivisions that only created one new lot and the elimination of the bonding surety option for subdivisions. Mr. Thomas explained that bonding as a form of subdivision surety was no longer economically feasible since the Great Recession. The Council, by consensus, was amenable to these subdivision bylaw changes.

Discuss: Act 250 sewer plant relief and pending zoning change – Mr. Thomas said that Susan Baird at Act 250 had told him his recent proposed conservation bylaw revisions will satisfy condition 13 of the Village's sewer plant permit. He said that formal release of condition 13 would be tied to the proposed changes to the conservation subdivision bylaw being approved. As such, he said he planned to warn the zoning change for this and all the other pending zoning change items for a May 2nd hearing.

Discuss (agenda addendum): Minimum residential lot sizes in the Village – Mr. Thomas used the recent razing of 182 Upper Main Street to demonstrate that the minimum lot size in that section of the Village remained too large. He presented the Council with a report showing that either 34% of the lots south of Main Street within 500 feet of 182 Upper Main Street were also non-conforming because they were smaller than

the zone's 6,000 ft2 minimum lot size. The Council agreed that the minimum lot size should be changed to 4,000 ft2, but that the land area per residential unit should remain larger so as to not encourage additional apartment conversions of large single family homes. Mr. Thomas said that he would include this change within the next zoning update.

Approve prior meeting minutes – Member Street moved to approve the February 21, 2017 meeting minutes. The motion was affirmed by a vote of 4-0-1 with Member Mason abstaining.

Mr. Thomas reminded the Council that the March 21st meeting was cancelled because he was out of State that week attending a FEMA training class.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.
– submitted by Todd Thomas, Planning Director

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Meeting Minutes of April 4, 2017

Planning Council Members Present: Yvette Mason, Tom Snipp, Laura Streets & Mark Struhsacker
Planning Council Members Absent: Paul Griswold (Chair), Etienne Hancock & Max Paine
Guests: Barry Russo, Ethan Waldman & Ann Carpenter
Staff: Planning Director Todd Thomas

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order in the Community Meeting Room of the Town Offices at 43 Portland Street at approximately 7:00 P.M.

Discuss: Tiny house zoning changes and density bonuses – Planning Director Thomas presented finalized zoning for a tiny dwelling density bonus. He explained that this density bonus would essential allow every parcel in town to have a tiny house on it regardless of what was already on the lot or the size of the lot. Mr. Waldman from the audience offered a one-word correction to the proposed density bonus. The Council accepted that change. Mr. Thomas said that the revised tiny dwelling unit density bonus would be including within the upcoming zoning change.

Discuss: $75k muni grand list exemption for new housing 32 VSA §3836 – Mr. Thomas shared that the Selectboard was in favor of offering this tax incentive as long as the Council agreed to use it judiciously. Mr. Thomas offered the Board a proposed press-release regarding this new program. The Council liked that write-up. Mr. Thomas said that he would have the press-release reviewed by the Selectboard before it was circulated.

Discuss: Blighted property tax exemption, 32 VSA §3850 – The Council again discussed the blighted property tax exemption authorized by 32 VSA §3850. Mr. Thomas related that he had met with the Selectboard to ask how much of a local tax hit the community could afford to pay for this program. Mr. Thomas explained that the Selectboard, particularly Member Dodge, did not agree with Council's assertion that the town's blighted property tax exemption program should only be available for owner-occupied properties. He added that Mr. Dodge wanted this program to incentive the improved appearance of all the buildings in town, not just the owner-occupied ones. The Council discussed that apartment houses could already be made to improve their appearance via the Vermont Rental Health housing Code and that this code did not offer jurisdiction over things like deteriorated single family homes. The Council, by consensus, affirmed that they viewed the blighted property program as a means to improve the appearance of owner-occupied single-family homes that were currently outside the reach of regulation. Member Streets said that apartment house owners had the incentive of increased rents to incentivize property improvements and she said she worried that this program, if offered to landlords, could incentivize them to let their properties run down to harvest the tax savings, via this blighted property program, when building improvements

were needed – adding to the their bottom line. The Council decided to table any further discussion of the blighted property improvement program until the Selectboard would agree to not offer this tax exemption to for-profit landlords.

Discuss: Upcoming zoning change – Mr. Thomas provided the Council with a copy of all the items included within the upcoming zoning change. He asked Council Members to prepare for May 2nd public hearing on the last years' worth of zoning work that would be put forth for the zoning change.

Approve prior meeting minutes – Approval of the meeting minutes was tabled due to quorum issues

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The meeting adjourned at 7:55 PM.
– submitted by Todd Thomas, Planning Director