

The Altavista Planning Commission held a regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, January 3rd, 2023, at 5pm, in Council Chambers at Town Hall, located at 510 7th Street, Altavista, VA.

Members present: John Jordan, Chairman
Marie Mitchell, Vice Chair
Reggie Bennett, Vice Mayor
Meghan Bolling
Ashby Robinson, Jr.

Staff present: Sharon D. Williams, AICP, Community Development Director
John Eller, Town Attorney
Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman John Jordan called the Altavista Planning Commission Meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

With all Commissioners present, Chairman Jordan confirmed a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Jordan added an amendment to the agenda: the election of officers.

Upon a motion by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, and seconded by Vice Chair Marie Mitchell, the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to approve the January 2023 meeting agenda as amended.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & INVOCATION

Chairman Jordan delivered an Invocation for the meeting and afterwards, the Planning Commission and staff recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW COMMISSIONER

Chairman Jordan welcomed Ashby "AJ" Robinson to the Altavista Planning Commission.

Mr. Robinson gave a brief introduction of himself. He stated that he grew up in the area and attended school in Altavista. Mr. Robinson said that he had resided in Altavista for 15 years and was happy to be a member of the Planning Commission. He stated that he looked forward to helping the Commission do good things for the Town.

ELECTION OF 2023 PLANNING COMMISSION OFFICERS

With a motion made by Vice Chair Mitchell, and seconded by Vice Mayor Bennett, the Commission voted 4-0 to reappoint John Jordan as the Altavista Planning Commission's 2023 Chairman. Mr. Jordan abstained during the vote.

With a motion made by Vice Mayor Bennett, and seconded by Commissioner Meghan Bolling, the Commission voted 4-0 to approve Marie Mitchell as the Altavista Planning Commission's 2023 Vice Chair. Mrs. Mitchell abstained.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Jordan asked the Commission if corrections were needed to the November 7th, 2022, meeting minutes. There were none.

With a motion made by Vice Mayor Bennett, and seconded by Vice Chair Mitchell, the minutes for the Commission's November 2022 meeting were approved as presented, with a 5-0 vote.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION - There were no citizen comments during this meeting.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were no public hearings scheduled for the January 2023 meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

2045 Comprehensive Plan Update

Community Development Director Sharon D. Williams, AICP, informed the Commission that on December 13, 2022, Town Council held a public hearing and adopted the 2045 Comprehensive Plan as presented by Staff and recommended by the Planning Commission. She said bound copies of the plan would be distributed to Town Council, the Planning Commission, and Town Directors; and also placed at designated places throughout town. Ms. Williams stated that Town Council extended their appreciation to the Planning Commission for their diligent work on the plan's update. She personally thanked the Commissioners for their support and confidence in her, as she guided them through the lengthy process.

NEW BUSINESS

Planning Commissioner 2023 Meeting Binder

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that since the meeting had moved to Tuesday, due to the holiday, the Town Attorney, John Eller, might need to leave early to attend another meeting. She began with an overview of the binders that had been delivered to the Commissioners. Ms. Williams said her goal had been to create a document to assist new Planning Commissioners who had not had the opportunity to attend the Certified Planning Commissioners Program, and could also serve as a refresher to seasoned Commissioners. She gave an overview of the eight tabs in the binder.

Tab 1: Ms. Williams stated that the first tab included contact information for Town Council, Planning Commissioners, and Staff. She said the 2023 Planning Commission meeting schedule was also included.

Chairman Jordan referenced the proposed deletion of determining a quorum and asked if it needed to remain for the record.

Ms. Williams stated that the item was not listed in the Town Council's Order of Business and that she mirrored that document. She reminded the Planning Commission that a quorum was needed to hold a Planning Commission meeting; thus, if there was not a quorum, the meeting would not occur. Ms. Williams reminded the Commission they were required to wait thirty days before they voted on the proposed changes; and accordingly, she scheduled adoption of the updated bylaws for their February meeting.

Tab 2: She said the second tab contained a Welcome Packet that provided an overview of the Planning Commission and the Department of Community Development. Ms. Williams stated that included in the document was a summary of the Zoning Ordinance, Comprehensive Plan, and Subdivision Ordinance.

Tab 3: Ms. Williams presented the Planning Commission with proposed amendments: to remove Roll Call and Determination of a Quorum, as the Commission did not do by practice, and to correctly identify her job title. To aid in the transition of leadership, Ms. Williams said that she thought the Planning Commission would benefit from written Rules of Procedure, and she shared a draft with the Commissioners. Finally, Ms. Williams stated that Roberts Rules of Order governed public hearings and she provided the Commission with a cheat sheet.

