

MEETING MINUTES
MUNICIPALITY OF WOODSTOCK, VERMONT
WOODSTOCK PLANNING COMMISSION
31 The Green
Woodstock, VT 05091

The Woodstock Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, August 1, 2023 to discuss the following:

Members present: Mary Margaret Sloan, Interim Chair, Brad Lawrence, Laura Powell, and Frank Horneck

Public present: Kevin Geiger, John King, Bill Kelsey, Jill Davies, Andrew Winter, and Ben Pauly

Staff present: Steven Bauer and Stephanie Appelfeller

Administrative Tasks

1. Call to Order - Mary Margaret Sloan called meeting to order at 7:02pm
2. Adjustments to Agenda - None
3. Approve Minutes
 - (a) 6/7/2023 – pass, no quorum, will vote at end of meeting.

Old Business–

1. Taftsville’s Village Center Designation was approved by the Downtown Board on June 26. – Steven Bauer mentioned downtown board approved the designation.

New Business –

Kevin Geiger of TRORC presented on how Act 47 (S.100) will impact Woodstock’s housing amendments. Kevin Geiger explained Act 47 was designed to help with obstacles to housing and suggested the Commission refer to the first four pages of the Act which are the portions that will impact the town most. The Act impacts areas with “municipal sewer and water” however, Kevin Geiger suggested that the State will likely revisit this language to clarify what is included within that definition. Until then, municipalities are responsible for creating their own defining factors. Laura Powell asked if there are other towns that have no municipal owned water and Kevin Geiger responded that Royalton and Randolph Center are good examples in this area.

Mary Margaret Sloan asked for examples of how other towns are structuring parking regulations and Kevin Geiger explained Hartford did away with all parking restrictions and many other towns are going to 1 parking space per dwelling unit.

Kevin Geiger explained that the Act establishes a minimum density of 8000 SF for 1 or 2-unit dwellings and additional 8000 SF per additional unit. Kevin Geiger mentioned another significant change is Section 510 referring to Accessory Dwelling Units. An ADU can be added at a duplex now and the owner can sell an ADU.

The ADU Subordination language was inadvertently removed from the bylaws draft and Steven Bauer responded that he would add the language back in.

Jill Davies inquired as to the purpose of defining affordable housing and Kevin Geiger mentioned Woodstock copied the State's definition. Steven Bauer said the definition is included as the requirements now mandate the amount of affordable housing with a bonus of extra 40% density for affordable housing or one additional floor.

Andrew Winter asked if there was already a 50% affordable housing bonus included in the Woodstock regulations and Steven Bauer responded yes, that is correct.

Mary Margaret Sloan asked about the extra floor and the 35 feet height cap, but with senior and affordable housing allowed to build to 40 feet. Mary Margaret Sloan questioned if Steven Bauer can correct the document where it lists 40 feet. Kevin Geiger responded that this height requirement is a mandatory waiver for affordable housing projects. The law says an extra floor must be allowed. However, the bylaws do not talk about height of a floor so may need to specify how tall a floor is. He suggested perhaps state "35 foot or 2.5 stories." Andrew Winters mentioned that a 35-foot height max for a 3-story building will require a flat roof but 40 feet can provide 3 stories with a pitched roof.

Mary Margaret Sloan replied that the Planning Commission decided at the June meeting to keep most construction at the 35-foot height requirement and 40-feet for affordable housing.

Steven Bauer suggested a potential contour waiver for height based on the slope of the site. Kevin Geiger mentioned the contour waiver could be based on grade difference between road to house.

Jill Davies asked if the future of housing is to build denser housing and allow for extra floors, why would the Town require 35 vs 40 feet which can help with sprawl on the farmlands and the housing crisis. Mary Margaret Sloan asked if the Planning Commission members prefer 35 feet with a waiver or would like to raise the maximum to 40 feet.

John King explained that the 35-foot maximum height requirement is a historical fire regulation based on ladder height. But now that sprinkler systems are in place it may no longer be necessary.

Laura Powell explained she preferred the 40 feet height limit to help avoid sprawl and construct buildings more in character to the area. Brad Lawrence replied that he is comfortable with the 40 feet max height. Frank Horneck also indicated he is ok with 40 feet height limit to allow a pitched roof, which is more aesthetically appropriate. Laura Powell questioned if the Town could define the affordable housing max height and Kevin Geiger responded yes, the town can regulate the height of the additional floor for affordable housing developments.

Kevin Geiger indicated the definition for Emergency Shelter is necessary as the use is now required to be allowed in the Town. An Emergency Shelter means any facility that will provide temporary housing for the homeless, with no leases or occupancy agreements. Kevin Geiger suggested it would be useful for Woodstock to define where to allow Emergency Shelters, so long as it does not preclude the use.

Andrew Winter questioned that Section 517, Off-Street Parking states one space per residential dwelling unit but the summary page eliminates parking requirement in the RHD zone. Steven Bauer responded it should be one space and he will update. Jill Davies asked if the Commission could consider shared parking language as it makes a difference in the cost of housing. Kevin Geiger responded he can send sample language to use for shared parking agreements.

Mary Margaret Sloan summarized the changes needed to the Draft Bylaws as:
Waiver language

Simplify ADU language
Define height of floor
Develop definition for emergency shelter particularly around location and lot size
Update summary regarding parking spaces
Look at new language regarding shared parking (Kevin will send)

Mary Margaret Sloan explained that as three of the Commissioners preferred increasing to a 40 feet height limit, they will leave it at 40 feet and vote at August 2, 2023 meeting. Brad Lawrence suggested the Commission needs to determine both max height in feet and height of a story.

John King mentioned 40 feet is preferred for affordable housing projects and one floor is typically 8-to-9-foot ceiling clearance for living space. Laura Powell asked if height has to include all the infrastructure, Andrew Winter said yes, 10 feet per floor includes 8.5-foot ceiling clearance and 1.5 foot above for HVAC and sprinklers, etc.

Mary Margaret Sloan asked if there is required timing of adopting the parts of Bylaws that are allowed to be dictated by the Town, Kevin Geiger responded that these changes already went in effect on July 1 but if writing bylaws above and beyond, the Commission can take more time.

Approve Minutes **(a) 6/7/2023**

Brad Lawrence motioned to approve minutes.
Frank Horneck seconded the motion.

Vote: 3-0-1 (Laura Powell abstained)

Ongoing Business

1. Review and discuss the Commission's Rules of Procedure.

Mary Margaret Sloan mentioned the Commission needs to determine the term limit for the Chair. Laura Powell asked what other boards do and Steven Bauer said they are elected annually. Brad Lawrence and Laura Powell like the idea of the annual election of officers. Steven Bauer explained the Selectboard appointed the Planning Commission seats for a 4-year term. Laura Powell suggested a 5-year term limit as Chair or Clerk with annual election. Frank Horneck agreed with the idea of a yearly vote and a 5-year seat term is appropriate. Steven Bauer will make the adjustment to create a 5-year cap on Officer positions.

Mary Margaret Sloan suggested the Clerk should not have any legal requirements and Steven Bauer responded he will make the change. Will vote on the changes in the September meeting.

2. Elect Officers

Frank Horneck suggested waiting until the August 2nd meeting to elect officers as all members will be in attendance. The Commission agreed.

Other Business – Ben Pauly was present and explained he would like to join the Commission and plans to attend the next Select Board and Trustees meeting.

Adjournment

Laura Powell moved to adjourn the meeting.
Frank Horneck seconded the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50pm.