

Morristown/Morrisville Planning Council
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Meeting Minutes of Tuesday 27 January 2021

Council Members present: Steven Foster, Joshua Goldstein, Etienne Hancock (Chair) & Tom Snipp

Council Members absent: Allen Van Anda

Guests present: Village Trustee Bob Heanue, Lyndon Burkholder, Graham Mink, Grant Wieler, and, from the Conservation Commission, Ron Stancliff, Jessica Zehngut, Kristen Connolly, and Jen Andrews

Staff: Planning Director Todd Thomas

Call to Order: Chair Hancock called the meeting to order electronically via Zoom at approximately 4:00 P.M.

Prior meeting minutes – Member Foster moved to approve the January 12th meeting minutes. A vote of 4-0 affirmed the motion, with Member Foster abstaining.

Discuss: Town Plan comments and outreach – Mr. Thomas explained that the new Town Plan was warned for its first hearing on February 23rd, and that comments on it had already started to come into the planning office. Bob Heanue said to the Council should expect pushback from some of the Best Street property owners regarding the plan's support for connecting it to Foss Street. Mr. Thomas said that he could remove this suggestion, but Member Goldstein said that the overall long-term planning goal of grid connectivity could trump some of the more acute immediate neighbor concerns. Mr. Heanue said that there had been very little ownership turnover in this neighborhood over the years. Conservation Commission Members Kristen Connolly and Jenifer Andrews offered comments on the Town Plan. Ms. Connolly said that she would like to see language added into the plan that protected Clark Park itself, and access thereto, from development infringement from the corner of Bridge Street and the Truck Route. Ms. Andrews echoed these comments and said that Clark Park would greatly benefit the new residents in this area. She added that the Town Plan should to speak to shoreland protection, and better highlight the environmental protection goals listed in Chapter 1. Ms. Andrews said she would follow up with suggestions in writing. Mr. Thomas said that Chair Hancock had asked for all Town Plan comments to be made in writing, including comments verbally given to Mr. Thomas by the Town Administrator on the previous Friday.

Discuss: Clarify waiver eligibility to all dimensional requirements – Mr. Thomas explained the proposed changes to the waiver eligibility language of §204.4 Waiver. He said the current listed categories therein were not intended to be limiting. All agreed that the revised language allowing waivers for “any dimensional or numerical requirement” would solve the issue uncovered during the DRB's denial of Prudy Newton's Accessory Apartment waiver request. Mr. Thomas said that this language would be included as part of the next zoning change.

Discuss: Make town's short term rental requirements match village requirement – Mr. Thomas expressed the desire to unify the zoning requirements for short term rentals, which were currently required to be owner occupied in the village, but not owner occupied in the town. Mr. Thomas clarified that any short term rental with 4 or less rented bedrooms was, and would remain, exempt from the zoning bylaw's short-term regulations when located in either the town or the village. Member Foster directed Mr. Thomas's attention to some language in the definition that needed to be clarified. Mr. Thomas said he would include these language updates as part of the next zoning change.

Discuss: Allow business to business retail in Business Services use – Mr. Thomas spoke to a proposal that would allow some Business to Business retail sales in the industrial zones. Council Members questioned if the "majority" language therein was adequate, but they were otherwise accepting of the proposal. Mr. Thomas said he would tweak the "majority" requirement in the coming months if needed, but otherwise include this language as part of the next zoning change.

Discuss: Change local notice requirements for site plan approval & waiver request – Mr. Thomas proposed draft language that would make the town's zoning bylaws mirror state statute regarding notice for various DRB applications. Mr. Mink said that this was a very helpful change to avoid unnecessary development delays and costs.

Discuss: High Density Residential Zoning for Brooklyn St? – The Council spent a considerable amount of time discussing the zoning for the lower section of Brooklyn Street, from Harrel Street on the north, to Bridge Street on the south. Mr. Thomas said that the existing Medium Density Residential zoning did a good job of protecting the largely single-family home neighborhood bracketed by Wilkins Street and Wabun Avenue. He added, however, that the zoning for the southern section of Brooklyn Street was a poor fit, making most properties therein non-conforming, including the dis-allowed multi-family uses on Westside Court, Brooklyn Heights, Fennimore Street, and the Wickart, Bourne, and Belanger properties. Member Hancock suggested a split zone for these two disparate neighborhoods, while also possibly allowing more density running just along Brooklyn Street, with less density in the residential neighborhood to the rear. Mr. Mink suggested rezoning the entire area High Density Residential, which fixes the non-conformities on its southern end. It was discussed if upzoning the Wilkins and Wabun neighborhood would have any negative repercussions. Mr. Mink said that it would not because of the small lot sizes in the neighborhood, where a developer would be financially disincentivized to buy a \$200,000 house and raze it to replace it with a maximum density four-plex. The Mixed Office Residential Zone was also discussed as a possibility. It was agreed by all parties that direct neighborhood feedback was needed before any decisions were made regarding the zoning. Mr. Thomas said he would arrange for some neighbor outreach later this summer when, hopefully, it would again be safe to host public meeting and gatherings.

The meeting adjourned at 5:35 PM, submitted by Todd Thomas, Planning Director