Ms. Williams referenced meeting timeframes under Rules of Procedure and asked the Commission if they wanted to designate a time limit for meetings.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated he attended other Planning Commission meetings as part of the Certified Planning Commissioners Program and one of those meetings only lasted thirty minutes.

Chairman Jordan shared his favor to have meetings last no longer than sixty minutes unless the Commission was in the middle of a discussion.

Ms. Williams referenced the Commission's 2023 goal, to update the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, and recommended their meeting timeframe be ninety minutes; to give Staff time to deliver their presentation and allow the Planning Commission adequate time to discuss.

The Planning Commission concurred with Ms. Williams recommendation.

Tab 4: As an introduction to this tab, Ms. Williams stated that the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) had recently updated its Code of Ethics. She informed the Commission that it was recommended that Planning Commissions adopt that same code, and she presented a draft of the document to the Planning Commission. Ms. Williams presented the Commission with Chapter 30 of the Albemarle County Code of Ethical Principals, Government Ethics, and Land Use Law Handbook titled, "Ethics in Government: Conflicts of Interest, Prohibited Gifts, and Impermissible Contractual Relationships". She stated that most planners and attorneys used the handbook as a resource, as it contained examples that were not found in the Code of Virginia.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked if Government Ethics also pertained to Town Council.

Ms. Williams stated the document was an excerpt of the Virginia State Code and pertained to all local government employees.

Vice Mayor Bennett said that he believed it would be a benefit for Town Council to also adopt.

Town Attorney John Eller informed the Commission that the aforementioned documents were state law and applied to all public officials, therefore it was not necessary to adopt.

Ms. Williams stated that it was up to Town Council whether they chose to adopt a Code of Ethics; however, she recommended that the Planning Commission adopt the Statement of Ethical Principals as presented; as adopting the document reflected the Commission's agreement to abide by a Code of Ethics.

As a point of clarification, Mr. Eller asked Ms. Williams if her recommendation was that the Planning Commission adopt Chapter 30 of the Albemarle Land Use Law Handbook or the one-page titled Planning Commission Statement of Ethical Principals.

Ms. Williams answer that it was the one-page document.

Mr. Eller stated he had no objection to its adoption. He said the state statute was not easily understood and that he favored the use of Chapter 30 of the Albemarle Land Use Law Handbook as a reference document, as it provided detailed explanations of Conflicts of Interest.

Chairman Jordan shared his favor to adopt the document presented and fellow Commissioners concurred.

Tab 5: Ms. Williams told of a conversation had with Vice Mayor Bennett, which occurred during the review process of the solar farm text amendment, where they had discussed processes. She shared Appendix D: An Approach to Making Discretionary Land Use Decisions of the Albemarle County Land Use Law Handbook. She gave an overview of its recommendations, which included application placed in its proper context; facts analyzed, issues and the relevant policies identified, the facts organized, points considered and discussed, and options selected. Ms. Williams moved on to Ex Parte Communications. She explained it was important that information was received by the Planning Commission as a whole to ensure applicants received their due process. She provided the members with a pamphlet about the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) prepared by the Virginia Advisory Council, and briefly reviewed the document with the Planning Commission.

Tab 6: Ms. Williams explained that the Planning Commission's Annual Reports for the last three (3) calendar years were included in the binder. She presented the Commission with the draft 2022 Annual Report and explained that State Code required the Planning Commission to annually report its activities, including planning and zoning, to the governing body (Town Council). Ms. Williams highlighted some of the activities from the report.

Chairman Jordan shared his favor with adopting the report at that meeting, rather than waiting until February's meeting.

With a motion made by Vice Chair Mitchell, and seconded by Commission Bolling, the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to approve and forward the 2022 Annual Report to Town Council.

Tab 7: Ms. Williams provided a copy of the Subdivision Ordinance, which was Chapter 68 of the Code of the Town of Altavista. She stated that the code had not been updated since 1968 and would be part of the Planning Commission's 2023 work plan.

Tab 8: Ms. Williams provided the Planning Commission with a copy of the Zoning Ordinance, which was Chapter 86 of the Code of the Town of Altavista. She stated the update to the ordinance was also part of the 2023 work plan.

Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that she was recently approached by a developer who wanted to convert a hotel in Altavista into a substance abuse treatment center. She was asked to make a determination on whether the use would be classified as a hospital based on the Zoning Ordinance. Ms. Williams stated she wrote a letter that detailed why the facility did not meet the Zoning Ordinance definition of hospital and explained that under the Zoning Ordinance and Code of Virginia, the developer had 30 days to appeal that decision to the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). She said the appeal period had passed and Staff recommended amending the Zoning Ordinance definition of hospital to state that the use did not include facilities for the treatment of substance abuse. She asked to advertise a public hearing.

