

Land Use Regulation Update Committee
Town of Ferrisburgh, Vt.

DRAFT – Minutes for meeting of February 5, 2020.

Members present: Bob Beach, Carl Cole, Arabella Holzapfel, Karen Pettersen, Jean Richardson, Norm Smith.

Visitor present: Katie Raycroft-Meyer.

1. Call to order; approve minutes. Arabella Holzapfel called the meeting to order at 5:45 p.m. The committee put off to a later date a vote on the minutes from the previous meeting.

2. 2020 Municipal Planning Grant: Visualizing Density. Katie Raycroft-Meyer from the Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC) will discuss the grant's objectives. Arabella Holzapfel introduced Katie Raycroft-Meyer of Bristol, who has been a practicing landscape architect in Vermont for more than 20 years. She currently serves as a senior community planner with ACRPC.

She said state planners have recently made housing issues a priority, and she had asked county towns if they were interested in pursuing municipal planning grants from the state to work on these issues. Ferrisburgh expressed interest, and she worked with committee members Arabella Holzapfel and Bonnie Barnes to develop a successful grant application on “Visualizing Density.” Holzapfel said the town wanted to learn about encouraging affordable housing, and the possibility for greater density of development in some parts of town, and saw the grant as a way to get help.

Jean Richardson noted the town plan adopted in 2017 envisioned the possibility of denser development in some parts of town, specifically the area around the town hall and the school and in North Ferrisburgh around the intersection of Route 7, Old Hollow Road and Stage Road. She said increased development density also might be possible in areas closer to Vergennes, particularly if they could tap into the city’s septic system.

Bob Beach said Vergennes has a new town manager, and that the city is looking at the need to spend \$6 million on septic infrastructure and \$10 million on stormwater upgrades. Allowing Ferrisburgh access to their septic and/or stormwater infrastructure could conceivably be a way to reduce the cost for Vergennes residents. Carl Cole said this kind of collaboration would probably need to take the form of a sewer district, with Ferrisburgh residents of the district helping defray the cost, rather than having all Ferrisburgh residents bear the burden.

Norm Smith said it was clear increased septic capacity would be required if the town was going to allow or encourage denser development in certain areas.

Katie Raycroft-Meyer said the grant, titled “Visualizing Density,” is designed to look at how denser development can happen in Ferrisburgh, what it will look like, and what

townspeople think about the possibility. The strategy, she said, is to envision what the town wants this development to look like and where it should happen, and not get bogged down in discussions of how it can't work for this reason or that. The town should ask whether there are pockets where they want this kind of development and then determine what kind of design-driven zoning bylaws would be needed, and what changes to the town's infrastructure would be required.

Carl Cole asked how Act 250, the state's development control law, would affect these discussions. He said some large parcels have huge septic capacity but development is limited by Act 250 rules on open space. Raycroft-Meyer said increasing housing density is a "concern of the moment" for the state, particularly the Department of Housing & Community Development, with workshops for planners and municipalities focused on whether and how to change local and state rules, and see these changes accepted by communities. She said this suggested the state might not want to have its own rules stand in the way of more creative ways to manage development.

Norm Smith said the town needs to agree on its vision, and how to pursue it, adopting tools that encourage the growth the town wants, where the town wants it to happen.

Bob Beach wondered whether West Ferrisburgh, near the lake, and Long Point might be areas where denser development could be considered. He said they already have more housing per acre than other parts of town because of small, lakeshore lots created before the town adopted zoning regulations. There are now few stores or other commercial developments, but perhaps this provides an opportunity. He thought it was important for the town to think outside the box, not considering just the two areas, in North Ferrisburgh and the center of town, that are often discussed.

Katie Raycroft-Meyer said it was worth considering that the town can increase density of development without necessarily adding a lot more buildings, converting large single-family homes to multi-family housing, adding apartments over garages, etc.

Jean Richardson said some large parcels in town are restricted from increased development by road frontage limits and other rules. Raycroft-Meyer noted the town plan already envisions cluster development, and the frontage issues could be addressed in the new land-use regulations now being considered.

Arabella Holzapfel said it was important to increase public awareness that the town is working on these issues, and that Town Meeting, on February 29, would be a good place to do this. Raycroft-Meyer thought it would be possible to create some visual information, such as posters, to display at town meeting. Carl Cole said it would be important to convince both people in the affected areas and the town in general about the wisdom of increasing density in some parts of town.

Bob Beach said people see the threat of having to close the Ferrisburgh Central School due to decreasing enrollment and wonder what the town can do to attract more young families.

Carl Cole said it didn't seem likely changes to zoning or development rules could do anything quickly enough to remove the threat to the school.

Katie Raycroft-Meyer noted the deadline for spending the municipal planning grant money is May 2021, but the town wants to get its land-use regulation update done before then. Jean Richardson said the group should continue to work on the new regulations, with the thought that changes could be made down the road. Raycroft-Meyer suggested changes to facilitate denser development would not be town-wide, possibly making them less problematic.

Holzapfel and Raycroft-Meyer said they would work together to get something ready to display at town meeting, probably focusing on the Route 7/Little Chicago Road area. Norm Smith said he would be willing to make an announcement at Town Meeting about the display and the committee's efforts.

3. Update on draft regulations: editing subcommittee met on January 28. Jean Richardson said the meeting on editing the draft regulations on January 28 had been excellent, with good progress on bringing the regulations up to date. She said the next meeting of the subcommittee would be February 19, and the group hoped to be able to make time in the future for more than one meeting each month.

4. Timeline and scheduling. There was a brief discussion of the timeline for the land-use regulations update. Committee members said a vote by the town might be possible six months after a draft document is approved by the Planning Commission, but admitted this might be an optimistic estimate. Members suggested there could be a vote by the town as early as November 2020, on election day, but Town Meeting Day 2021 seemed more realistic.

5. Next meeting. The next committee meeting will be February 25 at 5:30 p.m.

6. Adjournment. Norm Smith made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:51 p.m. Jean Richardson seconded. All voted in favor. **Motion approved.**

— Respectfully submitted,

Tim Etchells