

Barre City Planning Commission

March 13, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Present: David Sichel (Chair), Becky Wigg* (Vice Chair), Joe Reil (Secretary), Caitlin Corkins**, Wendey Ducey, Raylene Meunier*

*Joined meeting during discussion of Item 5.

**Joined meeting during discussion of Item 6.

Absent: Rosemary Averill

Staff: Janet Shatney (Director of Planning, Permitting & Assessing)

Visitors: None

1. Call to Order.

5:30pm.

2. Adjustments to the Agenda.

None.

3. Public comment (for something not on the agenda).

None.

4. Approval of Minutes.

- a. January 23, 2025.

Meunier moved to approve, Ducey seconded, unanimous in favor.

5. Warned Public Hearing.

- a. Proposed Changed to the Unified Development Regulations

Changes include those revisions made under an Interim Zoning approval by the City Council on August 27, 2024, as well as changes to allowed uses for downtown housing in the UC-1 Zoning District to allow for ground floor housing.

Sichel noted an error in “2101.B Allowed Uses”, where Subsection 3201 was referred to twice. Shatney indicated this was just a clerical error and this would be corrected prior to submitting to Council.

Shatney called out the Use Table on the conditional permissibles to ensure they matched with the Commission's intent in previous discussions.

Reil moved to approve submitting to City Council with noted correction, Ducey seconded, unanimous in favor.

6. Old Business.

a. Commission Charges: Information Regarding Commission Roles and Work

This discussion was regarding previous discussion of the City's Vacant Building Ordinance and whether the Planning Commission has authority to act on it. Shatney indicated that the Commission is in charge of bylaws and has the ability to work on studies, but ordinances fall to the City Council.

b. Municipal Plan – Review Economic Development Section

Continuing review of the existing City Plan. There was some discussion around a few specific categories, including the list of factors and key points that encourage economic development and how Barre is meeting them. There was some specific discussion about housing and renovating unused office space into housing and it was noted that there are both Federal and State Grants that can support that initiative, as well as the Neighborhood Designation that had been discussed previously, and that future plan's should consider remote workers and how to take advantage of that.

Issues and challenges were discussed next, including how Flood Hazard regulations were discussed as a challenge to downtown revitalization and improving building stock, as they can add to the costs of renovations, healthy food and whether or not to continue encouraging a new downtown grocery store, as well as the "Scary Barre" perception and how to address that, and issues with local infrastructure, notably the condition of local roads.

Strategies for meeting these goals and solving the City's problems were then discussed. These included investing into infrastructure, wireless internet downtown, land use policies, infrastructure improvement, walkability, retention of Barre's 'blue collar' heritage, encouraging investment and redevelopment into vacant or obsolete buildings, and attracting new and expanded business and the City. Walkability, specifically was broken out in more detail, with sidewalks, lighting, crosswalks, safe places to wait for buses, traffic calming, wintertime conditions, safety, all being considered.

There was some discussion around the validity of including items beyond the City's direct control and it was noted that some elements must be covered in a City Plan, by statute, and a City Plan is a wide roadmap that is a mission for the City as a whole and not just any one body, and is also aspirational, including hopes and dreams for the City.

Previous action items, implementing the TIF District, opening a grocery store, the Merchant Row project, and the North Main to Summer Street projects, with updates on the status of each, and how they should carry over into a new plan, considered.

7. New Business.

None.

8. Confirm Date of Next Meeting.

- a. April 10, 2025.

9. Staff Updates.

City Budget is in progress and several positions, e.g., Junior Planner, Engineering/Technician, cannot be funded at this time.

Residential Buyout Appraisals are starting to come in.

The Transportation/Planning Grant is moving again, the charette will be re-scheduled.

Assessors/Appraisers are out and working.

10. Round Table.

None.

11. Adjourn.

7:04 pm, **Ducey moved to adjourn, Meunier seconded, unanimous in favor.**