

Barre City Planning Commission

August 26, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Present: David Sichel (Chair), Jackie Calder (Vice Chair), Michael Hellein (Secretary), Amanda Gustin, Thomas Lauzon, Jim McWilliam

Staff: Janet Shatney (Director of Planning, Permitting & Assessing), Heather Grandfield (Permit Administrator)

Visitors: Toby Bernier, J. D. Green

1. Call to Order

6:31pm

2. Adjustments to the Agenda

Sichel noted that Commissioner Rudi resigned from the Planning Commission and stated there will be an open seat and interested parties may contact the City Manager.

3. Public Comment

No public comment.

4. Old business

A. Approve meeting minutes of August 12, 2021

Motion: Lauzon, Second McWilliam, Approved

B. Final Review of Housing Whitepaper with next steps

Gustin reported that she made adjustments requested in the last meeting. Sichel explained he informed Mayor Herring to expect it soon. Shatney will schedule a presentation to Council at an upcoming meeting.

Motion to recognize the document as final and communicate the letter to City Council: Lauzon, McWilliam. Approved unanimously.

C. Signage Discussion

Sichel introduced the discussion by explaining that Shatney researched sign ordinances of other nearby communities with similar downtowns and prepared a report comparing them, which was included in the meeting packet.

Toby Bernier requested that the regulations of how much space should be allowed to be covered by a sign should be more lenient, without going overboard. Gustin asked him to give an argument for the benefit to the community, and Bernier said that it is hard for small signs to grab the attention of passing drivers. McWilliam said that he is appalled by the empty storefronts, and we should not have ordinances that get in the way of businesses succeeding. Bernier estimated that his signs covered more than 60% of the windows.

Lauzon stated that we cannot keep people from covering their windows. He brought attention to the fact that he owns a building where a tenant has violated the ordinance and has worked to bring them into compliance.

Hellein pointed out that we are trying to create rules that work for everyone, as Sichel noted at the last meeting, and that his recollection was that the rules were created as they are to prevent an arms race or bidding war for attention.

Bernier speculated that it may be possible to let new businesses have large signs and then enforce smaller signs as time passes.

Calder said that she recalled that it was requested specifically that we look closely at signage and create consistent rules because permitting was having a hard time with signage applications. She stated that we are currently getting enough information to make changes.

Lauzon suggested the Planning Department propose changes for the Planning Commission to review.

Sichel suggested that we could consider Conditional Use language, for new businesses for example, so the Development Review Board would have more leeway in making subjective judgements.

J. D. Green asked if the regulation referred to the shopfront percentage, and Shatney said she would have to check and her understanding was that his application was denied in part because of dimensions. He noted that Cody Morrison from the BADC visited him when he was starting his business but did not mention anything about the need for a sign permit.

Sichel said that he is on the BADC board, so he will make sure that Morrison knows about sign permitting to short-circuit any future confusion.

Shatney agreed that it would be useful to have some time to put together proposed changes to the ordinance, and that suggestions should be emailed to her. **She will update the City website to state that she is accepting comment.**

Lauzon mentioned that he suggested a hold on enforcement. Shatney said that there's effectively a hold on enforcement for Green's sign because of decisions made by City staff, but that any signs applications that do not conform to the ordinance will be denied.

Grandfield reiterated that the Planning, Permitting, and Zoning office is always available and is here to help.

5. New Business

No new business.

6. Staff Updates

Shatney mentioned there's been some talk with developers around dormant subdivisions.

7. Roundtable

Sichel attended All in for Barre and thought it was an interesting process. He observed that there were a lot of high profile attendees who provided feedback to the community input.

Gustin noted that the next step is to create local task forces, and she hopes their members will read the plan, as 3/4 of the suggestions she heard were already in the Municipal Plan.

Lauzon would like housing density and green space to be on an upcoming agenda, bringing up the Ward 5 school as an example of a property that would be difficult to develop under the current ordinance.

8. Adjourn

7:50pm, **Motion Lauzon, Second Gustin, Adjourned**