

Barre City Planning Commission

December 12, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Present: David Sichel (Chair), Becky Wigg* (Vice Chair), Joe Reil (Secretary), Rosemary Averill, Raylene Meunier

*Left meeting after 6A: Unified Development Ordinance.

Absent: Caitlin Corkins, Wendy Ducey

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

Visitors: None

1. Call to Order.

5:30pm.

2. Adjustments to the Agenda.

Sichel asked to move items due to Wigg needing to leave early, items 7B and 7A were discussed immediately following Approval of Minutes.

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

None.

4. Approval of Minutes.

a. November 14, 2024.

Averill noted a correction to add Wendy Ducey to the list of members present.

Averill moves to approve with correction, Meunier seconds, Sichel abstains, Averill, Meunier, Reil, and Wigg vote in favor.

6. New Business (moved items)

b. Breaking Housing Matters Discussion

Wigg noted that she met with this organization, <https://www.breakinghousingmatters.org/>, and that it might be worth more discussion or inviting them to a future meeting.

There was some discussion around the group and what they are advocating for. They had approached Rutland previously. Bennington and Brattleboro were also being considered. Their goal is to have a municipality pass

ordinance that nobody should pay more than 25% of their income in housing costs and suggest several sources of funding for this goal, including possible taxes on landlords, mortgage lenders, etc., as well as grants and fundraising.

Consensus was that the costs and logistics of implementing this program may be too significant to be workable in Barre City but that it is worth further discussion which will be carried forward during our next meeting.

a. Unified Development Ordinance Revisions: Downtown Housing on first floor

Sichel noted having had a conversation with Thom Lauzon who is looking into placing apartment units on the first floor of a building on Main Street. Current ordinances restrict to within 100 feet of the front of the building and there was discussion about whether, and how, these should be revised.

It was noted that previous ordinances disallowed these units completely and that the 100 feet restriction seemed arbitrary. Some options were discussed, including what standards should be used (50 feet from the front, 50% of the space, something else?). Shatney also noted that there are currently some apartments behind other buildings on Main Street (Tasty Bites building).

Consensus was that this is worth further discussion and review (as well as possibly modifying our use tables accordingly) with the goal of allowing for more housing while also maintaining the character of the downtown and that it would be worthwhile to consider these changes along with any changes discussed for the Downtown Planning Area Grant.

5. Old Business.

a. Encore Renewable Energy Battery Storage Discussion and possible action

Shatney noted that the City Manager declined Encore performing a presentation at City Council. There was discussion around this, reiterating some of the advantages to the City for this project, and what actions would be appropriate for the Planning Commission to take.

Consensus was to draft a letter of recommendation for the project and to go before Council to summarize the project and our intent.

Reil moves for this action, Averill seconds, unanimous in favor.

b. Downtown Planning Area Grant: Outreach strategy and March 2025 upcoming charette with TPU DC: update

Shatney had meetings with the various consultants about the project schedule and outlined some of the details. Exact schedule to come, initial meetings intended for March with a presentation of results to follow in May and an expected completion in June. Public outreach will begin in January

including possibly having Planning Commission members attending City Council meetings to present details.

6. New Business.

c. Municipal Plan: Review Section 2 Transportation

It was decided to defer this discussion for a future meeting with more members present.

7. Confirm Date of Next Meeting.

a. January 9, 2025.

8. Staff Updates.

Shatney summarized a few recent developments.

A subdivision sketch plan to separate a lot with a house and a law office was submitted to the Development Review Board and approved.

Another agenda item was approval of an overhead door added to a Italian Baptist Church on Brook Street.

Seminary Street Project was approved, there is still time for appeals, though none have yet been submitted.

Assessors continue to work through buildings without recent assessment.

The new City Hazard Mitigation Plan was approved by Vermont Emergency Management.

Barre City received a \$500,000 grant from the Municipal Energy Resilience Plan, to be used to improve City Hall and the Barre Auditorium.

Money earmarked for building elevations (\$900,000) came in and candidate selection is underway.

9. Round Table.

Averill thanked Janet for her efforts.

Sichel gave an update on the Prospect Heights project, the engineering/due diligence work is progressing, funded by the City.

Shatney reminded that discussion around ReGroup and changes to the parking ban will be discussed in the upcoming City Council meeting.

10. Adjourn.

6:43pm, **Reil moves to adjourn, Averill seconds, unanimous in favor.**