It was the consensus of the Planning Commission that a public hearing be scheduled.

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that in the Zoning Ordinance, hospitals were a by right use. She asked the Commission to consider if it should be permitted by right or require a Special Use Permit (SUP).

It was the consensus of the Planning Commission that a public hearing be scheduled.

Moving to the next item, Ms. Williams informed the Commission that the Industrial (M) Zoning District allowed resource extraction. She stated Staff had discussed that use and agreed that it was not appropriate in Altavista. She asked the Commission to authorize staff to advertise to amend the ordinance to remove the use from Altavista's Zoning Ordinance.

It was the consensus of the Planning Commission that a public hearing be scheduled.

Ms. Williams led a discussion on whether recycling centers should be a permitted use in the Zoning Ordinance. She stated that Staff was concerned the use could become a nuisance. She said Campbell County recently removed recycling bins near the Altavista Walmart that were visually unappealing and overloaded.

There was a consensus of the Commission to defer the item to the February Planning Commission meeting.

At this time, 6:05pm, Attorney John Eller left the meeting.

Ms. Williams concluded the meeting with a visioning exercise in preparation for the Zoning Ordinance update and asked each Commissioner what they wanted to see more of in Altavista, and what issue, if any, they wanted addressed. She started the conversation and expressed her favor with different housing options and homes closer together.

Vice Mayor Bennett referenced the Parks & Recreation Master Plan and shared he favored the extension of the town's trail system.

Vice Chair Mitchell stated that she wanted additional focus to tackle blighted properties and enforcement on landlords. She said she would like to see a greater cultural presence in Altavista.

Chairman Jordan expressed his concern with blight in Altavista and stated he believed the issue should be a priority to the town. He said that he wanted to see the Vista Theatre revitalized and the town to continue updating the Booker Building, so both could be better utilized by the community.

Commissioner Robinson shared his love for Altavista's multiple community and neighborhood parks. He shared his concern regarding blighted businesses and stated he believed there were too many signs on Main Street that were not visually appealing for the town.

Commissioner Bolling shared her love for Altavista and its smalltown feel. She said that she liked having accessible/clean sidewalks all through the town. She stated, however, it made her nervous to think about the town growing much larger than it was. Mrs. Bolling said that she agreed with the concern regarding business blight and believed it needed to be addressed. She also believed the town needed additional restaurants and cultural locations.

Ms. Williams referenced Chairman Jordan's comments regarding the Vista Theatre and the Booker Building. She assured the Commission that it was important to Town Council to find appropriate uses for both facilities. She stated that the town was conducting a feasibility study on the theatre soon and it was at the top of the town's list for restoration.

Vice Chair Mitchell stated that she believed commercial blight should also be at the top of the town's list of issues to address and shared an example of uncovered dumpsters.

Ms. Williams stated that two businesses were recently contacted for that same issue and had enclosed the dumpsters at their businesses. She assured the Commission that the town would continue its efforts towards that matter.

Commissioner Robinson shared his love for all genres of music and recommended the Vista Theatre and the Booker Building be utilized for music events, and the Commission concurred.

Vice Chair Mitchell praised the town for the quarterly newsletter. She referenced a previous discussion regarding a town/community shredding event and stated she believed it should be advertised in the newsletter. Vice Chair Mitchell stated that she liked the heading of the town newsletter, Fall in Love with Altavista, and its positive vibe towards the town. She said there should be more marketing for the town.

Commissioner Bolling referenced the annual town calendar and stated the front cover had the same positive vibe as the newsletter. She shared her appreciation for them both.

Chairman Jordan stated that he believed both were assets to the community.

Ms. Williams thanked the Commission for their input. She reminded the Commission of the public hearings in February. Ms. Williams also informed the Commission that she and Vice Chair Mitchell would be visiting Altavista's Combined School, to meet with the Principal about a student representative for the Planning Commission, which was approved by Town Council. She said, in the FY2024 proposed budget, she asked for an increase to the Planning Commissioner's stipend.

Chairman Jordan thanked Ms. Williams for her presentation and for the Commission's new resource binders. He stated, no matter how long someone was in office, education of updated information was important.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, Chairman Jordan adjourned the meeting at 6:27 p.m.

John Jordan
Planning Commission Chair

Sharon D. Williams, AICP
Planning Commission Secretary